# The English tenses map

*Three times × four aspects = twelve tenses. The row tells you **when**; the column tells you **how the speaker sees the action**.*

time line · now · a complete action · an action in progress · the point we look from (a time or another action)

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| time ↓ · aspect → | Simple<br>the whole action, a fact, a habit | Continuous<br>be + -ing: in progress, temporary | Perfect<br>have + past participle: looks back | Perfect continuous<br>have been + -ing: an activity up to a point |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Past**<br>finished time | **Past simple**<br>V2 / V-ed · did + base<br><br>+ She **moved** to Cluj in 2020.<br>− didn't move · ? Did she move…?<br>A finished action at a finished time; the main events of a story.<br>**Signals:** yesterday, last week, in 2020, ago, when…? | **Past continuous**<br>was / were + -ing<br><br>+ I **was cooking** when you called.<br>− wasn't cooking · ? Were you cooking…?<br>In progress at a past moment; the background of a story; often interrupted by the past simple.<br>**Signals:** while, when, at 8 pm yesterday, all evening | **Past perfect**<br>had + past participle<br><br>+ The film **had started** when we arrived.<br>− hadn't started · ? Had it started…?<br>The earlier of two past actions: "the past before the past".<br>**Signals:** by the time, before, already, no sooner … than | **Past perfect continuous**<br>had been + -ing<br><br>+ She was tired: she **had been running**.<br>− hadn't been running · ? Had she been running?<br>How long an activity went on before a past moment, or its visible effect then.<br>**Signals:** for (two hours), since, all day, how long…? |
| **Present**<br>now, and time up to now | **Present simple**<br>V / V-s · do / does + base<br><br>+ He **works** from home on Fridays.<br>− doesn't work · ? Does he work…?<br>Habits, routines, facts, states; timetables ("The train **leaves** at 6").<br>**Signals:** always, usually, often, every day, never | **Present continuous**<br>am / is / are + -ing<br><br>+ They **are renovating** the flat this month.<br>− aren't renovating · ? Are they renovating…?<br>Now or around now; temporary situations; changes; fixed future arrangements.<br>**Signals:** now, at the moment, this week, currently, tonight | **Present perfect**<br>have / has + past participle<br><br>+ I **have** never **been** to Scotland.<br>− haven't been · ? Have you ever been…?<br>Past action, time not given, that matters now: experience, result, news; or a state up to now.<br>**Signals:** ever, never, yet, already, just, since, for, so far | **Present perfect continuous**<br>have / has been + -ing<br><br>+ We **have been waiting** for an hour.<br>− haven't been waiting · ? Have you been waiting…?<br>An activity from the past up to now (how long), or just stopped with a visible effect.<br>**Signals:** for, since, all morning, lately, how long…? |
| **Future**<br>after now | **Future simple**<br>will + base<br><br>+ I think it **will rain** later.<br>− won't rain · ? Will it rain…?<br>Predictions (opinion), decisions made now, promises, offers. Plans: *going to* (page 2).<br>**Signals:** I think, probably, tomorrow, soon, I promise | **Future continuous**<br>will be + -ing<br><br>+ This time tomorrow I'**ll be flying** to Rome.<br>− won't be flying · ? Will you be flying…?<br>In progress at a future moment; polite questions about plans ("**Will** you **be using** the car?").<br>**Signals:** this time next week, at 10 tomorrow, all day | **Future perfect**<br>will have + past participle<br><br>+ By June she **will have finished** the course.<br>− won't have finished · ? Will she have finished…?<br>Complete before a future deadline: looking back from the future.<br>**Signals:** by (June), by the time, before, in two years' time | **Future perfect continuous**<br>will have been + -ing<br><br>+ In May I **will have been teaching** for ten years.<br>− won't have been teaching · ? Will you have been…?<br>How long an activity will have lasted at a future point.<br>**Signals:** for (ten years) by / in (May), by the time |

**Two building blocks.** Continuous = **be** + -ing. Perfect = **have** + past participle. Perfect continuous uses both: **have been** + -ing.

**The first auxiliary does the work.** It shows the time (am / was / will be · have / had / will have), takes *not* (*hasn't*, *wasn't*) and moves before the subject in questions.

**Simple tenses have no auxiliary**, so *do / does / did* steps in for *not* and questions, and the verb goes back to the base form: *She ~~didn't moved~~ didn't move.*

# Choosing the right tense

*The contrasts that cost marks, the C1 patterns, and the mistakes Romanian speakers make most*

## 1 Past simple or present perfect?

Ask: **is the time finished, or does it reach now?** A finished time (*yesterday, in 2019, two years ago, when I was a child*) takes the past simple. No time, or a period up to now (*ever, yet, since, this year*), takes the present perfect. Romanian uses the *perfect compus* for both, so check every time.

| FINISHED | RESULT NOW |
|---|---|
| I lost my keys yesterday. | I've lost my keys. (I can't get in.) |

## 2 Present perfect simple or continuous?

Simple = the **result** or **how many**. Continuous = the **activity** or **how long**.

| HOW MANY | HOW LONG |
|---|---|
| I've written four emails. | I've been writing emails all morning. |

## 3 One sentence, three past meanings

"When I got home, my sister …"

| | |
|---|---|
| **… cooked dinner.** | First I arrived, then she started cooking. |
| **… was cooking dinner.** | She had started before I arrived; she was in the middle of it. |
| **… had cooked dinner.** | It was ready: she finished before I arrived. |

## 4 Talking about the future

| | |
|---|---|
| **will** | Prediction (opinion), decision now, promise: *I'll get it!* |
| **be going to** | Plan or intention; prediction from what you see: *Look at those clouds; it's going to rain.* |
| **present continuous** | Arrangement with a time and place: *I'm meeting Dan at six.* |
| **present simple** | Timetables, and after *when, as soon as, until, before, if*: *Call me when you arrive.* |
| **be about to / be due to** | Very soon / scheduled: *The flight is due to land at 9.* |

## 5 State verbs: usually no -ing

**know, believe, understand, mean, own, belong, need, want, prefer, seem, contain, consist**: *I ~~am knowing~~ know the answer.*

Some change meaning: *I **think** so* (opinion) / *I'm **thinking** about it* (process); *She **has** a car* / *She's **having** lunch*; *I **see*** (understand) / *I'm **seeing** the dentist* (meeting).

## 6 C1 patterns to know by heart

| | |
|---|---|
| **It's the first time + present perfect** | It's the first time I've driven abroad. |
| **wish / if only + past** | I wish I had more time. (now) |
| **wish + past perfect** | I wish I had listened. (regret about the past) |
| **It's (high) time / I'd rather + past** | It's time we left. I'd rather you didn't tell her. |
| **used to / would** | We used to live here. Every summer we would swim. (*would*: actions only) |
| **No sooner / Hardly + past perfect** | No sooner had I sat down than the phone rang. |
| **by the time + present → future perfect** | By the time you arrive, we'll have eaten. |

## 7 Mistakes Romanian speakers make most

| | |
|---|---|
| ~~I am here since Monday.~~ | I have been here since Monday. |
| ~~I have seen him yesterday.~~ | I saw him yesterday. |
| When I ~~will finish~~, I'll call you. | When I finish, I'll call you. |
| ~~I live here for five years.~~ | I have lived / have been living here for five years. |
| ~~Did you finished?~~ | Did you finish? |
| ~~I am agree.~~ | I agree. |

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