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| **Verb Tenses**There are 12 verb tenses in English. The verb action can take place in the past, the present or the future. There are usually word clues that give a guide as to when the verb action occurs. Within each of these times, there are four different situations that occur. Simple tenses occur at a point in time, or on a repeated or habitual basis. A progressive or continuous tense indicates that the action takes place over time and these tenses always use part of the verb “be” as the first part of the verb phrase and end with the main verb + ing. A perfect tense always uses part of “have” as the first part of the verb phrase and ends with the past form of the main verb. A perfect progressive tense starts with the relevant part of the verb “have” followed by “been” and ends with the main verb + ing. If you remember these basic rules, you can always identify the verb tense being used, or use the verb tense you need without having to continually refer to a text book or table. Meanwhile, a chart like the one given here, can provide a quick and easy reference until you feel comfortable using the various verb tenses. Also pay attention to the time clues in the following chart; while some of them can be used with more than one verb tense, they do restrict the number of possibilities and help you to understand which verb tense is being used, or which verb tense you should use. |

**Chart—Active Verb Tenses**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **Past** | **Present** | **Future** |
| **Simple** | *An action that ended at a point in the past.* | *An action that exists , is usual, or is repeated.* | *A plan for future action.* |
|   | **cooked** | **cook / cooks** | **will cook** |
| (time clue)\* | e.g. He cooked yesterday. | e.g. He cooks dinner every Friday. | e.g. He will cook tomorrow. |
| **Progressive**be + main verb +ing | *An action was happening (past progressive) when another action happened (simple past).* | *An action that is happening now.* | *An action that will be happening over time, in the future, when something else happens.* |
|   | **was / were cooking** | **am / is / are cooking** | **will be cooking** |
| (time clue)\*  | e.g. He was cooking when the phone rang. | e.g. He is cooking now. | e.g. He will be cooking when you come. |
| **Perfect**have + past participle | *An action that ended before another action or time in the past.* | *An action that happened at an unspecified time in the past.* | *An action that will end before another action or time in the future.* |
|   | **had cooked** | **has / have cooked** | **will have cooked** |
| (time clue)\* | e.g. He had cooked the dinner when the phone rang. | e.g. He has cooked many meals. | e.g. He will have cooked dinner by the time you come. |
| **Perfect Progressive**have + been + main verb + ing | *An action that happened over time, in the past, before another time or action in the past.* | *An action occurring over time that started in the past and continues into the present.* | *An action occurring over time, in the future, before another action or time in the future.* |
|   | **had been cooking** | **has / have been cooking** | **will have been cooking** |
| (time clue)\* | e.g. He had been cooking for a long time before he took lessons. | e.g. He has been cooking for over an hour. | e.g. He will have been cooking all day by the time she gets home. |

**\*Time clues:** these are words that give some information about when an action occurs. Some examples are:

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| yesterday    every daytomorrow whilenow  | simple pastsimple presentsimple futurepast progressivepresent progressive |

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| There are many words that are **time clues**; some can be used to indicate a number of tenses, for instance that something happened in the past or that it will happen in the future. If you learn to recognize these time clues, you will find them very helpful. Note that some time clues can be used with more than one verb tense and also that this table is not a complete listing of all the time clues that can be used with all of the tenses |

**Chart—Time Clues and Verb Tense**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|    | **Past**  | **Present**  | **Future**  |
| **Simple** | **Simple Past** | **Simple Present** | **Simple Future** |
|   | yesterdaylast year/ month/ etc.before for five weeks/days/etc.one year/ month ago  | every morning / day / etc.alwaysusuallyfrequentlysometimes | tomorrowtonightnext week/month/etc.soonin the future |
| **Progressive** | **Past Progressive** | **Present Progressive** | **Future progressive** |
|   | whilewhen | nowright nowthis week/minute/etc. | whenafteras soon asbefore |
| **Perfect** | **Past Perfect** | **Present Perfect** | **Future Perfect** |
|   | beforealreadyby the timeuntil then/last week/etc.after | until nowsinceevernevermany times/ weeks/years/etc.for three hours/ minutes/etc/ | by the time you go (somewhere)by the time you do (something)already  |
| **Perfect Progressive** | **Past Perfect progressive** | **Present Perfect Progressive** | **Future Perfect Progressive** |
|   | beforefor one week/hour/etc.since | for the past year/ month/ etc.for the last 2 months/ weeks/etc.up to nowfor 6 weeks/hours/etc.since | by the timefor ten days/weeks/etc.by |

Source: <http://www.athabascau.ca/courses/engl/155/support/verb_tenses.htm>