



# TENSES



What are traditionally called the 12 tenses are in fact 12 combinations of tense (relating to time) and aspect (how the verb is experienced, i.e. as a completed action or as still in progress). It is important to understand why we would choose a particular tense or aspect in a particular situation. For example, how can “He will arrive at 9pm tomorrow” and “He will be arriving at 9pm tomorrow” both be correct? The answer is that we must consider the aspect. In this case, the first sentence focuses strongly on the event and time, while the second sentence is less definite. Consider the following chart:



		TENSES		
		PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
ASPECT	Simple	<i>watched</i>	<i>watch / watches</i>	<i>will watch</i>
	Perfect (have + past participle)	<i>had watched</i>	<i>have / has watched</i>	<i>will have watched</i>
	Progressive/ Continuous (be + -ing)	<i>was / were watching</i>	<i>am / is / are watching</i>	<i>will be watching</i>
	Perfect Progressive/ Continuous (have + been + -ing)	<i>had been watching</i>	<i>have / has been watching</i>	<i>will have been watching</i>

**SIMPLE ASPECT:** used for events which are immediate facts (or strong predictions in the future), complete or unchanging.

- I live in Adelaide.
- I get the bus to work every day.
- I have a meeting next Wednesday. (It is already planned.)
- I attended a meeting last week.
- I will take the exam next year.

**PERFECT ASPECT:** used to show the prior nature of an event in relation to some other point in time.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • I have written my essay. (Present reference)   | • By the end of next month, she will have been living here for two years. (Future reference) |
| • He had left before I arrived. (Past reference) | • He will have left before we get there. (Future reference)                                  |

**PROGRESSIVE ASPECT:** used for an event which is temporary or changing.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| • They are living in Adelaide. (Temporary situation)       | • By the end of next month, she will have been living here for two years. (Temporary situation) |
| • She is becoming more and more deaf. (Changing situation) | • He will be doing an examination this time tomorrow (Temporary situation)                      |

## EXPRESSIONS

Some expressions can help us decide which aspect to use.

SIMPLE	PERFECT	PROGRESSIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• last year</li> <li>• next year</li> <li>• everyday</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• just</li> <li>• already</li> <li>• yet</li> <li>• since</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• now</li> <li>• at the moment</li> </ul>

(The above information on tense & aspect is mostly taken from Celce-Murcia, M & Larsen-Freeman, D 1999, *The grammar book*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Heinle & Heinle, USA.)



# TENSES



## STATIVE VERBS



Some verbs are not usually used in a progressive form. We do not say, for instance, “I am hating coffee” or “It is measuring five kilometres”. These “stative verbs” indicate stability (e.g. “I hate coffee and will not change my mind”). Other verbs change their meanings if they are used progressively. Compare, for example, “I think it’s going to rain” (it is my opinion) and “I’m thinking about changing jobs” (I am considering).

<b>EMOTION</b>	dislike, hate, like, love, prefer, want, wish
<b>SURPRISE</b>	astonish, surprise
<b>COMPREHENSION</b>	believe, doubt, feel (have an opinion), imagine (suppose), know, mean, recognise, remember, suppose, think (have an opinion), understand
<b>PERCEPTION</b>	hear, measure, see, smell (have a smell), sound, taste, weigh
<b>RELATIONSHIP</b>	belong to, concern, consist of, contain, depend on, deserve, fit, include, involve, lack, matter, need, owe, own, possess
<b>APPEARANCE</b>	appear (seem), resemble, seem

## SOME CONTRASTS

### 1. PRESENT PROGRESSIVE

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| • I am wearing my sunglasses because the sun is bright. | Temporary      |
| • What are you doing next week?                         | Specific; plan |
| • I am thinking about the answer                        | Active         |

#### SIMPLE PRESENT

- |                                |          |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| • I wear glasses.              | Habitual |
| • What do you do every day?    | Generic  |
| • I think the answer is wrong. | Stative  |

### 2. PRESENT PERFECT PROGRESSIVE

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| • I have been visiting my grandmother.   | Length of time close to present; informal                         |
| • I have been teaching for twenty years. | Continuity into the future implied and length of action stressed. |
| • She has been writing a book.           | Incomplete  |

#### PRESENT PERFECT

- |                                   |                                     |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • I have visited my grandmother.  | Finished action                     |
| • I have taught for twenty years. | Continuity into the future possible |
| • She has written a book.         | Complete                            |

### 3. SIMPLE PAST

- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| • My father lived here all his life.         | Complete (father has died) |
| • Did you visit Paris on your European trip? | Complete                   |

#### PRESENT PERFECT

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| • My father has lived here all his life | Incomplete (he still lives here) |
| • Have you ever visited Paris?          | Incomplete                       |



# TENSES



## 4. SIMPLE PAST

- He drowned in the lake. Complete
- He left when I came in. Complete
- They lived in Adelaide all their lives Complete

### PAST PROGRESSIVE

- He was drowning, but the lifeguard rescued him. Incomplete
- He was leaving when I came in. Incomplete/interrupted: he may have changed his mind and stayed
- They were living in Adelaide at the time Temporary

## 5. SIMPLE PAST

- The cake burned because I forgot about it. Past - complete

### PAST PERFECT

- By the time I remembered the cake, it had burned. Past – before another event in the past

## 6. SIMPLE FUTURE

- He will arrive at 8pm. Strong statement
- He will offer that class next semester. Definite

### FUTURE PROGRESSIVE

- He will be arriving by 8pm. Less definite; informal
- We will be offering that class next semester. Less definite; informal

## 7. SIMPLE PAST

- She will move house when she finishes her studies. After finishing

### FUTURE PERFECT

- She will have moved house by the time she finishes. Before finishing

## USE OF TENSES IN ACADEMIC WRITING

### PRESENT TENSE:

Used to explain or discuss current knowledge

- Continuing objectives*
- General principles / laws*
- Data / findings / overview of theory*
- Opinion or statement from academic source*
- Habitual or general state or action*

- This study's aim is....
- Ohm's law states
- These results show...
- Brown claims that...
- These factors characterise the two viewpoints...

### PAST SIMPLE TENSE:

Used to state or describe what previous researchers did or thought

- Past objectives and procedures*
- What happened*
- Views held in the past*

- The main purpose was...
- The sample was...
- The study showed that...
- Previous studies concentrated on teachers rather than students.
- It was thought for many years that...



# TENSES



## PRESENT PERFECT TENSE:

Used to show the current relevance of research

*Research conducted in the recent past and still important now*

*Views held in the past and still held*

*Recent studies have indicated that this is no longer the case.*

*This has been a key issue for many years.*

(Adapted from: Winckel, A & Hart, B 2002, *Report writing style guide for engineering students*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, University of South Australia, p. 34; Swales, JM & Feak, CB 1994, *Academic writing for graduate students*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Centre for Applied Language and Literacy Research, Edith Cowan University 2001, *Writing a literature review*, viewed 15 August 2006, <<http://www.ecu.edu.au/ses/research/CALLR/WRITING/tense.html>>)



Consider the use of tenses in the introduction to this essay question:

### QUESTION:

For education to be fair, it must be the same for everyone. Discuss this statement in the light of the recent debate about separate curriculum provision in relation to boys and girls.

### RESPONSE:

The concern for equity in regard to the treatment of boys and girls in school **has been** (*view held in the past and still held*) a key issue in Australia for the past 25 years. Gill (cited in Clark 1989, p. 14) **voices** (*opinion*) the ‘fundamental article of faith and commitment within the teaching profession’, that children should be treated ‘as individuals’. However, to argue that this belief **implies** (*general principle*) that identical provision for both boys and girls **was made** (*what happened in the past*) in past decades **is** (*opinion*) to trivialise the issue and to ignore the complex and often subtle differences of worldview, attitudes, behaviour and emotions that **characterise** (*general state*) the two groups. This brief survey, encompassing different school types and the intricate web of the actions and reactions of students, teachers and other stakeholders, **argues** (*general action*) for equal opportunities for boys and girls, to enable them to achieve their full potential within and following their school experience.

(Miller, JC 1999, 'Differentiated educational provision', unpublished assignment in the topic UBEU Education Context, University of South Australia, Magill)

## CONSISTENCY

It is not just the time when something occurred, but also other factors in the paragraph, that can influence your choice of tense. You can (and often should) change tense in a sentence or a paragraph, but you need to be careful to include words that show a difference in time.

- a) In 1998 Smith **proposed** a link between hair colour and temper. This **is now** disputed.  
In 1998 - past tense now - present tense
  
- b) We **can now** compare what we know about Ann with Carroll’s list. We **have already seen** that she is good at identifying sounds and attaching them to symbols.  
now - present tense already - past tense



## IRREGULAR VERBS

The following chart list some irregular verbs, and then describes verb types and characteristics.

INFINITIVE	PAST TENSE	PAST PARTICIPLE
arise	arose	arisen
awake	awoke	awaked/awoken
be	was/were	been
bear	bore	borne
beat	beat	beaten
become	became	become
begin	began	begun
bend	bent	bent
bet	bet/betted	bet/betted
bid	bade/bid	bidden/bid
bind	bound	bound
bite	bit	bitten
bleed	bled	bled
blow	blew	blown
break	broke	broken
breed	bred	bred
bring	brought	brought
build	built	built
burn	burnt/burned	burnt/burned
burst	burst	burst
buy	bought	bought
catch	caught	caught
choose	chose	chosen
come	came	come
cost	cost	cost
creep	crept	crept
cut	cut	cut
deal	dealt	dealt
dig	dug	dug
dive	dived	dived
do	did	done
draw	drew	drawn
dream	dreamed/dreamt	dreamed/dreamt
drink	drank	drunk
drive	drove	driven
eat	ate	eaten
fall	fell	fallen
feed	fed	fed
feel	felt	felt
fight	fought	fought
find	found	found
flee	fled	fled
fling	flung	flung
fly	flew	flown
forbid	forbade	forbidden

INFINITIVE	PAST TENSE	PAST PARTICIPLE
forecast	forecast/forecasted	forecast/forecasted
foresee	foresaw	foreseen
forget	forgot	forgotten
forgive	forgave	forgiven
freeze	froze	frozen
get	got	got
give	gave	given
go	went	gone
grind	ground	ground
grow	grew	grown
hang	hung / hanged	hung / hanged
have	had	had
hear	heard	heard
hide	hid	hidden, hid
hit	hit	hit
hold	held	held
hurt	hurt	hurt
keep	kept	kept
kneel	knelt	knelt
know	knew	known
lay	laid	laid
lead	led	led
lean	leant / leaned	leant / leaned
leap	leapt / leaped	leapt / leaped
learn	learnt / learned	learnt / learned
lend	lent	lent
let	let	let
lie	lay	lain
light	lit / lighted	lit / lighted
lose	lost	lost
make	made	made
mean	meant	meant
meet	met	met
mistake	mistook	mistaken
pay	paid	paid
put	put	put
read	read	read
ride	rode	ridden
ring	rang	rung
rise	rose	risen
run	ran	run
saw	sawed	sawn
say	said	said
see	saw	seen
seek	sought	sought



# TENSES



INFINITIVE	PAST TENSE	PAST PARTICIPLE
sell	sold	sold
send	sent	sent
set	set	set
shake	shook	shaken
shine	shone	shone
shoot	shot	shot
show	showed	shown / showed
swear	swore	sworn
sweep	swept	swept
swell	swelled	swollen / swelled
swim	swam	swum
swing	swung	swung
take	took	taken
tear	tore	torn
think	thought	thought
throw	threw	thrown
tread	trod	trodden / trod
undertake	undertook	undertaken

INFINITIVE	PAST TENSE	PAST PARTICIPLE
upset	upset	upset
wake	woke / waked	woken / waked
weave	wove	woven
win	won	won
withdraw	withdrew	withdrawn
write	wrote	written
teach	taught	taught
tell	told	told
thrive	throve / thrived	thriven / thrived
thrust	thrust	thrust
understand	understood	understood
undo	undid	undone
sit	sat	sat
wear	wore	worn
weep	wept	wept
wind	wound	wound
withhold	withheld	withheld

## TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF VERBS

<b>TRANSITIVE VERB</b>	Needs an object	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jim <b>saw</b> the pelican.</li> </ul>
<b>INTRANSITIVE VERB</b>	Does not need an object	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jim <b>ran</b> fast.</li> </ul>
<b>VERB PHRASE</b>	Contains more than one word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jim <b>has seen</b> the pelican.</li> </ul>
<b>FINITE VERB</b>	Is used with a subject and changes tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jim saw the pelican yesterday. He <b>will see it</b> tomorrow.</li> </ul>
<b>NON-FINITE VERB</b>	Cannot be used with a subject and does not change tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...<b>seeing</b> pelicans.</li> <li>...<b>to see</b> a pelican.</li> </ul>
<b>GERUND</b>	Is a noun formed from a verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Watching</b> pelicans was Jim's hobby.</li> </ul>
<b>REGULAR VERB</b>	Forms past tenses and past participles by adding 'd' or 'ed' to the present tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jim <b>watches</b> pelicans.</li> <li>Jim <b>watched</b> pelicans.</li> </ul>
<b>IRREGULAR VERB</b>	Forms past tenses by changing the verb stem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jim sees the pelican.</li> <li>Jim <b>saw</b> the pelican.</li> <li>The pelican flies past.</li> <li>The pelican <b>flew</b> past.</li> </ul>
<b>ACTIVE VOICE</b>	Is used when the subject does something	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jim <b>sees</b> the pelican</li> </ul>
<b>PASSIVE VOICE</b>	Is used when the verb has an effect on the subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The pelican <b>was seen</b> by Jim.</li> </ul>
<b>MOOD</b>	Describes the manner in which the action is expressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jim <b>watches</b> the pelican. (Indicative mood)</li> <li><b>Watch</b> the pelican! (Imperative mood)</li> <li>If I <b>were</b> Jim, I wouldn't watch any more pelicans. (Subjunctive mood)</li> </ul>



## EXERCISE



Can you put the highlighted infinitives into the best verb tenses for the following passage, and explain why you have chosen them? Remember to make the verbs fit in terms of person and number, and note that some of the verbs are passives. There is a list of irregular verbs at the end of this leaflet.

Debate on chocolate in recent years **focus**<sup>1</sup> on its antioxidant properties. Few authors **write**<sup>2</sup> before now about its overall benefits to general feelings of well-being. Research **reveal**<sup>3</sup>, however, that chocolate **be**<sup>4</sup> not only good for us biologically, but also emotionally. Boynton's book *Chocolate. The consuming passion* (1982) **be**<sup>5</sup> a comprehensive guide which **aim**<sup>6</sup> to answer all intelligent questions about chocolate. The book **describe**<sup>7</sup> the origins of chocolate, from the Aztecs and Mayans hundreds of years ago, who **make**<sup>8</sup> a drink which they called 'xocoatl' (Boynton 1982, p. 8), to the twentieth century, when people consistently **begin**<sup>9</sup> to use the word 'chocolate' to talk about chocolate bars.

Boynton's findings **indicate**<sup>10</sup> that 'fourteen out of ten individuals like chocolate' (1982, p. 9). She **demonstrate**<sup>11</sup> how chocolate appeals to people of all different personalities, **describe**<sup>12</sup> the process of chocolate making, and subtly **express**<sup>13</sup> the view that carob and white chocolate **be**<sup>14</sup> not really chocolate at all. In reporting research on taste tests, she **comment**<sup>15</sup> that during the tests 'three out of four individuals actually **resent**<sup>16</sup> having been blindfolded' (Boynton 1982, p. 68). The reason given is that during the tests one individual **steal**<sup>17</sup> the others' chocolate. Clearly testing **need**<sup>18</sup> always to be conducted within a carefully controlled framework.

In describing the philosophical progression of attitudes to chocolate, Boynton **explain**<sup>19</sup> how many years ago the rationalists first **question**<sup>20</sup> its existence, the empiricists then **prove**<sup>21</sup> its existence by tasting it and finally the capitalists **not mind**<sup>22</sup> if it **exist**<sup>23</sup> or not as long as people **buy**<sup>24</sup> it (1982, pp. 64-65). The book **conclude**<sup>25</sup> with a powerful discussion about the politics of chocolate, which **end**<sup>26</sup> with the statement 'chocolate is not a privilege: it is a right' (1982, p. 108). Chocolate **be thus seen**<sup>27</sup> as a universal benefit.

(Julia Miller, Student Learning Centre, Flinders University, 17.4.08)



## ANSWER

Debate on chocolate in recent years **has focussed**<sup>1</sup> (research conducted in the recent past and still important now) on its antioxidant properties. Few authors **have written**<sup>2</sup> (research conducted in the recent past and still important now) before now about its overall benefits to general feelings of well-being. Research **reveals**<sup>3</sup> (findings), however, that chocolate **is**<sup>4</sup> (general principle) not only good for us biologically, but also emotionally. Boynton's book *Chocolate. The consuming passion* (1982) **is**<sup>5</sup> (overview, fact) a comprehensive guide which **aims**<sup>6</sup> (continuing objective) to answer all intelligent questions about chocolate. The book **describes**<sup>7</sup> (overview, fact) the origins of chocolate, from the Aztecs and Mayans hundreds of years ago, who **made**<sup>8</sup> (what happened in the past) a drink which they called 'xocolatl' (Boynton 1982, p. 8), to the twentieth century, when people consistently **began**<sup>9</sup> (what happened in the past) to use the word 'chocolate' to talk about chocolate bars.

Boynton's findings **indicate**<sup>10</sup> (findings) that 'fourteen out of ten individuals like chocolate' (1982, p. 9). She **demonstrates**<sup>11</sup> (overview of theory) how chocolate appeals to people of all different personalities, **describes**<sup>12</sup> (overview of theory) the process of chocolate making, and subtly **expresses**<sup>13</sup> (overview of theory) the view that carb and white chocolate **are**<sup>14</sup> (fact) not really chocolate at all. In reporting research on taste tests, she **comments**<sup>15</sup> (findings) that during the tests three out of four individuals actually **resented**<sup>16</sup> (what happened in the past) having been blindfolded' (Boynton 1982, p. 68). The reason given is that during the tests one individual **stole**<sup>17</sup> (what happened in the past) the others' chocolate. Clearly testing **needs**<sup>18</sup> (general principle) always to be conducted within a carefully controlled framework.

In describing the philosophical progression of attitudes to chocolate, Boynton **explains**<sup>19</sup> (overview) how many years ago the rationalists first **questioned**<sup>20</sup> (view held in the past) its existence, the empiricists then **proved**<sup>21</sup> (what happened in the past) its existence, the rationalists first **questioned**<sup>20</sup> (view held in the past) its existence, the empiricists then **proved**<sup>21</sup> (what happened in the past) its existence by tasting it and finally the capitalists **did not mind**<sup>22</sup> (view held in the past) if it **existed**<sup>23</sup> (what happened in the past) or not as long as people **bought**<sup>24</sup> (what happened in the past) it (1982, pp. 64-65). The book **concludes**<sup>25</sup> (general action) with a powerful discussion about the politics of chocolate, which **ends**<sup>26</sup> (general action) with the statement 'chocolate is not a privilege: it is a right' (1982, p. 108). Chocolate **is thus seen**<sup>27</sup> (opinion) as a universal benefit.