

Tenses

Tenses are an important feature of writing and speaking in English to indicate the time of an event, i.e., *when* something takes place. Correct tense use is critical in academic writing.

There are 12 tenses:

Simple tense:

1. **Present simple:** This is used to discuss something true or factual, or to generalise about some observation, e.g.,
 - *I play the guitar;*
 - *Smith is an academic.*
2. **Past simple:** This is used to describe a completed action, e.g.,
 - *I played the guitar [in the past - I am not playing right now];*
 - *Smith was an academic [before his current occupation].*
3. **Future simple:** This is used to describe an action one intends to do in the future, e.g.,
 - *I will play guitar [given the opportunity to do so];*
 - *Smith will be an academic [given the opportunity to be one].*

Perfect tense

The perfect tense is used to indicate a “perfected” or completed action or event using the verb “have/had” (along with helping verbs).

4. **Present perfect:** This is like the present simple with the addition of the verb ‘to have’, carrying the implication that a completed action or event continues up until *now*, e.g.,
 - *I have played guitar in a band [and still could];*
 - *Smith and Jones have published many papers [and could publish more].*
5. **Past perfect:** This is like the past simple with the addition of ‘to have’ carrying the implication that one completed past event occurred before another completed past event, e.g.,
 - *I had played guitar in a band long before the band became famous;*
 - *Smith and Jones had published papers before they both retired.*
6. **Future perfect:** This is like the future simple with the addition of ‘to have’ carrying the implication of a connection between two completed events in the future, e.g.,
 - *I will have to play guitar in a band before I become famous [in the future];*
 - *Smith and Jones will have to publish papers before being promoted [in the future].*

Continuous (or “progressive”) tense

The continuous tense is focussed on an *ongoing action* in progress at a determinate or indeterminate time.

7. **Present continuous:** This is used to describe something happening in the present that continues into the future [*am/are + ing form of verb*] e.g.,
 - *I am playing guitar [right now!];*
 - *Smith and Jones are publishing papers [and will continue to do so].*

- Interest rates are rising around the world.
- Past continuous:** This is used to describe something that started or happened in the past and continued until a particular, specified time in the past [*was/were + ing form of verb*] e.g.,
 - *I was playing guitar in a band when the 'phone rang;*
 - *Smith and Jones were publishing papers when they were made redundant from their jobs.*
 - *The share prices were rising around the world when I invested my money.*
 - Future continuous:** This is used when describing something in the unspecified future that is in progress at another specified time in the future [*will + be + ing form of verb*] e.g.,
 - *I will be playing guitar when the 'phone rings;*
 - *Smith and Jones will be publishing papers until they retire from their jobs.*
 - *I will be investing in the share market tomorrow.*
 - Present perfect continuous:** This is used to describe something that started at some unspecified time in the past and which has continued to the unspecified time in the present [*has/have + been + ing form of verb*]. It is also used when we are interested in incomplete outcomes or results*, e.g.,
 - *I have been playing guitar for a long time [=and I am getting much better at it];*
 - *Smith and Jones have been publishing papers for many years [= and are still doing so];*
 - **He has been waiting for an opportunity to take over the company [= and still hasn't].*
 - Past perfect continuous:** This is used to describe an unspecified past event which continued until or just before another unspecified past event [*had been + ing form of verb*] e.g.,
 - *I had been playing guitar for about ten years;*
 - *Smith and Jones had been publishing papers for decades when they called an end to their partnership;*
 - *I had been working for years in the same job when head-hunted by another company.*
 - Future perfect continuous:** This is used to describe something in the unspecified future that will continue until being finished at an unspecified future time [*will have been + ing form of verb*] e.g.,
 - *I will have been playing guitar for many years before I perform on stage.*
 - *Smith and Jones will have been publishing papers for many decades before they get promoted.*
 - *I will have been waiting for an hour before being considered for the job.*

X = precise point in past, present or future
 X -----> = continues from precise beginning but no specific termination point
 X -----> X = continues with specific termination point
 -----> = continues without a specific beginning or termination point

