

Verb Tense

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Verbs are words that indicate action. A sentence must have a verb in order to be complete. Each verb can take different forms (conjugations) that give the reader clues about who or what is doing the action and when the action happened. The conjugation of a verb changes based on its subject, tense, aspect, and mood.

Subject

Take the infinitive (non-conjugated) verb “to work.” Conjugations depend on who or what is doing the action and include the following:

| | |
|------------------|------------------|
| I work. | We work. |
| You work. | All of you work. |
| He/she/it works. | They work. |

Tense

In English, verbs take one of three tenses: past, present or future.

| Past | Present | Future |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Describes what happened in the past | Describes what is happening right now | Describes what will happen at some later time |
| He worked at the store. | He works at the store. | He will work at the store. |

Aspect

Verbs also take one of four aspects: simple, perfect, progressive, and perfect progressive. All of the verbs above are in the simple aspect. Combining the correct verb with the correct aspect gives the reader clues about time.

Let’s take a look again at the verb with the infinitive to work.

| Aspect \ Tense | Simple | Perfect | Progressive | Perfect Progressive |
|----------------|-----------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Past | Worked | Had worked | Was/were working | Had been working |
| Present | Work | Has/have worked | Am/is/are working | Has/have been working |
| Future | Will work | Will have worked | Will be working | Will have been working |

Simple- The simple aspect, also called indefinite, indicates a sense of completeness, without giving a sense of time. It happened at some point in the past, or is happening now, or will definitely happen in the future. We may know the boy worked, but we do not know exactly when the action started or ended.

Perfect- The perfect aspect gives the reader a relationship between two points in time. The action has a finite ending point; it has ended or will end.

Past: He had worked at the store before he went to college.
Present: He has worked at the store for two hours.
Future: He will have worked at the store for eight years in January.

Progressive- The progressive is used to indicate an action or event that is incomplete. It can also make something seem less permanent but does not indicate exactly when the action will end.

Past: He was working at the store when the fire alarm went off.
Present: He is working at the store, so he cannot join us at the beach.
Future: He will be working at nine am tomorrow.

Perfect Progressive- The perfect progressive combines the elements of perfect with the elements of progressive indicating an incomplete or impermanent action that has been going on or will have been going on for a certain amount of time before coming to an end.

Past: He had been working but stopped when the fire alarm went off.
Present: He has been working since he was sixteen.
Future: He will have been working for twenty years in June.

Mood

Mood gives the tone of a verb. It can convey a command, show desire for something to happen, or indicate a question.

Indicative (or declarative)- All of the above examples are in the indicative mood. Verbs in this mood are presented as fairly neutral and don't have a particular emotion or connotation attached.

He worked at the grocery store.

Imperative- When giving a command, you would use the imperative. It indicates the expectation that something will be done. In the imperative, the subject is implied, and tense is not used.

Go to work.

Interrogative- When you ask a question, you are using the interrogative.

Did you work today?

Subjunctive- When you want to indicate a state of wishing or wanting something that is real or hypothetical, you use the subjunctive. Indicators of the subjunctive include the words *could*, *would*, and *if*.

If I were younger, I would work less often.