

TENSE USES IN ENGLISH

by Alice C. Pack

Uses of the Present Tense

Tense (present) + Verb

1. **Perception or feelings of state or condition at moment of speaking.**
 Examples: *see, hope, hear, smell, feel, seem, look, want, remember, forget, prefer, appear.*
 Sentence examples: He seems distressed.
 I forget his name.
 I want something to eat.
 I remember the facts now.
 The cheese smells bad.
 The hamburger tastes delicious.
2. **Ability.**
 Sentence examples: She swims very well.
 I teach music.
 Mary plays the piano, but John plays the trombone.
 He jumps over three feet.
3. **Customary or habitual action.**
 Time expression used with the action: *annually, always, every day, usually, rarely, often, frequently, occasionally, sometimes, never.*
 Sentence examples: I often go to town.
 John rarely comes to see me.
 He usually attends the meetings.
 He frequently swims at four o'clock.
 He jogs every morning.
 He comes all the time.
4. **General truths.**
 Sentence examples: The administration sets the fees.
 The planets revolve around the sun.
 Water freezes at 0° Centigrade.
 The moon circles around the earth.
5. **Future time.**
 Examples: *leave, begin, arrive, come, start, get back, go play, sing, drive, speak.*
 Use with future time expressions such as: *tomorrow, next week, next summer, Monday, Tuesday, etc., in January, in February etc., at 8 o'clock, before 6 o'clock.*
 Sentence examples: We leave tomorrow.
 The train arrives at ten tonight.
 James starts his trip next week.
 Mary gets home in the morning.

Tense (present) + have + past participle + verb

1. **Activities which began in the past and continue up to the moment of speaking.**
(and will probably extend beyond this time.)

Examples: I have listened to the choir broadcast for years.

We have known these students for a long time.

I have always liked that girl.

She has been in Tonga since she left here.

2. **Activities that have existed or occurred sometime before the time of speaking, but the exact time is not always indicated.**

Frequency words such as *several times, often, at least, etc.* may indicate one or more times, but the exact time is not always indicated.

Examples: I have read that book several times.

She has written three essays.

This is one of the best assemblies I've ever attended.

She has been at CCH since last September.

I've been in ELI far too long.

3. **Activities completed a relatively short time before the time of speaking.**

"Just" is often used to indicate or emphasize this recent time.

Examples: I have just finished my last assignment.

They have just arrived.

I've eaten already.

They have just returned from a trip to the Orient.

We've heard the news.

I haven't heard from my parents recently.

4. **Activities completed in the past but closely connected with future or present events.**

Examples: I have received some money from my parents so I can buy some new clothes.

She has studied all day so she can relax now.

She's completed all her assignments, so she won't have to go to class tomorrow.

He has passed the test so he can go to Freshman English next semester.

5. **Used with questions or statements with yet or ever.**

(to indicate completion before the present time or to indicate recent completion.)

use never only with affirmative.

ever with either negative or affirmative.

Examples: Haven't you ever been there?

He has never been there.

Hasn't he ever met her?

He's never met her.

Has she come yet?

Have you had lunch yet?

Have you ever been there before?

Has he met her?

Tense (present) + be + -ing + Verb**1. Activities in actual progress at the moment of speaking.**

Examples: Mary is watching television.
 John is swimming in the pool.
 The movie is playing now.
 Mr. Jones is speaking now.
 She is listening to the concert.

2. Activities that began a while before and will continue a while after the moment of speaking. (Not necessarily taking place at moment of speaking.)

Examples: I'm having a lot of trouble this semester.
 The newspaper is presenting a series of John's articles.
 He's doing biological research.
 She is teaching a course in English at the college.
 The office is collecting funds for the Aloha Center.
 They're having a lovely courtship.

3. Future activities.

Often used with time expressions indicating future: *Tomorrow, next year, this evening, tonight, etc.*

Examples: We're going to the Mainland next summer.
 I'm having Bill and Mary over on Sunday.
 The girls in Dorm 1 are giving a party.
 We're leaving for Europe next week.
 I'm starting on a diet tomorrow.

Uses of the Past Tense**Tense (past) + Verb****1. Past activities that existed or occurred. A definite time in the past is often indicated by time expressions such as *yesterday, last week, ten years ago, etc.***

Examples: She went home an hour ago.
 I thought I recognized her.
 The baby cried during the performance.
 We were sorry to hear of your illness.
 I received a package from home yesterday.
 Our team won the game.
 Mary played the piano while Jane sang.

2. Past activities that existed or occurred over a period of time.

Examples: They played for several hours.
 I was in Tonga during the interim semester.

He played rugby while he was in college.
 He was in the army from 1968 to 1971.
 I waited for her all afternoon.
 During the semester break, the students went home.

3. **Past activities that existed or occurred at intervals.**
 (Time expressions *just before*, and *already* are frequently used.)

Examples: She was usually late to the meetings.
 He visited his mother from time to time.
 She walked to school every day.
 I heard the chimes regularly.

Tense (past) + have + past participle + Verb

1. **Activities that occurred or existed before another activity in the past.**
 (Before is often used)
 Examples: I had just finished my assignment when Bill arrived.
 I had already finished my assignment when he invited me to complete my work in his office.
 I had done my work before the bell rang.
2. **Activities that occurred or existed before a point of time in the past.**
 Examples: I had never heard that story before. (Implies he had not heard it at a time in the past.)
 She had studied English before she entered college.

Tense (past) + be + -ing

1. **Past activity in progress at a specific time in the past.**
 (Time expressions giving past point of time are generally used.)
 Examples: When I saw her last, she was walking toward the library.
 I was working in the lab when the tornado struck.
 It was raining last night.
 I was living in Samoa at that time.
2. **Past activities in progress at the time of another activity in the past.**
 While is frequently used to introduce the be + ing clauses.
 When is frequently used to introduce the other activity.
 Examples: Mary was sleeping and John was studying.
 (Notice the slight difference between this and Mary slept and John studied.)
 John was swimming while Joe was playing tennis.
3. **Past activities in progress at the same time.**
 Examples: I thought about her while I was walking home.
 The blowout occurred while we were passing another car.
 He was steering the boat when the wave turned it over.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Clark, Allen D. *Korean Grammar for Language Students*. Seoul: The Christian Literature Society, 1965.

Jaramillo, Mari-Luci. "Cultural Differences in the ESOL Classroom." In *TESOL QUARTERLY*, 7, 1, Mar. '73, pp. 51 - 60.

Lee, Hei Sook. "English Korean Cognates." In *Language Learning*, 1958, 8, No. 4, pp. 63 - 69.

New, James W. "English Teaching on the Rim of Asia." In *Language Learning*, 1963, 8, No. 3, pp. 61 - 70.

Vandesande, Anthony V. and Francis Y.T. Park. *Myongdo's Korean: '68 Part 1*. Seoul: Myongdo Institute, 1968.