

The
Grammaring
Guide
to
English
Grammar

WITH EXERCISES

Péter Simon

**The Grammaring Guide to English
Grammar
with Exercises**

Second Edition

By Péter Simon

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Introduction

What is this book and who is it for?

The Grammaring Guide to English Grammar by Péter Simon is a resource book on the grammar of Standard British English. It is intended for intermediate to advanced students of English as a second or foreign language who have already studied the basic grammar of English. It covers the most important areas of English grammar and concentrates on structures which may cause difficulty at an intermediate level or above.

How the book is organised

The book starts with a pretest that helps you identify the areas you need to work on. The pretest is followed by eleven chapters, broken down to a number of subchapters that each deal with a specific grammar point. The related explanations are accompanied by real-life sample sentences, timeline diagrams, tables, and quotes. If a similar point or the same point is discussed in a different part of the book, you will find cross-references to that point. Where appropriate, chapters begin with guiding questions and end with revision questions. Most of the chapters are followed by exercises, including multiple choice, sentence transformation, error correction, gap filling and matching exercises, as well as communicative tasks that can be done in language lessons. At the end of the book, there is an appendix which contains a list of the most common irregular verb forms and the most important spelling rules; a list of the quotes that appear in the book; and a glossary that defines grammatical terms frequently used in the explanations.

How to use this book

The chapters in this book are not arranged in order of difficulty. This way, the book can be used for quick reference on specific points of interest, as well as for systematic study, either as a self-study grammar book or as additional material in an ESL/EFL course. No matter which way you use the book, it is recommended that you follow the cross-references, which will lead you to further information on a given item. The exercises, which come with suggested answers, are best done using pen and paper. These exercises will not only help you to practise grammar but also to tie grammatical forms to real-world meaning.

What is "grammaring"?

When I decided to create a website based on the first version of this book, I wanted to find a unique domain name that would make it different from the hundreds of other grammar sites. In a moment of inspiration, the word "grammaring" occurred to me. At that time, I thought it was a non-existent term: a play on the noun "grammar" used as a verb. I felt the *-ing* form would reflect the idea that grammar should not merely be considered as a field of study but rather as an activity in which language learners are dynamically engaged. Thus, in 2009, I launched www.grammaring.com.

It was not until a few years later that, while browsing the Internet, I learned that "grammaring" was actually an existing term coined by Diane Larsen-Freeman well before my discovery. In her *Teaching Language from Grammar to Grammaring*, she defines it as the fifth skill (besides reading, writing, speaking and listening), something more than just an area of knowledge: "the ability to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully and appropriately".

Although I did not have this exact definition in mind when I chose the domain name for the site, I thought it was very close to my understanding of grammar and so I decided to keep the name and later adopt it for the title of this book.

Acknowledgements

I started writing the first version of this book while I was teaching English grammar to English teacher trainees at the Juhász Gyula Teacher Training Faculty of the University of Szeged in Szeged, Hungary. I would like to thank all my students who have studied from this book since then for their useful feedback on the material. I am also grateful to my colleagues for their help and encouragement.

Special thanks go to my colleague Tibor Borbás, who worked with me in the initial stage of the project and contributed greatly to the first version of the text.

Finally, I would also like to thank the proofreader Thomas A. Williams for his meticulous corrections and helpful advice.

About the author

Péter Simon is a teacher of English as a foreign language and the creator of www.grammaring.com. He has been involved in the training of EFL teachers at the University of Szeged in Hungary, where he has offered various courses ranging from General English to English Grammar, Phonetics, Listening Skills, Reading Skills and Presentation Skills to FCE and CPE Exam Preparation. He has also taught Business English, Medical English and English for IT to students in a variety of professional training courses and has been an ERASMUS guest lecturer in Hamar (Norway), Istanbul (Turkey) and Klagenfurt (Austria). He is the co-author of *International Business Communication*, an online module in Business English developed at the University of Szeged. He is a certified TELC examiner in English, LCCI examiner in Business English, and City & Guilds interlocutor in English.

About the proofreader

Thomas A. Williams is an instructor at the Department of English Language Teacher Education and Applied Linguistics of the University of Szeged in Hungary, where he has taught courses in grammar and the four language skills as well as in translation, English for Academic Purposes, Academic Writing and Business English. His areas of interest include the link between culture(s) and language teaching and learning, task-based language teaching and learning, researching speaking and postmethod pedagogies. He has also seen an English test prep book and other writings of his in print.

Pretest

The following test contains 50 multiple choice questions related to various fields of English grammar covered in this book. For each question, choose the best answer from the three choices listed and note it down for yourself. The questions get harder as you progress, from beginner to advanced level. Don't worry if you don't know all the answers. At the end of the test you will find an answer key that also provides links to the chapters that will explain each answer for you.

1. Mary is ... teacher.
 1. -
 2. a
 3. an
2. ... go for a walk?
 1. Would you like to
 2. Would you like
 3. Do you like
3. I ... in the morning.
 1. drink a cup of tea usually
 2. drink usually a cup of tea
 3. usually drink a cup of tea
4. My sister ... in Canada.
 1. live
 2. lives
 3. living
5. Where ...
 1. does Peter work?
 2. Peter does work?
 3. works Peter?
6. I don't have ... problems.
 1. some
 2. any
 3. much
7. I like ... early in summer.
 1. get up
 2. getting up
 3. to getting up
8. Tom can ... the piano.
 1. play
 2. to play
 3. plays

9. Come on, I ... you with those bags.
 1. 'm going to help
 2. 'll help
 3. 'm helping
10. I ... for you all day yesterday.
 1. looking
 2. was looking
 3. have been looking
11. Let's take an umbrella. ...
 1. It rained.
 2. It rains.
 3. It's raining.
12. Sorry, I can't meet you tonight. I ... out with some friends.
 1. am going
 2. go
 3. will go
13. When I ... home, I ... to bed straight away.
 1. was getting / went
 2. got / went
 3. got / had gone
14. Last week, I stayed with my sister ... a few days.
 1. during
 2. since
 3. for
15. I ... on the computer all day. My eyes are sore.
 1. been working
 2. was working
 3. have been working
16. If I ... in New York at that time, I ... to the show.
 1. were living / would go
 2. had been living / would have gone
 3. lived / would have gone
17. Tim should spend ... time on the computer.
 1. less
 2. fewer
 3. a few
18. He wanted to know ...
 1. who I was waiting for.
 2. who was I waiting for.
 3. for who I was waiting.
19. The question was ... to answer.
 1. enough difficult
 2. too difficult

3. difficulty
20. There is something you want to say, ...
 1. isn't there?
 2. isn't it?
 3. doesn't it?
21. I really ... give up smoking.
 1. need
 2. must
 3. ought
22. When I met Philip in 1980, he said he ... to Brunei.
 1. had never been
 2. has never been
 3. never been
23. The wind was blowing through the ... living room window.
 1. breaking
 2. broken
 3. broke
24. I regret to inform you that your application ...
 1. has been rejected.
 2. has rejected.
 3. rejected.
25. What's the last film ... you saw?
 1. what
 2. who
 3. that
26. Have you ever ... China?
 1. been in
 2. been to
 3. gone to
27. Who ... to?
 1. belongs this bag
 2. this bag belongs
 3. does this bag belong
28. ... a lot of cheese.
 1. French eat
 2. The French eat
 3. The French eats
29. I wish ... nearer. Then we could meet more often.
 1. living
 2. I would live
 3. I lived
30. I'll never forget ... her for the first time.
 1. to have met

2. to meet
3. meeting
31. The guide ... visiting the Royal Palace.
 1. suggested
 2. agreed
 3. promised
32. J. K. Rowling is rumoured ... a new book.
 1. that she is writing
 2. to be writing
 3. writing
33. Smokers are more likely ... lung cancer compared to non-smokers.
 1. to develop
 2. that they develop
 3. developing
34. Here ...
 1. the postman comes.
 2. comes she.
 3. comes the bus.
35. It ... have been Carla you saw this morning. She is away on holiday.
 1. mustn't
 2. can't
 3. needn't
36. ... as compensation.
 1. \$500 was paid the customer
 2. The customer was paid for \$500
 3. The customer was paid \$500
37. The student apologised ... the professor ... being late.
 1. to / for
 2. to / of
 3. for / of
38. We haven't heard from him for ten years. He ...
 1. had to die.
 2. should have died.
 3. might have died.
39. ... this morning.
 1. My hair had cut
 2. I had cut my hair
 3. I had my hair cut
40. By next week, they ... painting the rooms.
 1. have finished
 2. will finish
 3. will have finished
41. It's high time I ... a new pair of jeans.

1. buy
 2. bought
 3. had bought
42. I took the phone back to the shop, but they ... me a replacement.
1. wouldn't give
 2. shouldn't give
 3. can't have given
43. Mike insisted ... his new muffin recipe.
1. trying
 2. on that I try
 3. that I should try
44. Mr Jones ... at the meeting, but he had to cancel because of his illness.
1. was speaking
 2. was to speak
 3. was to have spoken
45. Knowing a little Russian, I had no difficulty ... myself understood.
1. to make
 2. making
 3. about making
46. If you ... smarter, you ... money in the first place.
1. were / wouldn't have borrowed
 2. were / didn't borrow
 3. are / wouldn't borrow
47. Not only ... the speed limit, but he had also consumed alcohol.
1. he exceeded
 2. did he exceed
 3. he did exceed
48. If only it ... snowing.
1. would stop
 2. stopped
 3. stops
49. You ... that again.
1. not do
 2. are not do
 3. are not to do
50. Where would you rather ...
1. I'll sleep?
 2. I'd sleep?
 3. I slept?

Answer key

1. Mary is ... teacher. (2) **a** (See [Articles](#))
2. ... go for a walk? (1) **Would you like to** (See [Non-finite verb forms](#))
3. I ... in the morning. (3) **usually drink a tea** (See [Present simple](#))
4. My sister ... in Canada. (2) **lives** (See [Present simple](#))
5. Where ... (1) **does Peter work?** (See [Present simple](#))
6. I don't have ... problems. (2) **any** (See [Countable and uncountable nouns](#))
7. I like ... early in summer. (2) **getting up** (See [Non-finite verb forms](#))
8. Tom can ... the piano. (1) **play** (See [Modals](#))
9. Come on, I ... you with those bags. (2) **'ll help** (See [Future time](#))
10. I ... for you all day yesterday. (2) **was looking** (See [Past continuous](#), [Present perfect continuous](#))
11. Let's take an umbrella. ... (3) **It's raining.** (See [Past simple](#), [Present simple](#), [Present continuous](#))
12. Sorry, I can't meet you tonight. I ... out with some friends. (1) **am going** (See [Future time](#))
13. When I ... home, I ... to bed straight away. (2) **got / went** (See [Past time](#))
14. Last week, I stayed with my sister ... a few days. (3) **for** (See [Past simple](#))
15. I ... on the computer all day. My eyes are sore. (3) **have been working** (See [Past continuous](#), [Present perfect continuous](#))
16. If I ... in New York at that time, I ... to the show. (2) **had been living / would have gone** (See [Conditionals](#))
17. Tim should spend ... time on the computer. (1) **less** (See [Countable and uncountable nouns](#))
18. He wanted to know ... (1) **who I was waiting for.** (See [Indirect speech](#))
19. The question was ... to answer. (2) **too difficult** (See [The use of the infinitive](#))
20. There is something you want to say, ... (1) **isn't there?** (See [Subject-auxiliary inversion](#))
21. I really ... give up smoking. (2) **must** (See [Modals](#))
22. When I met Philip in 1980, he said he ... to Brunei. (1) **had never been** (See [Indirect speech](#))
23. The wind was blowing through the ... living room window. (2) **broken** (See [The use of the participle](#))
24. I regret to inform you that your application ... (1) **has been rejected.** (See [Passive voice](#))
25. What's the last film ... you saw? (3) **that** (See [Relative clauses](#))
26. Have you ever ... China? (2) **been to** (See [Present perfect](#))
27. Who ... to? (3) **does this bag belong** (See [Present simple](#))
28. ... a lot of cheese. (2) **The French eat** (See [The definite article \(THE\)](#))
29. I wish ... nearer. Then we could meet more often. (3) **I lived** (See [Conditionals and unreal tenses](#))
30. I'll never forget ... her for the first time. (3) **meeting** (See [Verbs followed by the TO-infinitive or gerund](#))

31. The guide ... visiting the Royal Palace. **(1) suggested** (See [Common reporting verbs](#), [The use of the gerund](#))
32. J. K. Rowling is rumoured ... a new book. **(2) to be writing** (See [Passive voice with reporting verbs](#))
33. Smokers are more likely ... lung cancer compared to non-smokers. **(1) to develop** (See [Other modal expressions](#))
34. Here ... **(3) comes the bus.** (See [Subject-verb inversion](#))
35. It ... have been Carla you saw this morning. She is away on holiday. **(2) can't** (See [Categories of meaning expressed by modals](#))
36. ... as compensation. **(3) The customer was paid \$500** (See [Passive voice](#))
37. The student apologised ... the professor ... being late. **(1) to / for** (See [Common reporting verbs](#), [The use of the gerund](#))
38. We haven't heard from him for ten years. He ... **(3) might have died.** (See [Categories of meaning expressed by modals](#))
39. ... this morning. **(3) I had my hair cut** (See [Causative structures](#))
40. By next week, they ... painting the rooms. **(3) will have finished** (See [Future time](#))
41. It's high time I ... a new pair of jeans. **(2) bought** (See [Conditionals and unreal tenses](#))
42. I took the phone back to the shop, but they ... me a replacement. **(1) wouldn't give** (See [Categories of meaning expressed by modals](#))
43. Mike insisted ... his new muffin recipe. **(3) that I should try** (See [Common reporting verbs](#), [The use of the gerund](#))
44. Mr Jones ... at the meeting, but he had to cancel because of his illness. **(3) was to have spoken** (See [Other modal expressions](#))
45. Knowing a little Russian, I had no difficulty ... myself understood. **(2) making** (See [The use of the participle](#))
46. If you ... smarter, you ... money in the first place. **(1) were / wouldn't have borrowed** (See [Conditionals](#))
47. Not only ... the speed limit, but he had also consumed alcohol. **(2) did he exceed** (See [Subject-auxiliary inversion](#))
48. If only it ... snowing. **(1) would stop** (See [Conditionals and unreal tenses](#))
49. You ... that again. **(3) are not to do** (See [Other modal expressions](#))
50. Where would you rather ... **(3) I slept?** (See [Conditionals and unreal tenses](#))

Chapter 1: Time, tense and aspect

- [Guiding questions: time, tense and aspect](#)
- [The difference between times and tenses](#)
- [Aspects](#)
- [State verbs and action verbs](#)
- [Past time](#)
- [Present time](#)
- [Future time](#)
- [Tenses in indirect speech](#)

Guiding questions: time, tense and aspect

- How many tenses are there in English?
- How many aspects are there in English?
- Can a present tense refer to past or future time?
- What kind of verbs can *not* be used in continuous tenses?

The difference between times and tenses

Time is a concept which is related to our perception of reality. There are three times: past, present and future. Tense is a grammatical category which is marked by verb inflection and expresses when an event or action happens in the flow of time.

Strictly speaking, only two English tenses are marked by the inflection of the verb:

- past (*talked*)
- present (*talks*)

Other tenses are marked by auxiliaries (*be, have*):

- past continuous (*was/were talking*)
- past perfect (*had talked*)
- past perfect continuous (*had been talking*)
- present continuous (*am/are/is talking*)
- present perfect (*have/has talked*)
- present perfect continuous (*have/has been talking*)

As future time is expressed with the modal *will* + infinitive and not with inflection, the forms with *will* (*will talk, will be talking, will have talked, will have been talking*) are not considered to be tenses. However, for the sake of convenience, we refer to them as such throughout this book.

Therefore, the twelve basic tenses in English are:

	Past	Present	Future
Simple	Past simple	Present simple	Future simple
Continuous	Past continuous	Present continuous	Future continuous
Perfect	Past perfect	Present perfect	Future perfect
Perfect continuous	Past perfect continuous	Present perfect continuous	Future perfect continuous

Note that certain tenses in English may refer to a different time than that expressed by their names. For example, the present continuous tense may refer to either present or future time:

"What are you doing?" "I'm reading." (present reference)

"What are you doing on Wednesday evening?" "I'm visiting my grandma."
(future reference)

Aspects

The aspect of a verb does not indicate when an action takes place in time; it rather shows the relationship between the action and the passage of time as seen from the speaker's point of view.

There are two aspects in English: the continuous (also called the progressive) aspect expresses duration; the perfect aspect expresses completion. The combination of these two aspects makes the perfect continuous.

- [The continuous aspect](#)
- [The perfect aspect](#)
- [The perfect continuous aspect](#)

The continuous aspect

BE + PRESENT PARTICIPLE (VERB-ING)

The continuous aspect is expressed with the auxiliary *be* and the present participle *-ing* form of the verb. Depending on the time of the action, we use the past (*was, were*), present (*am, are, is*) or modal + infinitive (e.g. *will be*) form of *be*.

The continuous aspect focuses on the duration of an event. It expresses that the action was, is or will be in progress at a specific point in time or over a period of time. The point in time may be defined by a time expression (*now, at 5 o'clock yesterday, this time tomorrow*) or a clause (*when I came home, when I come home*). For the period of time, we can also use a time expression (*all day yesterday*) or a clause (*while she was reading*).

Examples of the continuous aspect:

*Are you **enjoying** yourself?* (now)

*At 9 o'clock, I **was sitting** on the train.*

*When I came home, he **was sleeping**.*

*She **must be waiting** for me.* (now)

*Rob **was hiking** all day yesterday.*

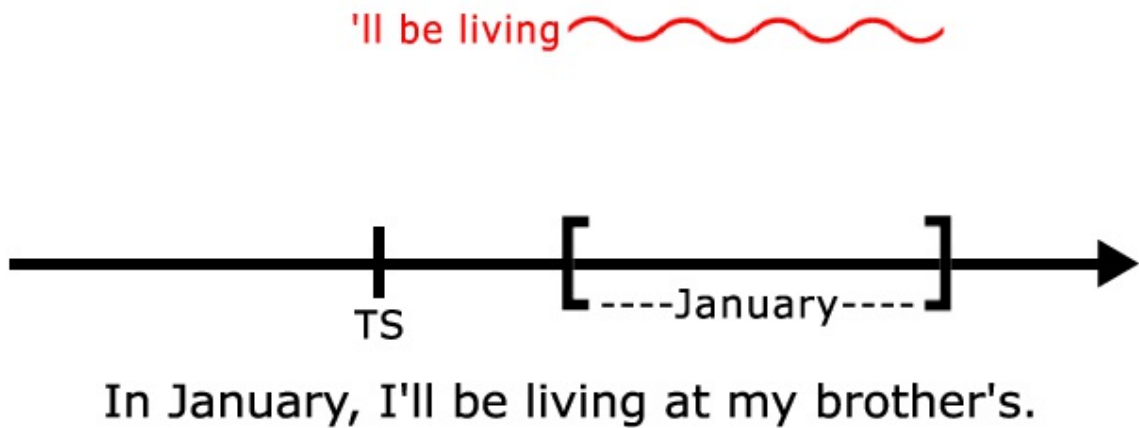
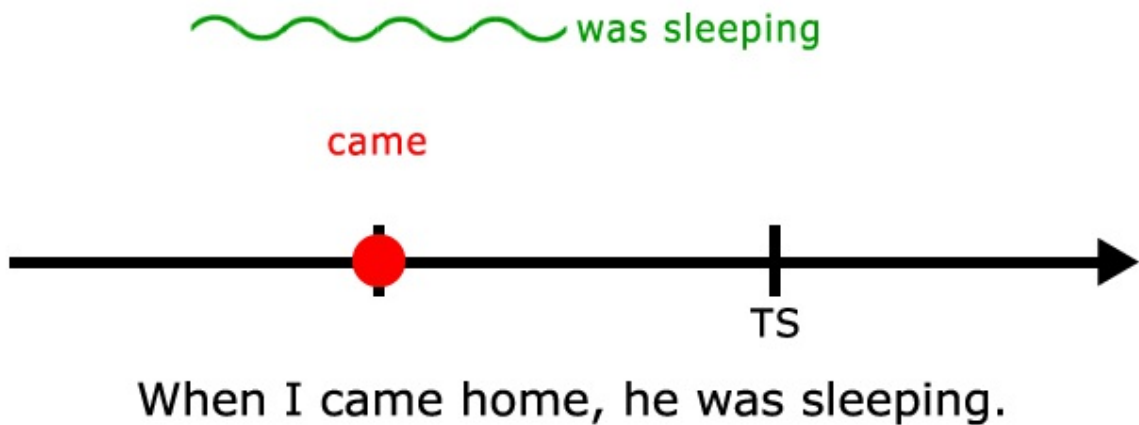
*While she **was reading**, Bill **was working** on the computer.*

*In January, I'll **be living** at my brother's.*

 are...enjoying



Are you enjoying yourself?



Quotes:

- *Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it.* - [Henry David Thoreau](#)
- *We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.* - [Oscar Wilde](#)

Related topics:

- [The present participle used to form the continuous aspect](#)
- [Past continuous](#)
- [Present continuous](#)
- [Future continuous](#)
- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [The forms of the participle](#)

The perfect aspect

HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE

The perfect aspect is expressed with the auxiliary *have* and the past participle form of the verb. Depending on the time of the action, we use one of the following forms of *have*: the past (*had*), present (*have, has*), modal + infinitive (e.g. *will have*) or *-ing* (*having*).

The perfect aspect focuses on the completion of an event. It expresses that the action had, has or will have been completed by a specific point in time. This point in time may be defined by a time expression (*by 5 o'clock*) or a clause (*by the time you get home, when I arrived*).

Examples of the perfect aspect:

I've lived here for ten years. (from 10 years ago until now)

By 5 o'clock, he had finished the letter. (at some time before 5 o'clock)

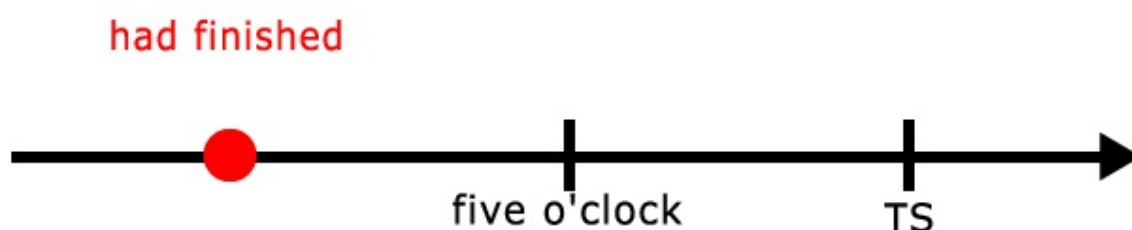
When I arrived, they had already left. (at some time before I arrived)

Have you seen my new bike? (at any time up to now)

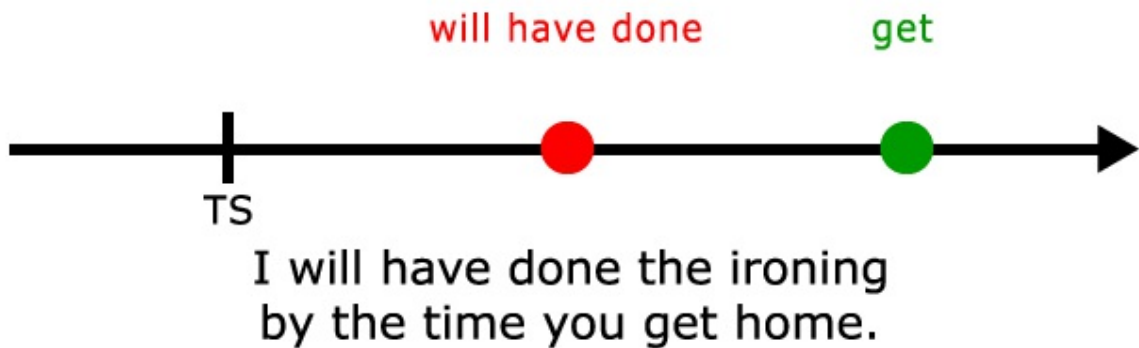
I will have done the ironing by the time you get home. (between now and when you get home)

He might have missed the train. (at some time before now)

Having taken the wrong turn, he ended up in a dangerous neighbourhood.
(he turned before he found himself in a dangerous neighbourhood)



By five o'clock, he had finished the letter.



Quotes:

- *I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.* - [Thomas Edison](#)

Related topics:

- [The past participle used to form the perfect aspect](#)
- [Past perfect](#)
- [Present perfect](#)
- [Future perfect](#)
- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [The forms of the gerund](#)
- [The forms of the participle](#)

The perfect continuous aspect

HAVE + BEEN + VERB-ING

The perfect continuous is not considered as an aspect in itself; it is rather the combination of the perfect and continuous aspects.

It is expressed with the auxiliaries *have* and *been* (the third form of *be*) and the (present participle) *-ing* form of the verb. Depending on the time of the action, we use one of the following forms of *have*: the past (*had*), present (*have, has*) or modal + infinitive (e.g. *will have*).

The perfect continuous expresses that the action had, has or will have been in progress for some time at a specific point in time. This point in time may be defined by a time expression (*at 5 o'clock*) or a clause (*when she gets home*).

Examples of the perfect continuous:

I've been waiting for this moment all my life. (from when I was born until now)

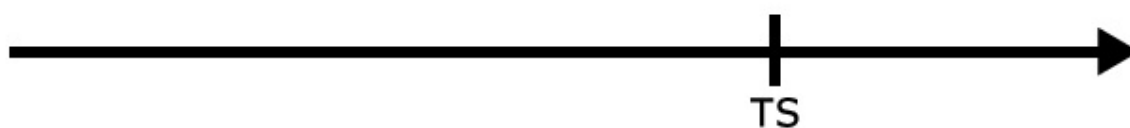
He's been ironing his shirts. (from some time in the past until now)

By 2005, George had been living in Scotland for 20 years. (from 1985 to 2005)

When Mary gets home, Kevin will have been sleeping for hours. (Kevin's sleep lasting from some point in time before Mary gets home until she gets home)

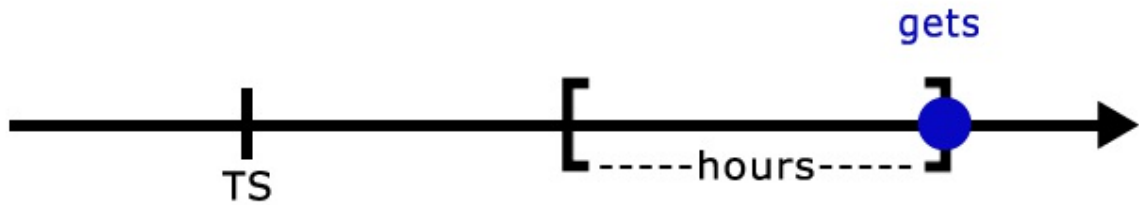
I wouldn't have been sitting there if I hadn't had to. (from some time in the past until a later time in the past)

's been ironing 



He's been ironing his shirts.

will have been sleeping 



When Mary gets home, Kevin will have been sleeping for hours.

Related topics:

- [The present participle used to form the continuous aspect](#)
- [Past perfect continuous](#)
- [Present perfect continuous](#)
- [Future perfect continuous](#)
- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [The forms of the participle](#)

State verbs and action verbs

State verbs

State verbs express states or conditions which are relatively static. They include verbs of perception, cognition, the senses, emotion and state of being.

Examples of state verbs:

appear, believe, belong, consider, consist, contain, cost, doubt, exist, fit, hate, hear, have, know, like, love, matter, mean, need, owe, own, prefer, remember, resemble, seem, suppose, suspect, understand, want, wish

State verbs are not normally used in continuous forms:

I **am needing a new phone. / I **need** a new phone.*

Who **is this bag **belonging** to? / Who **does** this bag **belong** to?*

They **are seeming tired. / They **seem** tired.*

Action verbs

Action verbs (also called dynamic verbs) express activities, processes, momentary actions or physical conditions.

Examples of action verbs:

ache, arrive, ask, call, change, cook, dance, eat, fall, feel, go, grow, have, help, hit, hurt, itch, kick, knock, leave, melt, read, say, shrink, sing, speak, talk, throw, travel, watch

Action verbs may be used in continuous forms:

*Who **was he dancing** with?*

*Someone's **knocking** at the door.*

*I've **been reading** this book for weeks.*

State verbs in the continuous form

Some state verbs may be used in the continuous form if they refer to a temporary action or an action in progress at a certain moment, rather than a permanent attitude:

*I'm **having** second thoughts about moving abroad.*
*Jones **is appearing** in Hamlet this evening.*
*You're **looking** great in those jeans.*

There are also state verbs which may be used in the continuous form, but with a different, active meaning:

***Do** you **have** a car? (own)*
*They **are having** dinner at the moment. (eating)*

*You **are** my best friend. (it's a fact)*
*She's **being** silly again. (behaving in a silly way)*

*That soup **smells** good. (has a good smell)*
*He **is smelling** the soup. (sniffing at)*

*This milk **tastes** sour. (has a sour taste)*
*I **was just tasting** the food. (testing)*

*You **look** great! (your current appearance)*
*He **was looking** out the window when I saw him. (directing his eyes towards)*

*What **do** you **see**? (notice with eyes)*
*I'm **seeing** my dentist this afternoon. (visiting)*

*I **don't hear** well. (pick up with ears)*
*The judge **will be hearing** the evidence later this week. (listening to)*

*I **expect** that you are tired. (assume)*
***Are you expecting** visitors this evening? (waiting for them to arrive)*

*I **feel** that you are wrong. (think)*
*How **have you been feeling**? (asking about physical state)*

*This melon **weighs** 2 kg. (its weight is 2 kg)*
*He **is weighing** the melon. (measuring its weight)*

Naturally, we can use the verbs with the active meaning in the simple form, too:

*How often **do** you **see** your dentist?*
*They usually **have** dinner at 6.*

But we cannot use the verbs with the stative meaning in the continuous form:

This melon **is weighing 2 kilos.*

The soup **was smelling good.*

Quotes:

- *I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody. - [Bill Cosby](#)*
- *If you don't know where you're going, you might never get there. - [Yogi Berra](#)*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express habits: WILL, WOULD, USED TO](#)
- [Verbs which cannot be used in the passive voice](#)
- [The passive with GET](#)

Past time

- [Guiding questions: past time](#)
- [Past simple](#)
- [Past continuous](#)
- [The difference between the past simple and the past continuous](#)
- [Past perfect](#)
- [The difference between the past simple and the past perfect](#)
- [Past perfect continuous](#)
- [The difference between the past perfect and the past perfect continuous](#)
- [Present simple to express past](#)
- [USED TO and WOULD for past habits](#)
- [Revision questions: past time](#)
- [Exercises: past time](#)

Guiding questions: past time

- How many past tenses are there?
- Which past tense is used to express a point in time at which something happened?
- Does the past perfect tense show how long ago something happened?
- How can you express past habits?
- What is the difference between the past perfect simple and the past perfect continuous tenses?

Past simple

- [Form: past simple](#)
- [Past simple for completed actions in the past](#)
- [Past simple for past habits and states](#)
- [Past simple for actions happening over a period of time in the past](#)
- [Past simple to express a point in the past](#)
- [The auxiliary DID for emphasis](#)

Form: past simple

VERB-ED

Affirmative

Subject	Verb (past tense)	
<i>I</i>	<i>arrived</i>	<i>yesterday.</i>
<i>You</i>		
<i>He/She/It</i>		
<i>We</i>		
<i>You</i>		
<i>They</i>		

In the case of regular verbs, the past simple is formed by adding *-ed* to the base form of the verb for all persons. Note the changes in spelling:

look » ***looked***

stay » ***stayed***

arrive » ***arrived*** (we only add *-d* if the verb ends in *-e*)

try » ***tried*** (a final *-y* changes to *-i-* after a consonant)

stop » ***stopped*** (we double the final consonant if the verb ends in consonant-vowel-consonant)

A number of verbs have irregular past forms. A few examples are:

buy » ***bought***

fly » ***flew***

hit » ***hit***

shine » ***shone***

swim » ***swam***

See the [Appendix](#) for a list of the most common irregular verbs in English.

Negative

In the negative, we use the auxiliary *did* + *not* followed by the bare infinitive:

Subject	Auxiliary	<i>not</i>	Verb (bare infinitive)	
<i>I</i>	<i>did</i>	<i>not</i>	<i>arrive</i>	<i>in time.</i>
<i>You</i>				
<i>He/She/It</i>				
<i>We</i>				
<i>You</i>				
<i>They</i>				

The contracted form *didn't* is often used instead of *did not* in spoken and in informal written language.

Interrogative

In the interrogative, we use the auxiliary *did* followed by the subject and the bare infinitive:

(Question word)	Auxiliary	Subject	Verb (bare infinitive)
<i>(When)</i>	<i>did</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>arrive?</i>
		<i>you</i>	
		<i>he/she/it</i>	
		<i>we</i>	
		<i>you</i>	
		<i>they</i>	

The verb BE in the past simple

The verb *be* has irregular past tense forms. In the past simple, the auxiliary *did* is not used in the negative or interrogative if the main verb is *be*:

Affirmative	Negative	Interrogative
<i>I was at home.</i>	<i>I was not at home.</i>	<i>Was I at home?</i>
<i>You were at home.</i>	<i>You were not at home.</i>	<i>Were you at home?</i>
<i>He/She/It was at home.</i>	<i>He/She/It was not at home.</i>	<i>Was he/she/it at home?</i>

We were at home.	We were not at home.	Were we at home?
You were at home.	You were not at home.	Were you at home?
They were at home.	They were not at home.	Were they at home?

The contracted forms *wasn't* and *weren't* are often used instead of *was not* and *were not* in spoken and in informal written language.

Related topics:

- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)
- [The auxiliary DID for emphasis](#)
- [Appendix: irregular verb forms](#)

Past simple for completed actions in the past

The past simple tense is used for actions which were completed at a definite point in time in the past. This point can be implied or expressed with a time expression or a clause:

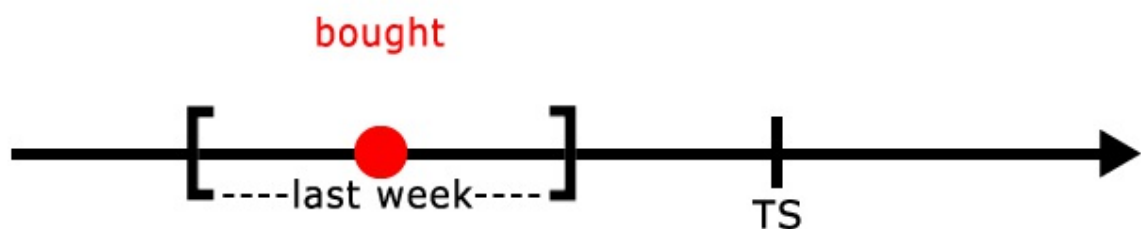
*I **bought** a motorbike last week.*

*She **was born** in 1990.*

*Columbus **discovered** America. (i.e. in 1492)*

*How **did** it **happen**? (i.e. when it happened)*

*When I got home, I **went** to bed straight away.*



I bought a motorbike last week.

Examples of time expressions that refer to a definite time in the past:

a year/two months/a few weeks/three days/etc. ago
at 5 o'clock

yesterday
earlier today/this week/this month
last week/month/year

Quotes:

- Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton asked why. - [Bernard Baruch](#)
- I had been told that the training procedure with cats was difficult. It's not. Mine had me trained in two days. - [Bill Dana](#)
- What you have become is the price you paid to get what you used to want. - [Mignon McLaughlin](#)

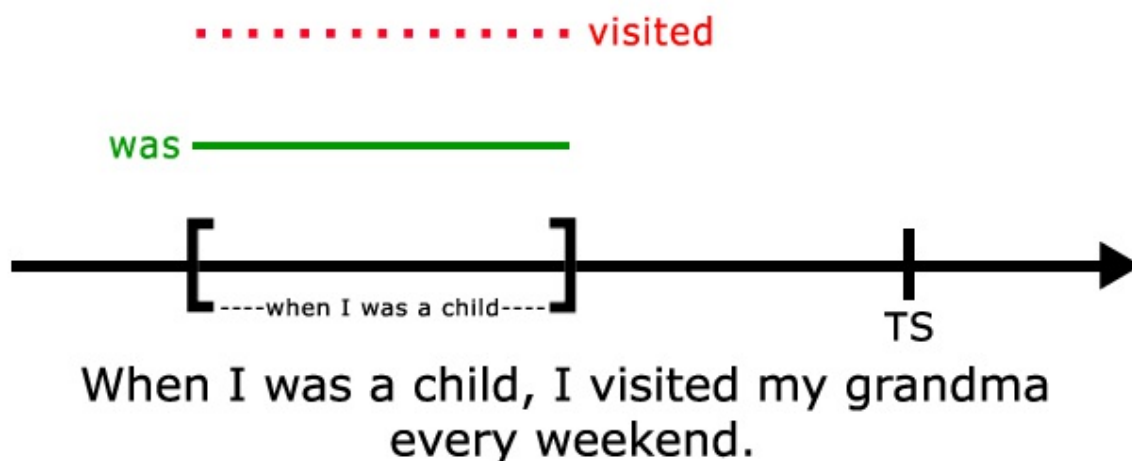
Past simple for past habits and states

The past simple is used to express habits and states that existed during a period of time in the past. This period can be implied or expressed with a time expression or a clause:

When I was a child, I **visited** my grandma every weekend. (habit)

When my brother was young, he **liked** spinach. (state)

Where **did** you **go** to primary school? (habit, where the implied period of time is when you went to primary school)



Quotes:

- The fishing was good; it was the catching that was bad. - [A. K. Best](#)
- I had been told that the training procedure with cats was difficult. It's not. Mine had me trained in two days. - [Bill Dana](#)

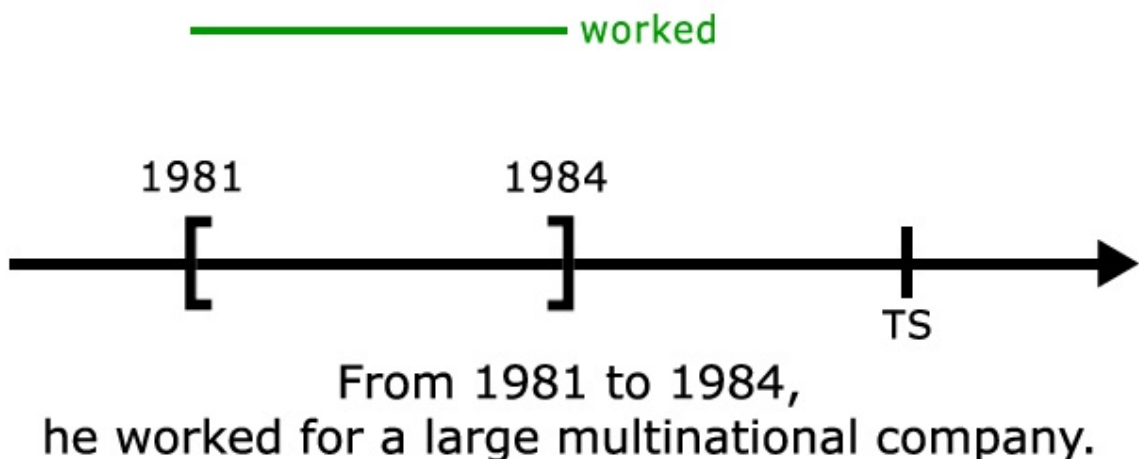
Related topics:

- [Modals to express habits: WILL, WOULD, USED TO](#)
- [Past continuous for frequently repeated actions in the past](#)
- [Present simple for present habits and states](#)

Past simple for actions happening over a period of time in the past

The past simple is used for actions that took place over a complete period of time in the past. This period is expressed with a time expression; however, the exact time may or may not be mentioned:

*Pterodactyls **existed** between 1.5 billion and 70 million years ago.*
*From 1981 to 1984, he **worked** for a large multinational company.*
*Last week, I **stayed** with my sister for a few days. (the exact time is not mentioned)*
*Joe **lived** in Boston for ten years. (the exact time is not mentioned)*



Related topics:

- [Present perfect with FOR and SINCE](#)

Past simple to express a point in the past

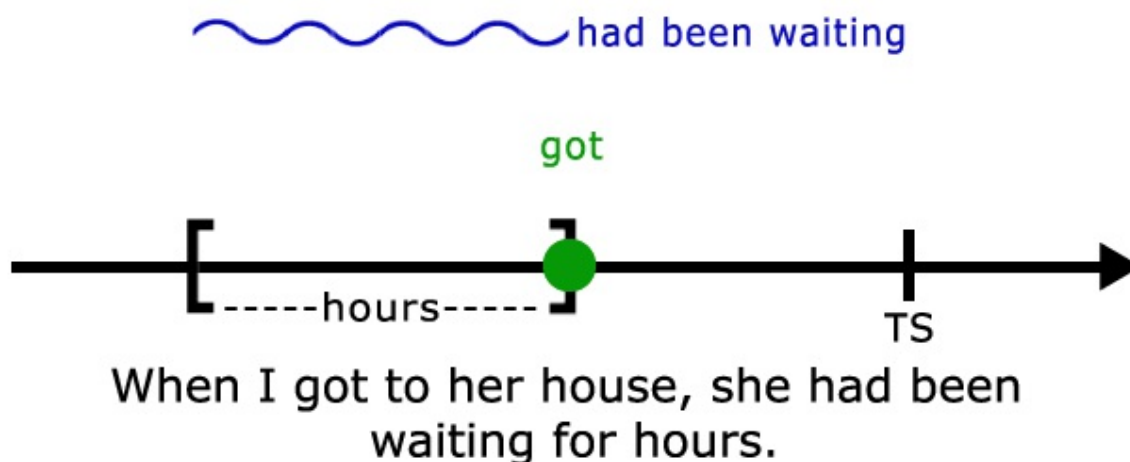
The past simple is used to refer to a point in the past at which another event was in progress, had been completed or had been going on for some time. The past simple thus serves as a time marker in subordinate time clauses within complex

sentences, where the main clause is in the past continuous, past perfect or past perfect continuous tense:

*When I **called** her, she was studying.*

*By the time we **reached** the top, it had stopped raining.*

*When I **got** to her house, she had been waiting for hours.*



Related topics:

- [Past continuous for actions in progress at a specific point in the past](#)
- [Past perfect for actions completed before a point in the past](#)
- [Present perfect with FOR and SINCE](#)
- [IT'S \(BEEN\) + DAYS / WEEKS / MONTHS / etc. + SINCE](#)

The auxiliary DID for emphasis

In the past simple, the auxiliary *did* followed by the bare infinitive form of the main verb can be used in affirmative sentences to express emphasis. In speech, the auxiliary is stressed:

*I **did** want to tell you, but I didn't know how.*

*He **did** arrive late.*

*She **did** go to a school, but she is not nationally certified.*

Related topics:

- [Form: past simple](#)
- [DO, DOES, DID + bare infinitive](#)

Past continuous

- [Form: past continuous](#)
- [Past continuous for actions in progress at a specific point in the past](#)
- [Past continuous for actions happening over a period of time in the past](#)
- [Past continuous for gradual development](#)
- [Past continuous for frequently repeated actions in the past](#)
- [Past continuous for temporary habitual actions in the past](#)

Form: past continuous

WAS/WERE + PRESENT PARTICIPLE (VERB-ING)

The past continuous (also called the past progressive) is formed with *was/were* (the past tense forms of *be*) + the present participle *-ing* form of the verb.

Affirmative

Subject	Auxiliary	Verb (present participle)
<i>I</i>	<i>was</i>	<i>sleeping.</i>
<i>He/She/It</i>		
<i>You</i>	<i>were</i>	
<i>We</i>		
<i>You</i>		
<i>They</i>		

Negative

Subject	Auxiliary	<i>not</i>	Verb (present participle)
<i>I</i>	<i>was</i>		<i>not sleeping.</i>
<i>He/She/It</i>			
<i>You</i>	<i>were</i>		
<i>We</i>			
<i>You</i>			
<i>They</i>			

The contracted forms *wasn't* and *weren't* are often used instead of *was not* and *were not* in spoken and in informal written language.

Interrogative

(Question word)	Auxiliary	Subject	Verb (present participle)
(Where)	was	I	sleeping?
		he/she/it	
	were	you	
		we	
		you	
		they	

Related topics:

- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)

Past continuous for actions in progress at a specific point in the past

The past continuous tense is used to refer to actions that were in progress at or around a specific point in time in the past. This point can be implied or expressed with a time expression or a clause with a verb in the past simple tense:

*At 9 o'clock, I **was sitting** on the train.*

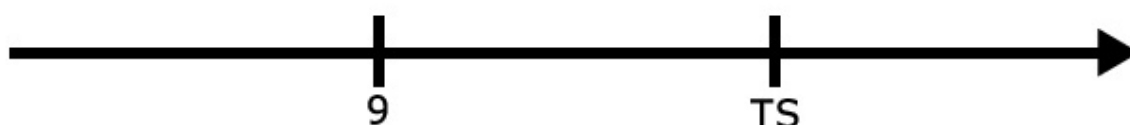
*A few minutes ago, they **were still dancing**.*

*When I called her, she **was studying**.*

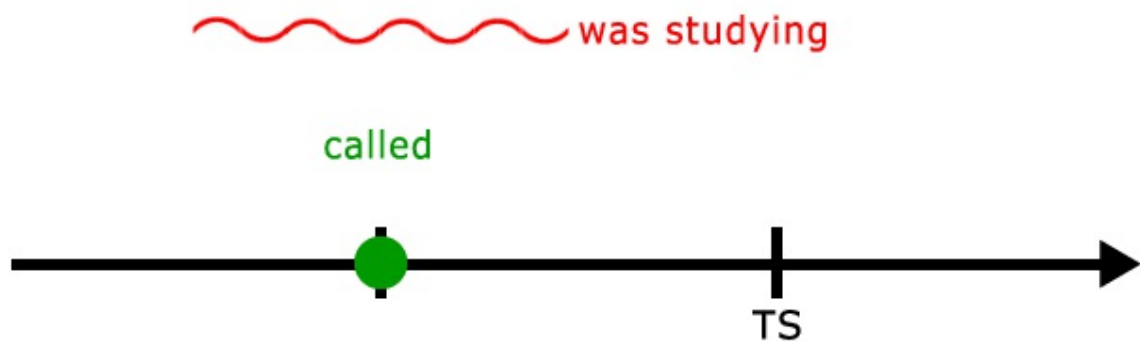
*What **were you doing** when you heard the explosion?*

*Sorry, can you repeat that? I **wasn't listening**. (when you said that)*

 was sitting



At 9 o'clock, I was sitting on the train.



When I called her, she was studying.

Related topics:

- [Present continuous for actions in progress at the time of speaking](#)
- [Future continuous for actions in progress at a specific point in the future](#)
- [Past simple to express a point in the past](#)

Past continuous for actions happening over a period of time in the past

The past continuous is used to describe actions which continued over a period of time in the past. This period can be expressed with a time expression or a clause with a verb in the past continuous tense. In this case the two actions were happening simultaneously:

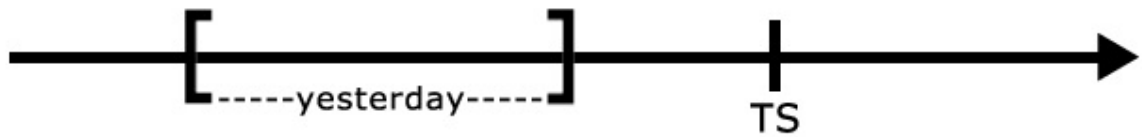
I was looking for you all day yesterday.

He was staying in Rome that summer.

Were you sleeping during the speech?

My friends were enjoying themselves playing cards while I was studying in my room.


~~~~~ was looking for



I was looking for you all day yesterday.

### Related topics:

- [Future continuous for actions happening over a period of time in the future](#)

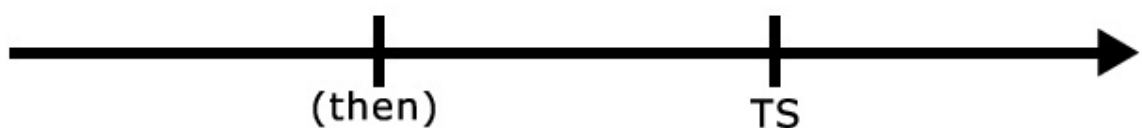
### Past continuous for gradual development

Used without a time expression, the past continuous can express change and gradual development in the past:

*It was **getting** darker and darker.*

*Our hopes **were fading**.*

~~~~~ was getting



It was getting darker and darker.

Related topics:

- [Present continuous for gradual development](#)

Past continuous for frequently repeated actions in the past

With time expressions such as *always*, *constantly*, *continually* and *all the time*, the past continuous can express frequently repeated past actions which annoy(ed) the speaker:

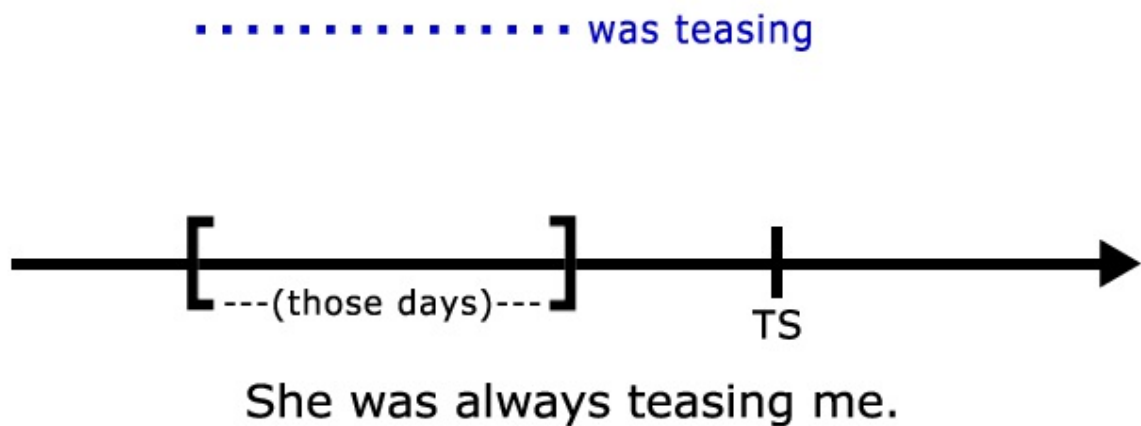
She was always teasing me.

They were constantly arguing about money.

He was continually interrupting the speaker.

I was getting into trouble all the time.

He was always calling me at night to ask me how I was.



These sentences imply that the actions happened very often, but they are not meant literally. To express the literal meaning, the past simple is used:

*He always **called** me at night to ask me how I was.* (He called me every night to ask me how I was.)

Related topics:

- [Present continuous for frequently repeated actions in the present](#)
- [Past simple for past habits and states](#)

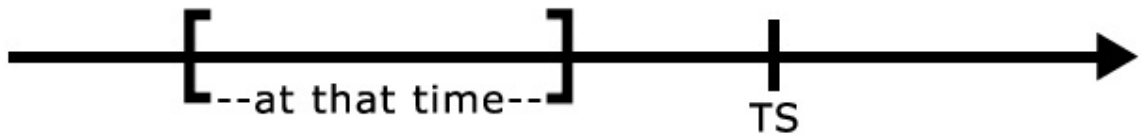
Past continuous for temporary habitual actions in the past

The past continuous is used to express repeated or habitual actions in the past that were temporary:

*At that time, she **was meeting** him twice a week.*

When I lived in London, I **was getting** up at 5 am to be able to get to work by 6.

..... was meeting



At that time, she was meeting him twice a week.

Related topics:

- [Present continuous for temporary habitual actions in the present](#)
- [Future continuous for temporary habitual actions in the future](#)

The difference between the past simple and the past continuous

Main events and background events in a story

In a story which is told in the past tense, the main events (the ones that happen in the foreground and carry the story forward) are expressed with the past simple, while the past continuous is used for background events:

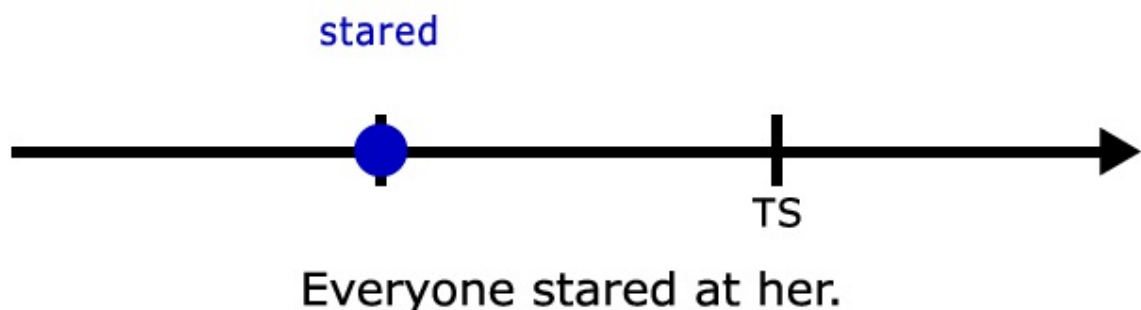
*Ten people **were sitting** around the table. It **was raining** outside. Suddenly, the door **opened** and a woman **entered** the room. She **was wearing** a black dress. Everyone **stared** at, her but she **didn't say** anything. She slowly **went** to the table and **put** an envelope on it. They **were just staring** at her as she **left** the room.*

Note the difference between these two sentences from the story:

*Everyone **stared** at her.*

*They **were just staring** at her.*

The past simple in the first sentence expresses a momentary, completed action, whereas the past continuous in the second sentence expresses an action in progress.



~~~~~ were staring



They were just staring at her.

Here is another example for the same contrast:

*I went home at 7.* (completed action)

*At 7, I was going home.* (action in progress)

**Related topics:**

- [Past simple for completed actions in the past](#)
- [Past continuous for actions in progress at a specific point in the past](#)

# Past perfect

- [Form: past perfect](#)
- [Past perfect for actions completed before a point in the past](#)
- [Past perfect with FOR](#)
- [Past perfect with superlative forms of adjectives](#)

## Form: past perfect

HAD + PAST PARTICIPLE

The past perfect is formed with *had* + the past participle form of the verb.

### Affirmative

| Subject          | Auxiliary  | Verb (past participle) |                 |
|------------------|------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>I</i>         | <i>had</i> | <i>arrived</i>         | <i>by then.</i> |
| <i>You</i>       |            |                        |                 |
| <i>He/She/It</i> |            |                        |                 |
| <i>We</i>        |            |                        |                 |
| <i>You</i>       |            |                        |                 |
| <i>They</i>      |            |                        |                 |

The following contracted forms are often used in spoken and in informal written language:

*I had* » ***I'd***  
*you had* » ***you'd***  
*he/she/it had* » ***he'd/she'd/it'd***  
*we had* » ***we'd***  
*you had* » ***you'd***  
*they had* » ***they'd***

### Negative

| Subject    | Auxiliary | <i>not</i> | Verb (past participle) |  |
|------------|-----------|------------|------------------------|--|
| <i>I</i>   |           |            |                        |  |
| <i>You</i> |           |            |                        |  |
|            |           |            |                        |  |

|                  |            |                    |                 |
|------------------|------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| <i>He/She/It</i> | <i>had</i> | <i>not arrived</i> | <i>by then.</i> |
| <i>We</i>        |            |                    |                 |
| <i>You</i>       |            |                    |                 |
| <i>They</i>      |            |                    |                 |

The contracted form *hadn't* is often used instead of *had not* in spoken and in informal written language.

## Interrogative

| (Question word) | Auxiliary  | Subject          | Verb (past participle) |                 |
|-----------------|------------|------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>(How)</i>    | <i>had</i> | <i>I</i>         | <i>arrived</i>         | <i>by then?</i> |
|                 |            | <i>you</i>       |                        |                 |
|                 |            | <i>he/she/it</i> |                        |                 |
|                 |            | <i>we</i>        |                        |                 |
|                 |            | <i>you</i>       |                        |                 |
|                 |            | <i>they</i>      |                        |                 |

## Related topics:

- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)
- [Appendix: irregular verb forms](#)

## Past perfect for actions completed before a point in the past

The past perfect tense is used to express that an action was completed before a point in time in the past. This point can be implied or expressed with a time expression or a clause with a verb in the past simple tense:

*They **had** all **arrived** by 10 o'clock.*

*When he tried to stand up, he realised he **had broken** his ankle.*

had broken tried realised



When he tried to stand up,  
he realised he had broken his ankle.

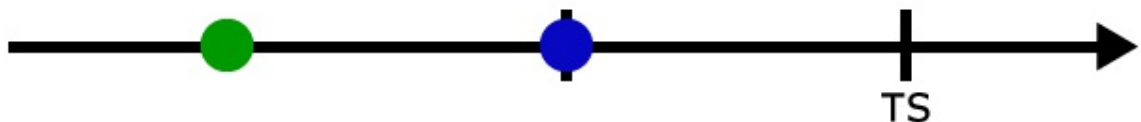
Contrary to a common misunderstanding, the past perfect does not express that something happened a very long time ago. What it expresses is not how long ago an event happened but rather that it happened earlier than something else:

*Julius Caesar **attacked** Britain in 54 BC.* (This was quite a long time ago; still, the past simple tense is used here.)

*When I got home, they **had** already **eaten** everything in the house.* (Maybe this only happened yesterday, but the point is that the eating happened before my arrival.)

had eaten

got



When I got home, they had already  
eaten everything in the house.

Expressions which are often used with the past perfect tense: *by, till, until, before, when, by the time, no sooner, hardly, scarcely, barely.*

*Danny **had** never **seen** a real cow **till** I showed him one last Friday.*

*He didn't leave **until** he **had** **talked** with the boss.*

***By the time** she got to the theatre, the play **had** already **begun**.*



*I had no sooner got home than the telephone rang.*

*I had hardly/barely/scarcely fallen asleep when there was an earthquake.*

### Quotes:

- *I had been told that the training procedure with cats was difficult. It's not. Mine had me trained in two days. - [Bill Dana](#)*

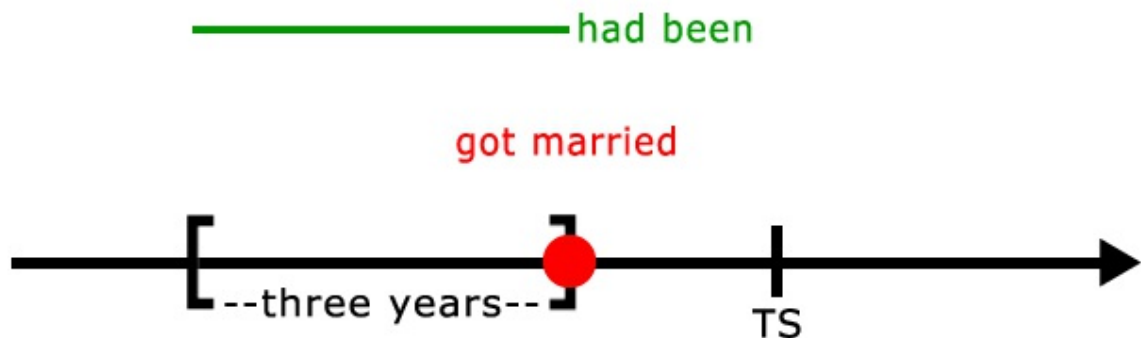
### Related topics:

- [Present perfect for past events](#)
- [Future perfect for actions completed before a point in the future](#)
- [HARDLY, SCARCELY, BARELY, NO SOONER](#)

## Past perfect with FOR

The preposition *for* is used with the past perfect tense to express that something started before a point in time in the past and was still true at that point:

*When they got married, they **had already been** together for three years.*



When they got married,  
they had already been together for three years.

### Related topics:

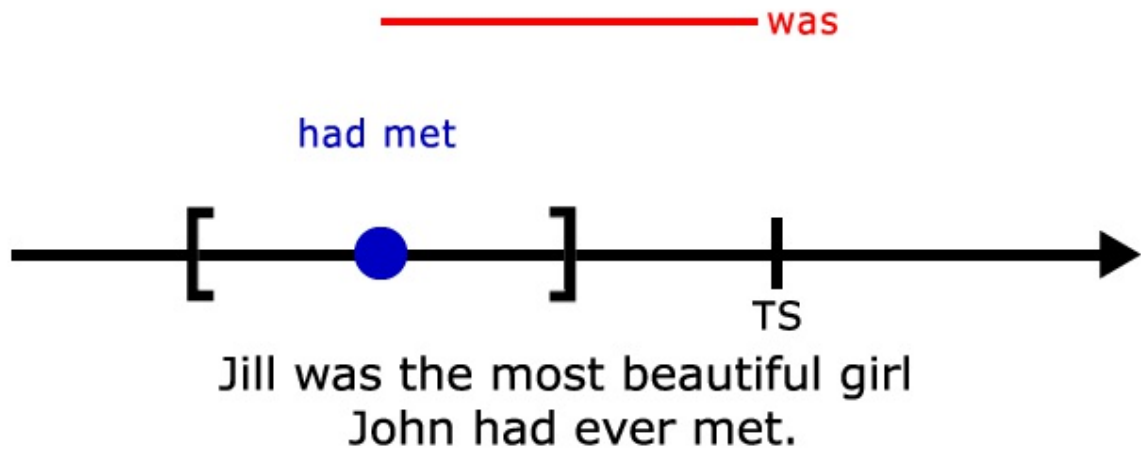
- [Present perfect with FOR and SINCE](#)
- [Future perfect with FOR](#)

## Past perfect with superlative forms of adjectives

The past perfect is used with superlative forms of adjectives to express emphasis:

*It was the strangest piece of music I **had** ever **heard**.*

*Jill was the most beautiful girl John **had** ever **met**.*



The second sentence above implies that until that time John had never met such a beautiful girl, but since then perhaps he has. If, however, John hasn't met anybody like Jill since then, the present perfect is used instead of the past perfect:

*Jill was the most beautiful girl John **has** ever **met**.*

### Related topics:

- [Present perfect with superlative forms of adjectives](#)

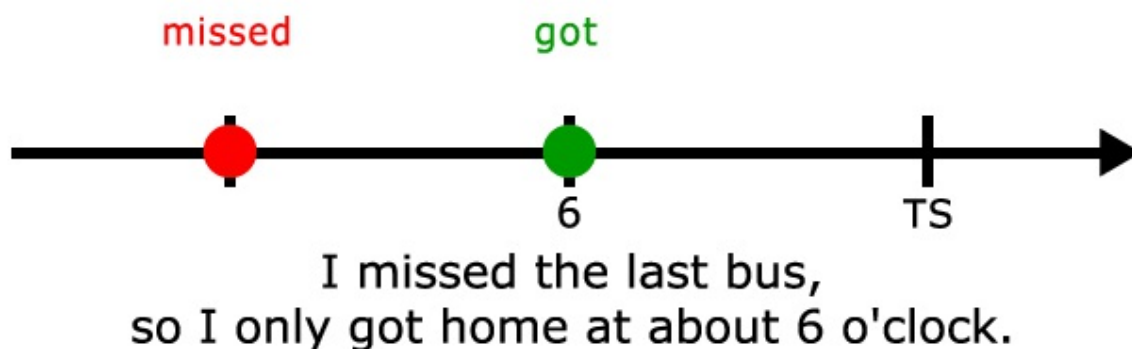
## The difference between the past simple and the past perfect

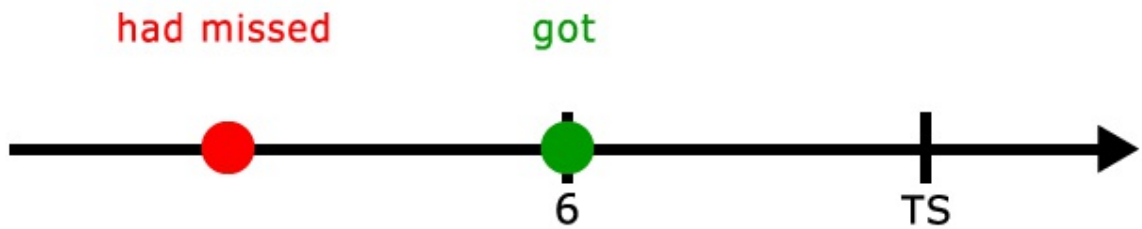
When the events of a story are told in the order in which they occurred, the past simple tense is used:

*I **missed** the last bus, so I only **got** home at about 6 o'clock. I **was** really tired, so I **took** a hot bath. Then I **made** some dinner and **watched** a film. At 10, I **was** in bed.*

However, if the events are told in a different order or there are references to an earlier time, the past perfect tense is used to express the earlier events:

*I only got home at about 6 o'clock because I **had missed** the last bus. I was really tired, so I took a hot bath. Then I made some dinner and watched a film I **had borrowed** from my friend Sheila earlier that week. At 10, I was in bed. It **had been** a long day.*





I only got home at about 6 o'clock  
because I had missed the last bus.

**Related topics:**

- [Past simple for completed actions in the past](#)
- [Past perfect for actions completed before a point in the past](#)

# Past perfect continuous

- [Form: past perfect continuous](#)
- [Past perfect continuous for continuous events in the past](#)
- [Past perfect continuous for habitual actions in the past](#)

## Form: past perfect continuous

HAD + BEEN + PRESENT PARTICIPLE (VERB-ING)

The past perfect continuous (also called the past perfect progressive) is formed with *had* + *been* (the past participle form of *be*) + the present participle *-ing* form of the verb.

### Affirmative

| Subject          | Auxiliary               | Verb (present participle) |  |
|------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| <i>I</i>         | <i>had been waiting</i> | <i>for hours.</i>         |  |
| <i>You</i>       |                         |                           |  |
| <i>He/She/It</i> |                         |                           |  |
| <i>We</i>        |                         |                           |  |
| <i>You</i>       |                         |                           |  |
| <i>They</i>      |                         |                           |  |

### Negative

| Subject          | Auxiliary 1 | <i>not</i>      | Auxiliary 2    | Verb (present participle) |  |
|------------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------------------|--|
| <i>I</i>         | <i>had</i>  | <i>not been</i> | <i>waiting</i> | <i>long.</i>              |  |
| <i>You</i>       |             |                 |                |                           |  |
| <i>He/She/It</i> |             |                 |                |                           |  |
| <i>We</i>        |             |                 |                |                           |  |
| <i>You</i>       |             |                 |                |                           |  |
| <i>They</i>      |             |                 |                |                           |  |

The contracted form *hadn't* is often used instead of *had not* in spoken and in informal written language.

### Interrogative

| (Question word) | Auxiliary 1 | Subject          | Auxiliary 2 | Verb (present participle) |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| <i>How long</i> | <i>had</i>  | <i>I</i>         | <i>been</i> | <i>waiting?</i>           |
|                 |             | <i>you</i>       |             |                           |
|                 |             | <i>he/she/it</i> |             |                           |
|                 |             | <i>we</i>        |             |                           |
|                 |             | <i>you</i>       |             |                           |
|                 |             | <i>they</i>      |             |                           |

### Related topics:

- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)

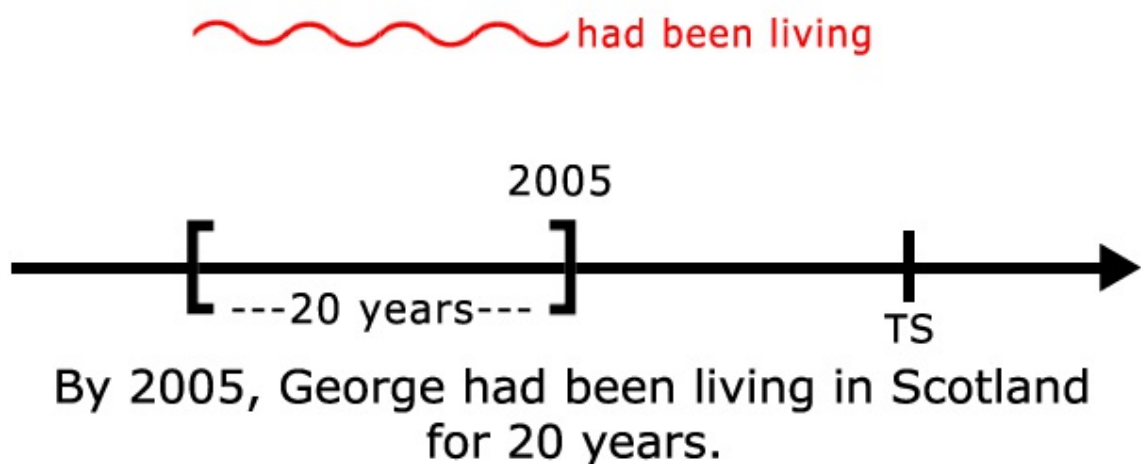
## Past perfect continuous for continuous events in the past

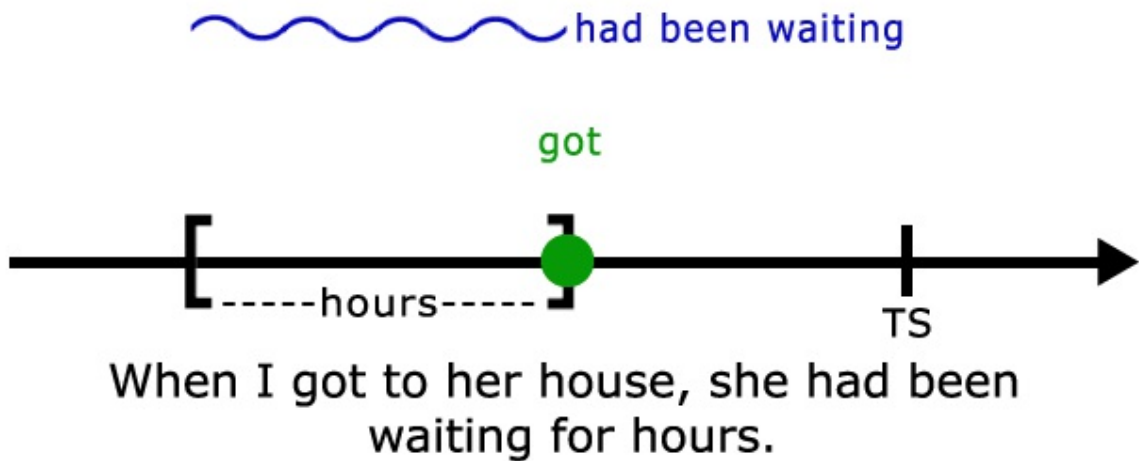
The past perfect continuous tense is used to express that an action started before a point in time in the past and that it was still in progress or it had just stopped. This point can be implied or expressed with a time expression or a clause with a verb in the past simple tense:

*It **had been snowing** all night.*

*By 2005, George **had been living** in Scotland for 20 years.*

*When I got to her house, she **had been waiting** for hours.*





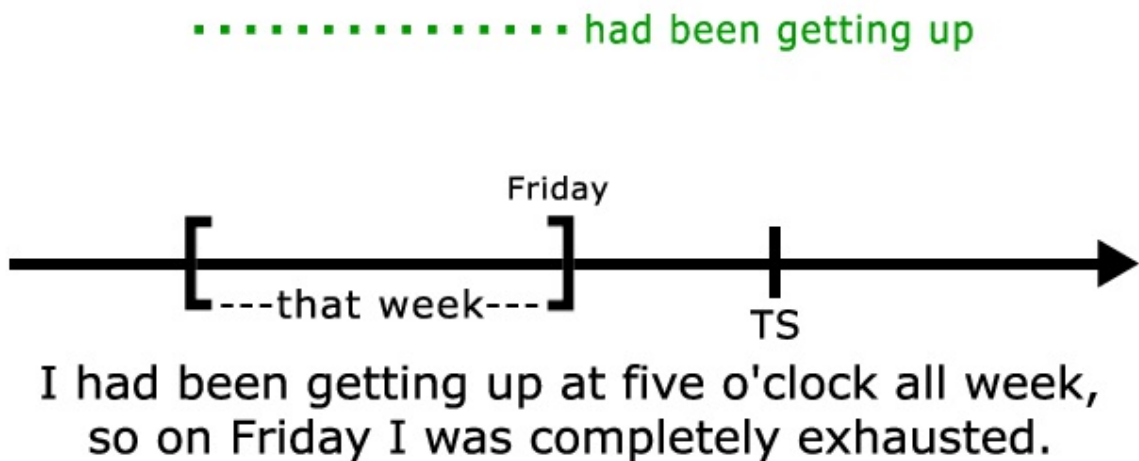
**Related topics:**

- [Present perfect continuous with FOR and SINCE](#)
- [Present perfect continuous for continuous events that have just finished](#)
- [Future perfect continuous for continuous events in the future](#)

**Past perfect continuous for habitual actions in the past**

The past perfect continuous is used to express repeated or habitual actions happening over a period of time before a point in time in the past:

*I had been getting up at five o'clock all week, so on Friday I was completely exhausted.*



**Related topics:**

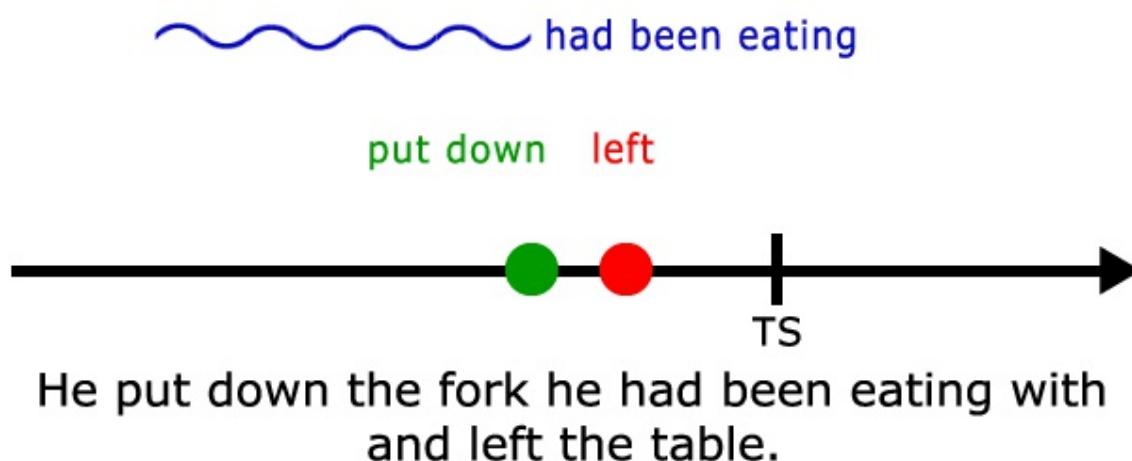
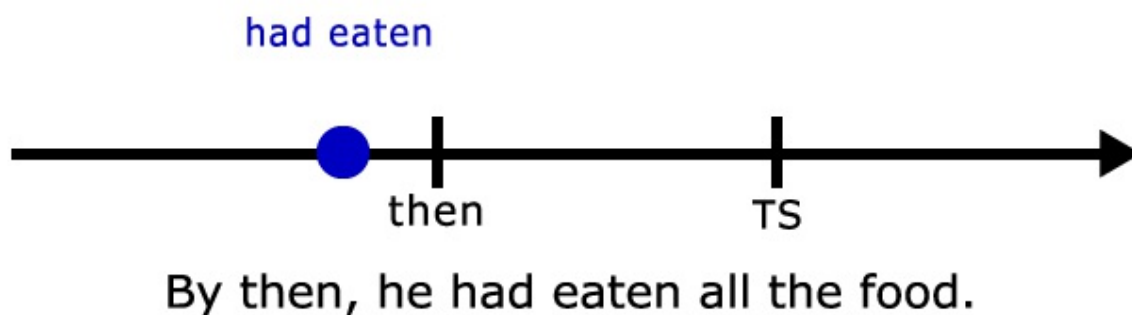
- [Present perfect continuous for habitual actions](#)



## The difference between the past perfect and the past perfect continuous

In contrast with the past perfect simple tense, which emphasises the result of a completed action, the past perfect continuous focuses on the duration or the activity itself:

*By then, he **had eaten** all the food. (there was nothing left)  
He put down the fork he **had been eating** with and left the table.*



# Present simple to express past

## Headlines

In news headlines, the present simple tense refers to past time:

*WAR CRIMINAL **ESCAPES** FROM COURTROOM* (A war criminal has escaped from a courtroom.)

*REAL MADRID **WINS AGAINST** MANCHESTER UNITED* (Real Madrid won against Manchester United yesterday.)

## Historical present

The present simple tense is used in narratives for purposes of dramatization to express past events. This use of the present simple is called the historical present.

- Summaries of historical events:

*1945: the war in Europe **comes** to an end.*

- Jokes:

*Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson **go** camping. In the morning, as they are lying in their sleeping bags, Holmes **says**, 'Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you deduce.' So Watson **says**, 'Well, the sky is salmon pink, so we're going to have a clear day. The moon is just setting, so it must be about 5 am. There are no clouds, so it probably won't rain.' Holmes **bursts** out, 'Watson, you idiot! Someone has stolen our tent.'*

- Plot summaries (real stories, books, films etc.):

*So I **walk** into this shop, and I **see** this man with a gun in his hand. And like... everybody's looking at him. Then he **says**...*

*At the end of the story, Luke **becomes** a Jedi and **defeats** Darth Vader.*

In such narratives, we use the present simple for main events and the present continuous for background events.

## **USED TO and WOULD for past habits**

This topic is discussed under [Modals » Categories of meaning expressed by modals » Modals to express habits: WILL, WOULD, USED TO.](#)

## Revision questions: past time

- Which past tense expresses a point in time at which something happened, was happening or had been happening for some time?
- Is the auxiliary *did* used in affirmative sentences in the simple past?
- Which past tenses can be used to express repeated, habitual actions in the past?
- What is the difference between *used to* and *would* with regard to past habits?
- What is the historical present?

## Exercises: past time

### Past time - Exercise 1

**Order the words to make sentences.**

1. crying you Why when were met we
2. week was beach This the I sunbathing time last on
3. We finally she waiting had for hour when been an arrived
4. night you dancing all Were long
5. By their kids time finished Jimmy the up the woke other had breakfast
6. like He always didn't because teasing Claire she him was
7. we playing blackout there were cards was a While
8. How when been you living long sold there you had the flat
9. That seen was the violin the children time had a first
10. had got already they When home I left

### Past time - Exercise 2

**Choose the best answer for each of the following sentences.**

1. Julie ... to school last week because she ... ill.
  1. hadn't been going / was
  2. didn't go / was
  3. didn't go / had been
2. I ... around to see what ... .
  1. looked / was going on
  2. looked / went on
  3. had looked / went on
3. He ... on the motorway when he ... a puncture.
  1. had been driving / had
  2. was driving / had
  3. drove / was having
4. What comics ... when you were young?
  1. did you read
  2. had you read
  3. had you been reading
5. We ... why Peter ... a white shirt and a tie.
  1. weren't understanding / wore
  2. didn't understand / worn

3. didn't understand / was wearing
6. How long ... together when their first child was born?
  1. were they
  2. had they been
  3. did they use to be
7. After I paid, I ... that I ... to buy cheese.
  1. remembered / forgot
  2. remembered / had forgotten
  3. had remembered / had forgotten
8. People ... eat so many carbohydrates before.
  1. didn't use to
  2. didn't used to
  3. wasn't used to
9. By the time the concert ... , the fans ... impatiently for almost two hours.
  1. had begun / had queued
  2. began / had been queueing
  3. began / were queueing
10. Sally ... for her mid-term all day yesterday.
  1. had been revising
  2. was revising
  3. used to revise

### Past time - Exercise 3

**Make sentences with the appropriate past tenses.**

1. What | you | do | at 5 o'clock?
2. Carlos | not | come | to the cinema | because | he | work
3. I | take | the bus | to work today | because | my car | break down
4. How long | Nick and Susan | know | each other | when | they | move together?
5. It | get | colder and colder
6. While | the professor | give | a lecture | some students | talk | to one another
7. By Tuesday | we | paint | every room
8. What | you | want | to be | when | you | be | younger?
9. I | fall off | my bike | when | a cat | run | in front of me
10. When | John | get | his first pay rise | he | work | for the company | for 10 years

### Past time - Exercise 4

**Rewrite each sentence so that it contains the word(s) in capital letters and the**

**meaning stays the same. Do not change the words given.**

1. I have been staying in London for three weeks. (AGO)
2. When was your last exam? (TAKE AN EXAM)
3. She got to the theatre after the beginning of the play. (BY THE TIME)
4. Paul lived in Brazil when he was young. (LIVE)
5. Was there anybody interesting at the reception? (MEET)
6. I left the office. Filip rang me half an hour later. (WHEN)
7. In the middle of his speech, somebody knocked on the door. (WHILE)
8. We didn't clean up until everybody had left. (AFTER)
9. The man was driving the wrong way for several miles. Then the police stopped him. (WHEN)
10. What time did you usually go to bed when you were a kid? (USE)

## **Past time - Exercise 5**

**Tell your partner about ...**

1. your last birthday party.
2. the last time you went abroad.
3. a time when you felt extremely angry.
4. the best present you have ever given.
5. the funniest thing that has happened to you in the past three weeks.
6. the last time you had to study a lot for an exam.
7. how you got to school/work this morning.
8. the first thing you remember from your childhood.
9. the best and worst things in your secondary school years.
10. why you decided to learn English.

## **Answer key: past time**

### **Answer key - Past time - Exercise 1**

1. Why were you crying when we met?
2. This time last week, I was sunbathing on the beach.
3. We had been waiting for an hour when she finally arrived.
4. Were you dancing all night long?
5. By the time Jimmy woke up, the other kids had finished their breakfast.
6. He didn't like Claire because she was always teasing him.
7. While we were playing cards, there was a blackout.

8. How long had you been living there when you sold the flat?
9. That was the first time the children had seen a violin.
10. When I got home, they had already left.

### Answer key - Past time - Exercise 2

1. Julie ... to school last week because she ... ill. **(2) didn't go / was**
2. I ... around to see what ... . **(1) looked / was going on**
3. He ... on the motorway when he ... a puncture. **(2) was driving / had**
4. What comics ... when you were young? **(1) did you read**
5. We ... why Peter ... a white shirt and a tie. **(3) didn't understand / was wearing**
6. How long ... together when their first child was born? **(2) had they been**
7. After I paid, I ... that I ... to buy cheese. **(2) remembered / had forgotten**
8. People ... eat so many carbohydrates before. **(1) didn't use to**
9. By the time the concert ... , the fans ... impatiently for almost two hours. **(2) began / had been queueing**
10. Sally ... for her mid-term all day yesterday. **(2) was revising**

### Answer key - Past time - Exercise 3

1. What were you doing at 5 o'clock?
2. Carlos didn't come to the cinema because he was working.
3. I took the bus to work today because my car had broken down.
4. How long had Nick and Susan known each other when they moved together?
5. It was getting colder and colder.
6. While the professor was giving a lecture, some students were talking to one another.
7. By Tuesday, we had painted every room.
8. What did you want to be when you were younger?
9. I fell off my bike when a cat ran in front of me.
10. When John got his first pay rise, he had been working for the company for 10 years.

### Answer key - Past time - Exercise 4

1. I came to London three weeks ago.
2. When did you last take an exam?
3. By the time she got to the theatre, the play had begun.
4. Paul used to live in Brazil when he was young.



5. Did you meet anybody interesting at the reception?
6. When Filip rang me, I had already left the office.
7. While he was speaking, somebody knocked on the door.
8. We cleaned up after everybody (had) left.
9. The man had been driving the wrong way for several miles when the police stopped him.
10. What time did you use to go to bed when you were a kid?

# Present time

- [Guiding questions: present time](#)
- [Present simple](#)
- [Present continuous](#)
- [Present perfect](#)
- [Present perfect continuous](#)
- [Revision questions: present time](#)
- [Exercises: present time](#)

## Guiding questions: present time

- What adverbs of frequency do you know?
- What is a general truth?
- Which two times does the present perfect tense connect?
- What is the difference between the present perfect and the present perfect continuous tenses?
- When do we use *for* with the present perfect tense and when do we use *since*?

# Present simple

- [Form: present simple](#)
- [Present simple for present habits and states](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [Present simple in instructions](#)
- [Present simple in commentaries](#)
- [The auxiliaries DO and DOES for emphasis](#)
- [Present simple with SINCE WHEN](#)

## Form: present simple

VERB/VERB-S

### Affirmative

| Subject          | Verb (present tense) |
|------------------|----------------------|
| <i>I</i>         | <i>work.</i>         |
| <i>You</i>       |                      |
| <i>We</i>        |                      |
| <i>You</i>       |                      |
| <i>They</i>      |                      |
| <i>He/She/It</i> | <i>works.</i>        |

The present simple form of the verb is identical to the base form in all persons except the third person singular. The third person singular is formed by adding -s to the base form. Note the changes in spelling:

*work* » *works*

*live* » *lives*

*stay* » *stays*

*try* » *tries* (a final -y changes to -ie- after a consonant)

*wash* » *washes*; *kiss* » *kisses*; *watch* » *watches*; *box* » *boxes* (we add -es after -sh, -s, -ch and -x)

*go* » *goes* (we add -es)

*do* » *does* (we add -es)

*have* » *has*

### Negative

In the negative, we use the auxiliary *do* + *not* followed by the bare infinitive in all persons except the third person singular. In the third person singular we use *does* + *not*:

| Subject          | Auxiliary   | <i>not</i> | Verb (bare infinitive) |
|------------------|-------------|------------|------------------------|
| <i>I</i>         | <i>do</i>   | <i>not</i> | <i>work.</i>           |
| <i>You</i>       |             |            |                        |
| <i>We</i>        |             |            |                        |
| <i>You</i>       |             |            |                        |
| <i>They</i>      |             |            |                        |
| <i>He/She/It</i> | <i>does</i> |            |                        |

The contracted forms *don't* and *doesn't* are often used instead of *do not* and *does not* in spoken and in informal written language.

## Interrogative

In the interrogative, we use the auxiliary *do* followed by the subject and the bare infinitive in all persons except the third person singular. In the third person singular, we use *does*:

| (Question word) | Auxiliary   | Subject          | Verb (bare infinitive) |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|------------------------|
| <i>(How)</i>    | <i>do</i>   | <i>I</i>         | <i>work?</i>           |
|                 |             | <i>you</i>       |                        |
|                 |             | <i>we</i>        |                        |
|                 |             | <i>you</i>       |                        |
|                 |             | <i>they</i>      |                        |
|                 | <i>does</i> | <i>he/she/it</i> |                        |

## The verb BE in the present simple

The verb *be* has irregular present tense forms. In the present simple, the auxiliaries *do* and *does* are not used in the negative and interrogative if the main verb is *be*:

| Affirmative                  | Negative                         | Interrogative                |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>I am at home.</i>         | <i>I am not at home.</i>         | <i>Am I at home?</i>         |
| <i>You are at home.</i>      | <i>You are not at home.</i>      | <i>Are you at home?</i>      |
| <i>He/She/It is at home.</i> | <i>He/She/It is not at home.</i> | <i>Is he/she/it at home?</i> |

|                          |                              |                          |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| We <b>are</b> at home.   | We <b>are not</b> at home.   | <b>Are</b> we at home?   |
| You <b>are</b> at home.  | You <b>are not</b> at home.  | <b>Are</b> you at home?  |
| They <b>are</b> at home. | They <b>are not</b> at home. | <b>Are</b> they at home? |

The following contracted forms are often used in spoken and in informal written language:

*I am* » **I'm**  
*you are* » **you're**  
*he/she/it is* » **he's/she's/it's**  
*we are* » **we're**  
*you are* » **you're**  
*they are* » **they're**

*are not* » **aren't**  
*is not* » **isn't**

### Related topics:

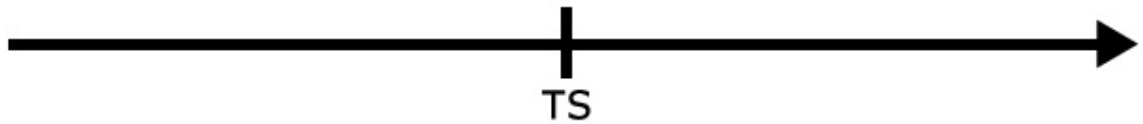
- [The auxiliaries DO and DOES for emphasis](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)

## Present simple for present habits and states

The present simple tense is used to express repeated, habitual actions in the present. Adverbs of frequency, such as *always*, *usually*, *regularly*, *frequently*, *often*, *sometimes*, *rarely*, *seldom*, *occasionally* and *never*, and adverb phrases, for example, *every year*, *once in a blue moon* and *three times a day*, are often used with this tense:

*What's the first thing you **usually do** when you **get up** in the morning?*  
*I **go** to the gym **twice a week**.*  
***Every 15 minutes**, someone **dies** as a result of an alcohol-related collision.*

..... go



I go to the gym twice a week.

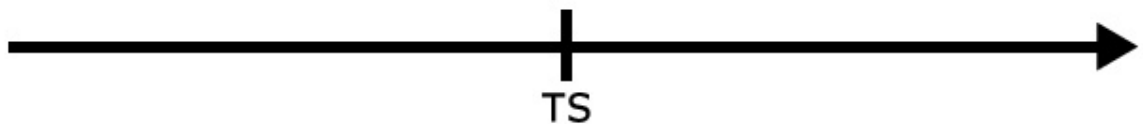
The present simple is also used to refer to states that exist at the time of speaking:

*My sister **lives** in Canada.*

*George **likes** pudding.*

*This house **is** really beautiful.*

————— likes



George likes pudding.

### Quotes:

- *I had been told that the training procedure with cats was difficult. It's not. Mine had me trained in two days. - [Bill Dana](#)*
- *Parents often talk about the younger generation as if they didn't have anything to do with it. - [Haim Ginott](#)*
- *We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars. - [Oscar Wilde](#)*
- *I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else. - [Winston Churchill](#)*

## Related topics:

- [Past simple for past habits and states](#)

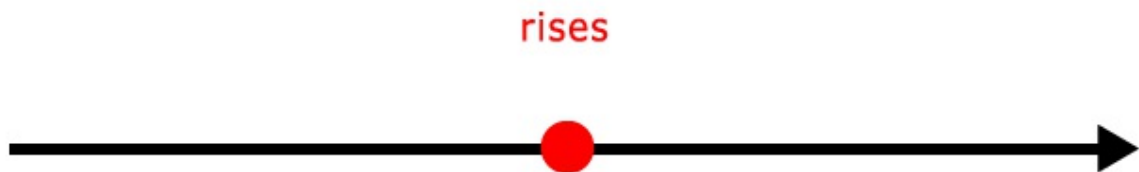
## Present simple for general truths

The present simple is used to express facts that are always true or events that always happen. This use is often described with the term "general truth":

*A magnet **attracts** iron.*

*The sun **rises** in the east.*

*Water **boils** at 100 degrees Celsius.*



The sun rises in the east.

## Quotes:

- *Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.* - [Albert Einstein](#)
- *Most of us spend our lives as if we had another one in the bank.* - [Ben Irwin](#)
- *Lost time is never found again.* - [Benjamin Franklin](#)
- *Christmas is a time when you get homesick - even when you're home.* - [Carol Nelson](#)
- *Growing old is mandatory; growing up is optional.* - [Chili Davis](#)
- *It is impossible to keep a straight face in the presence of one or more kittens.* - [Cynthia E. Varnado](#)
- *Attitudes are contagious. Are yours worth catching?* - [Dennis and Wendy Mannering](#)
- *Saying nothing sometimes says the most.* - [Emily Dickinson](#)
- *The greatest weariness comes from work not done.* - [Eric Hoffer](#)
- *No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn.* - [Hal Borland](#)



- *Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it.* - [Henry David Thoreau](#)
- *Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.* - [Jim Rohn](#)
- *Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.* - [Lao Tse](#)
- *What is not good for the swarm is not good for the bee.* - [Marcus Aurelius](#)
- *Men for the sake of getting a living forget to live.* - [Margaret Fuller](#)
- *Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.* - [Pablo Picasso](#)
- *The best way to predict the future is to create it.* - [Peter Drucker](#)
- *Small deeds done are better than great deeds planned.* - [Peter Marshall](#)
- *Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.* - [Plato](#)
- *Each day is an opportunity to travel back into tomorrow's past and change it.* - [Robert Brault](#)
- *Freedom lies in being bold.* - [Robert Frost](#)
- *Fate leads the willing, and drags along the reluctant.* - [Seneca](#)
- *It is terrible to speak well and be wrong.* - [Sophocles](#)
- *Those who wish to sing always find a song.* - [Swedish proverb](#)
- *Life is a shipwreck but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats.* - [Voltaire](#)
- *A barking dog is often more useful than a sleeping lion.* - [Washington Irving](#)
- *It is the familiar that usually eludes us in life. What is before our nose is what we see last.* - [William Barret](#)
- *In summer, the song sings itself.* - [William Carlos Williams](#)
- *A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.* - [Winston Churchill](#)

### Related topics:

- [Zero conditional](#)

## Present simple in instructions

The present simple tense is used in instructions as an alternative to the imperative. This use implies that the actions are or should always be performed in the same way or order:

*First you **roll out** the pastry, then you **cut** circles with a cup or a glass.  
You **go down** this street to the supermarket, then you **turn** left.  
I've pressed Ctrl+Alt+Del. What **do** I **do** now?*



First you roll out the pastry,  
then you cut circles with a cup or a glass.

## Present simple in commentaries

The present simple is used in commentaries on events happening at the present moment to describe actions that are completed at the time of speaking:

*Torres **passes** to Fabregas... Fabregas to Iniesta...  
Then the curtain **drops** and the lights **go out**.*

## The auxiliaries DO and DOES for emphasis

In the present simple, the auxiliaries *do* and *does* (in the third person singular) followed by the bare infinitive form of the main verb can be used in affirmative sentences to express emphasis. In speech, the auxiliary is stressed:

*We **do want** to help you.  
Diego **does work** hard.  
But I really **do love** you, baby!*

### Quotes:

- *Flowers really do intoxicate me.* - [Vita Sackville-West](#)

### Related topics:

- [Form: present simple](#)
- [DO, DOES, DID + bare infinitive](#)

## Present simple with SINCE WHEN

*Since when?* with the present simple is used to indicate doubt or sarcasm:

*Since when are people like Geoffrey allowed to join this club?!* (How can he join this club?!)  
*Since when do you speak Russian?* (I don't believe you speak Russian.)

### Related topics:

- [Present perfect with FOR and SINCE](#)

# Present continuous

- [Form: present continuous](#)
- [Present continuous for actions in progress at the time of speaking](#)
- [Present continuous for gradual development](#)
- [Present continuous for frequently repeated actions in the present](#)
- [Present continuous for temporary habitual actions in the present](#)
- [Present continuous for habitual actions in the present](#)

## Form: present continuous

AM/IS/ARE + PRESENT PARTICIPLE (VERB-ING)

The present continuous (also called the present progressive) is formed with *am/is/are* (the present tense forms of *be*) + the present participle *-ing* form of the verb.

### Affirmative

| Subject          | Auxiliary  | Verb (present participle) |
|------------------|------------|---------------------------|
| <i>I</i>         | <i>am</i>  | <i>sleeping.</i>          |
| <i>He/She/It</i> | <i>is</i>  |                           |
| <i>You</i>       | <i>are</i> |                           |
| <i>We</i>        |            |                           |
| <i>You</i>       |            |                           |
| <i>They</i>      |            |                           |

### Negative

| Subject          | Auxiliary  | <i>not</i>           | Verb (present participle) |
|------------------|------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>I</i>         | <i>am</i>  | <i>not sleeping.</i> |                           |
| <i>He/She/It</i> | <i>is</i>  |                      |                           |
| <i>You</i>       | <i>are</i> |                      |                           |
| <i>We</i>        |            |                      |                           |
| <i>You</i>       |            |                      |                           |
| <i>They</i>      |            |                      |                           |

### Interrogative

| (Question word) | Auxiliary  | Subject          | Verb (present participle) |
|-----------------|------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| (Where)         | <i>am</i>  | <i>I</i>         | <i>sleeping?</i>          |
|                 | <i>is</i>  | <i>he/she/it</i> |                           |
|                 | <i>are</i> | <i>you</i>       |                           |
|                 |            | <i>we</i>        |                           |
|                 |            | <i>you</i>       |                           |
| <i>they</i>     |            |                  |                           |

The following contracted forms are often used in spoken and in informal written language:

*I am* » ***I'm***

*you are* » ***you're***

*he/she/it is* » ***he's/she's/it's***

*we are* » ***we're***

*you are* » ***you're***

*they are* » ***they're***

*are not* » ***aren't***

*is not* » ***isn't***

### Related topics:

- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)

## Present continuous for actions in progress at the time of speaking

The present continuous tense is used to refer to actions that are in progress at or around the time of speaking:

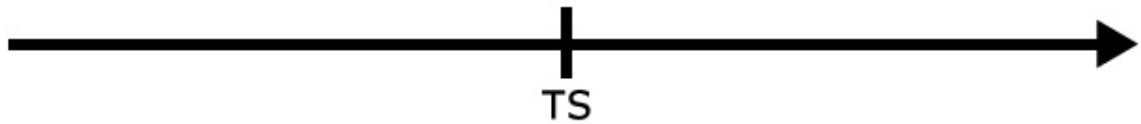
"What **are** you **doing**?" "I **am reading** a book."

New York police **are investigating** the case.

Let's take an umbrella. It's **raining**.

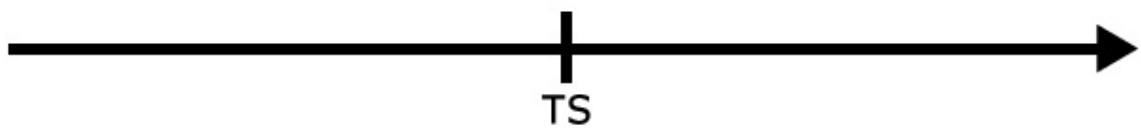
I'm **staying** at the Hotel Royal.

are...doing



"What are you doing?"

'm staying



I'm staying at the Hotel Royal.

### Quotes:

- *We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.* - [Oscar Wilde](#)

### Related topics:

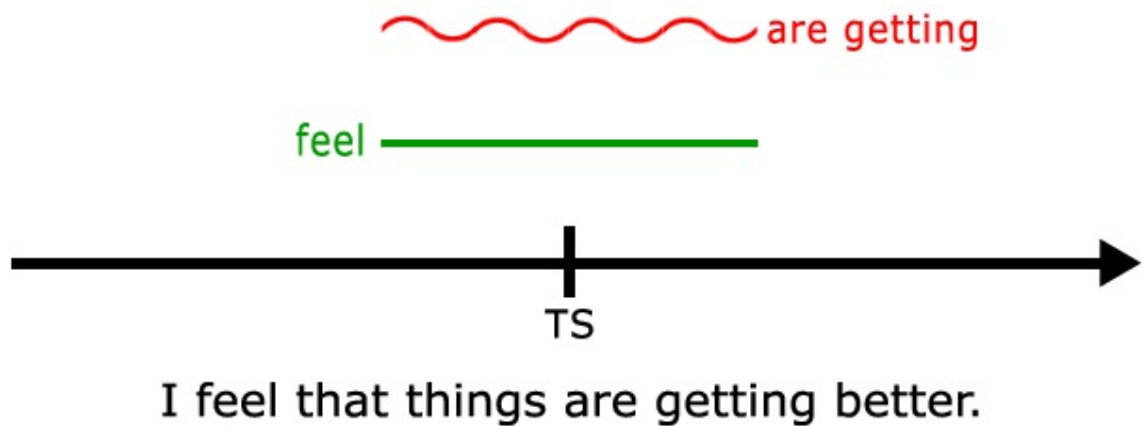
- [Past continuous for actions in progress at a specific point in the past](#)
- [Future continuous for actions in progress at a specific point in the future](#)

## Present continuous for gradual development

The present continuous can express change and gradual development in the present:

*I feel that things **are getting** better.*

More and more people **are giving** up smoking.



**Related topics:**

- [Past continuous for gradual development](#)

## **Present continuous for frequently repeated actions in the present**

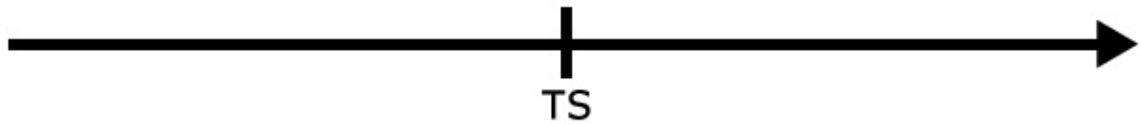
With time expressions such as *always*, *constantly*, *continually* and *all the time*, the present continuous can express frequently repeated actions which annoy the speaker:

*Adults **are always asking** little kids what they want to be.*

*Her mother **is constantly checking** up on her.*

*Why **are you continually criticising** me?*

..... is checking



Her mother is constantly checking up on her.

### Quotes:

- *Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses.* - [Alphonse Karr](#)

### Related topics:

- [Past continuous for frequently repeated actions in the past](#)

## Present continuous for temporary habitual actions in the present

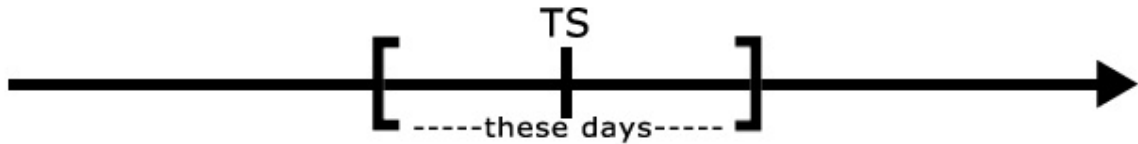
The present continuous is used to express repeated or habitual actions in the present that are temporary and may or may not actually be happening at the time of speaking:

*Lucy **is taking** piano lessons these days.*

***Are you still seeing** that guy from the hiking club?*



..... is taking



Lucy is taking piano lessons these days.

### Related topics:

- [Past continuous for temporary habitual actions in the past](#)
- [Future continuous for temporary habitual actions in the future](#)

### Present continuous for habitual actions in the present

The present continuous tense is used to describe repeated, habitual actions that begin before a specific point in time (not necessarily the time of speaking) and finish after it. This point can be expressed with a time expression or a clause with a verb in the present simple tense:

*At 7.15, I'm **having** breakfast.*

*Whenever I get home, my dog **is sleeping** in the armchair.*

~~~~~ 'm having



At 7.15, I'm having breakfast.

The present continuous is also used for repeated, habitual actions that continue for

a period of time. This period of time can be expressed with a time expression or a clause with a verb in the present continuous tense:

*I'm **having** breakfast between 7 and 7.30.*

*While I'm **walking** the dog, my wife **is making** dinner.*

I'm having



I'm having breakfast between 7 and 7.30.

Related topics:

- [Present simple for present habits and states](#)

Present perfect

- [Form: present perfect](#)
- [Present perfect for past events](#)
- [Present perfect for recent events with a result in the present](#)
- [Present perfect with an incomplete period](#)
- [Present perfect with FOR and SINCE](#)
- [Present perfect with JUST](#)
- [Present perfect with YET and ALREADY](#)
- [IT'S \(BEEN\) + DAYS / WEEKS / MONTHS / etc. + SINCE](#)
- [Present perfect with quantities](#)
- [Present perfect with superlative forms of adjectives](#)
- [Present perfect with WHEN](#)

Form: present perfect

HAVE/HAS + PAST PARTICIPLE

The present perfect is formed with *have/has* (the present tense forms of *have*) + the past participle form of the verb.

Affirmative

| Subject | Auxiliary | Verb (past participle) | |
|------------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>I</i> | <i>have</i> | <i>seen</i> | <i>this film before.</i> |
| <i>You</i> | | | |
| <i>We</i> | | | |
| <i>You</i> | | | |
| <i>They</i> | | | |
| <i>He/She/It</i> | <i>has</i> | | |

The following contracted forms are often used in spoken and in informal written language:

I have » ***I've***
you have » ***you've***
he/she/it has » ***he's/she's/it's***
we have » ***we've***
you have » ***you've***
they have » ***they've***

Negative

| Subject | Auxiliary | <i>not</i> | Verb (past participle) | |
|------------------|-------------|------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>I</i> | <i>have</i> | <i>not</i> | <i>seen</i> | <i>this film yet.</i> |
| <i>You</i> | | | | |
| <i>We</i> | | | | |
| <i>You</i> | | | | |
| <i>They</i> | | | | |
| <i>He/She/It</i> | <i>has</i> | | | |

The contracted forms *haven't* and *hasn't* are often used instead of *have not* and *has not* in spoken and in informal written language.

Interrogative

| (Question word) | Auxiliary | Subject | Verb (past participle) | |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>(How many times)</i> | <i>have</i> | <i>I</i> | <i>seen</i> | <i>this film?</i> |
| | | <i>you</i> | | |
| | | <i>we</i> | | |
| | | <i>you</i> | | |
| | | <i>they</i> | | |
| | <i>has</i> | <i>he/she/it</i> | | |

Related topics:

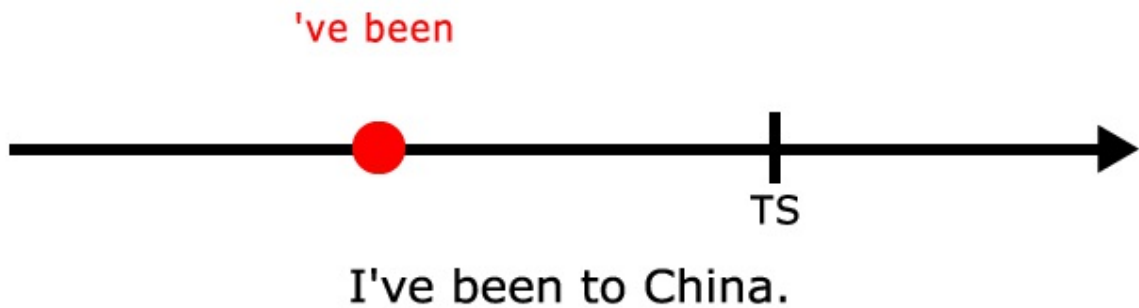
- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)
- [Appendix: irregular verb forms](#)

Present perfect for past events

The present perfect tense is used for past events when the exact time is not mentioned either because it is not known or it is not important. The emphasis is on the fact that the events happened before the time of speaking:

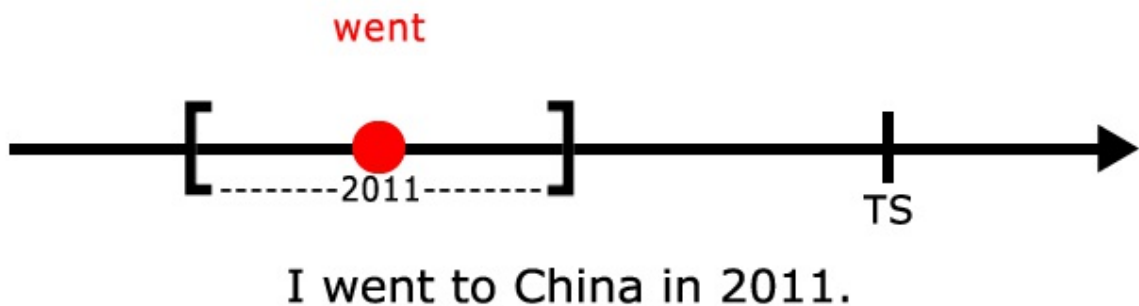
I've been to China.

I've seen that film before.



But if we say when something happened, we use the past simple:

*I **went** to China in 2011.*
*I already **saw** that film last week.*



We also use the past simple if we ask when something happened in the past:

"Have you ever been to China?"

"Yes, I have."

*"When **did** you **go** there?"*

"Have you seen that film before?"

"Yes, I have."

*"When **did** you **see** it?"*

Quotes:

- *Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.* - [Albert Einstein](#)
- *I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn't learn something from him.* - [Galileo Galilei](#)
- *What you have become is the price you paid to get what you used to want.* - [Mignon McLaughlin](#)
- *I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.* - [Thomas Edison](#)

Related topics:

- [Past simple for completed actions in the past](#)
- [Past perfect for actions completed before a point in the past](#)
- [Future perfect for actions completed before a point in the future](#)

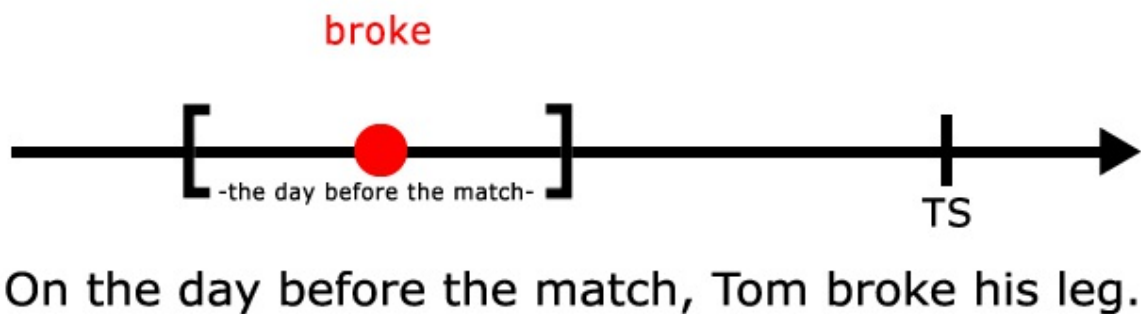
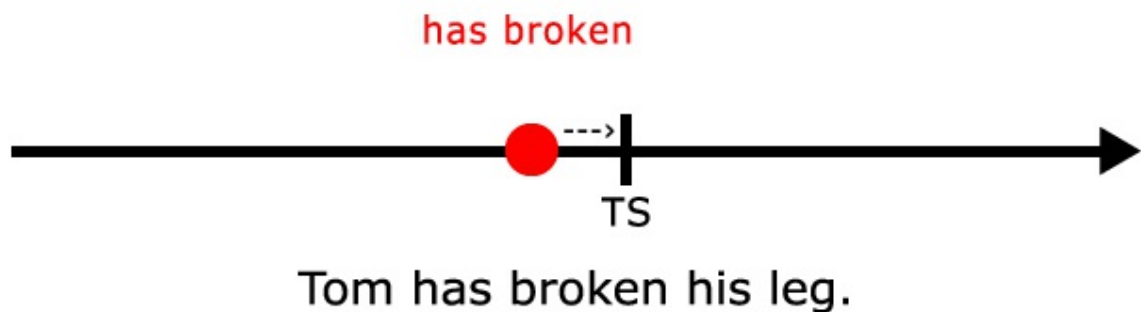
Present perfect for recent events with a result in the present

The present perfect tense is used for recent events that have a result in or an effect on the present moment:

*Someone **has opened** the window.* (the window is open, and it is cold inside)
*Tom **has broken** his leg.* (his leg is broken, and he can't walk)

If there is no connection between the action and the present moment, the past simple is used:

*Someone **opened** the window to let in some fresh air.* (the window is now closed, or we don't know whether it is closed or not)
*On the day before the match, Tom **broke** his leg.* (his leg is not broken any more)



Present perfect with an incomplete period

The present perfect tense is used to express actions happening in an incomplete period of time. An incomplete period is one that includes the present moment, that is, the time of speaking. This period can be implied or expressed with a time expression (*today, this week, this year, ever, never* etc.):

I haven't smoked today.

I've lived here all my life.

Have you ever been to China? (in your life)

My uncle has written several plays. (in his life, supposing he is still alive)

He has never worked as a waiter. (in his life)

If the action happened in a completed period of time (one that does not include the time of speaking), the past simple tense is used. This period can be implied or

expressed with a time expression (*yesterday, last week, last year, between 1905 and 1910* etc.) or a clause:

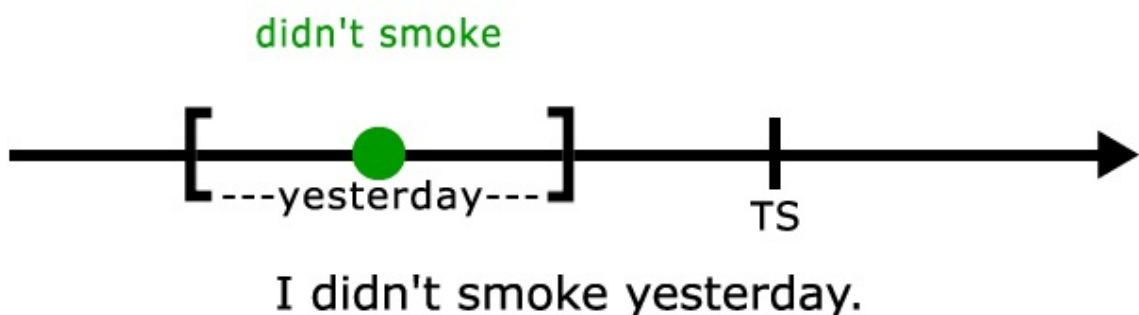
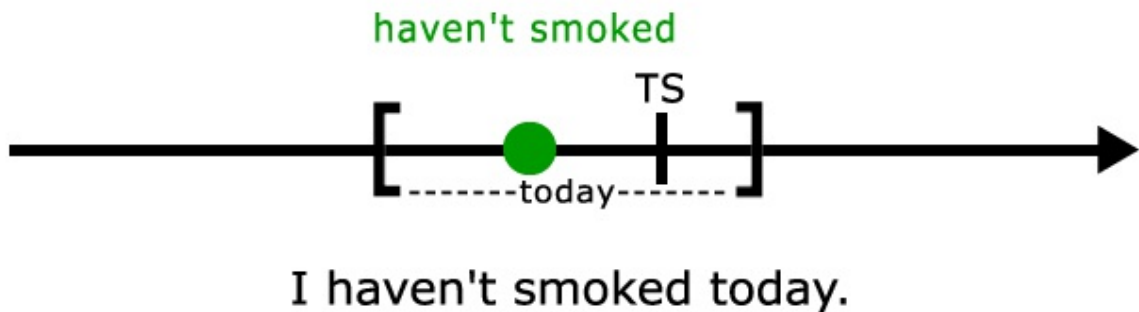
*I **didn't smoke** yesterday.*

*I **lived** in this house when I was a child. (I am not a child any more)*

***Did** you go to China when you were working as a flight attendant?*

*Shakespeare **wrote** numerous plays. (in his life, he is dead now)*

*He **worked** in this café between 1905 and 1910.*



Note that some time expressions (e.g. *this morning, recently* and *lately*) may refer to either a completed or an incomplete period of time depending on the context and whether or not the time of speaking is included in the given period:

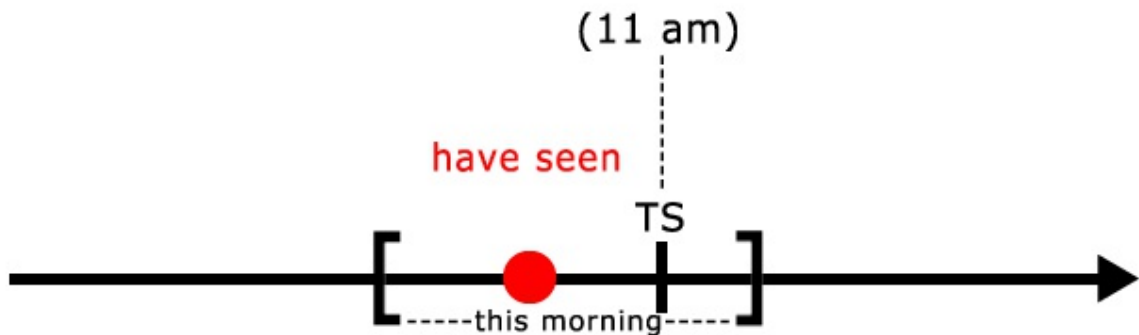
*I **have seen** him this morning. (it is still morning)*

*I **saw** him this morning. (it is later during the day)*

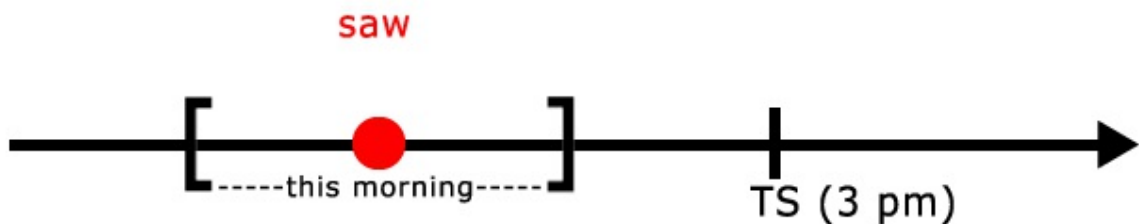
*He **has put on** some weight recently. (in the past few days/weeks/months)*

etc.)

*He **put on** some weight recently.* (some time ago)



I have seen him this morning.



I saw him this morning.

Reference to an incomplete period of time, however, does not always involve the use of the present perfect tense:

***Have you been** to Lake Balaton **this year**?* (any time this year)

***Did you go** to Lake Balaton **this year**?* (at the time when you go there every year)

Although both actions are related to an incomplete period, the present perfect in the first sentence refers to an indefinite time; meanwhile, the past simple in the second sentence implies a definite time (supposing the recipient of the question always visits Lake Balaton at the same time every year).

Quotes:

- *I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn't learn something from him.*
- [Galileo Galilei](#)

Present perfect with FOR and SINCE

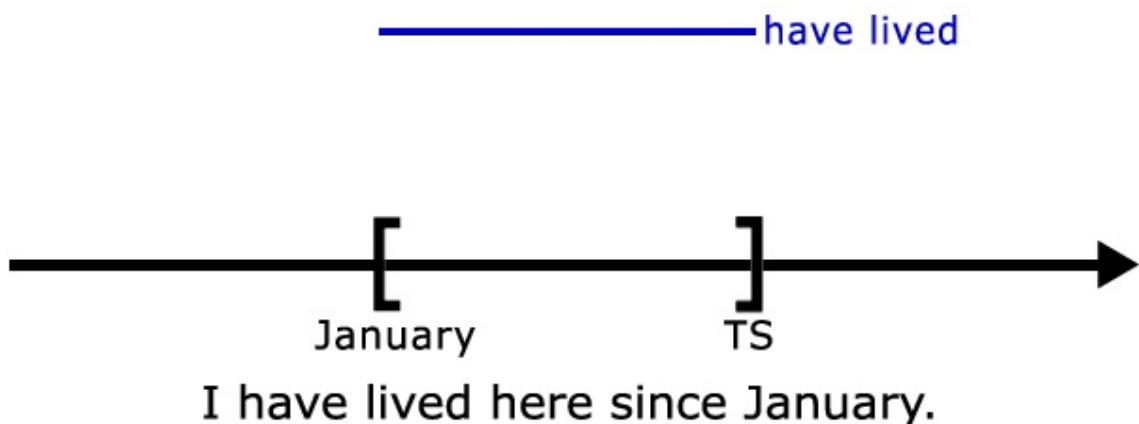
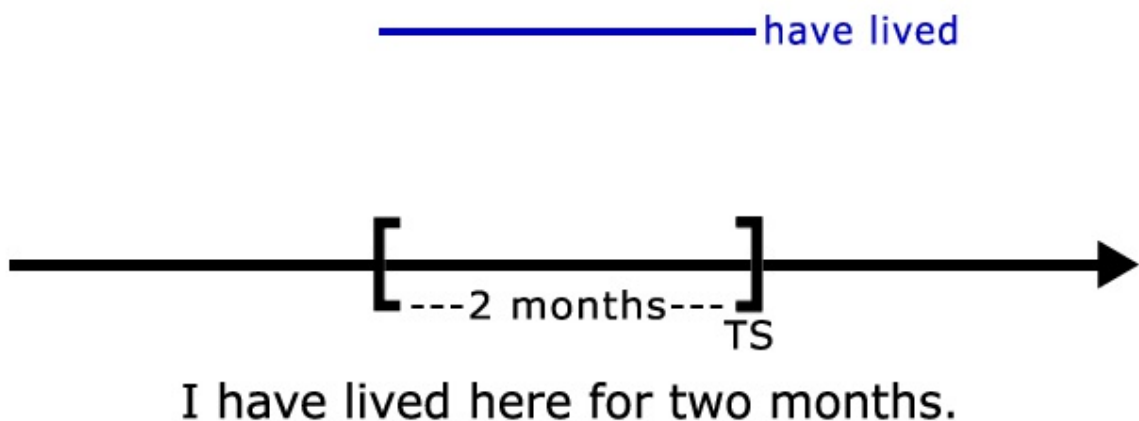
The question words *how long?* and *since when?*, and the prepositions *for* and *since* are used with the present perfect tense to express that something started in the past and is still true. *How long?* and *for* refer to an incomplete period of time, while *since when?* and *since* refer to a point in time:

I have lived here for two months.

I have lived here since January.

"How long have you known José?" "For ten years."

"Since when have you known José?" "Since the early 1990s."



The point in time after *since* can also be expressed with a clause containing a verb

in the past simple:

*I have lived here **since I was born**.*
*I've known José **since we were young**.*

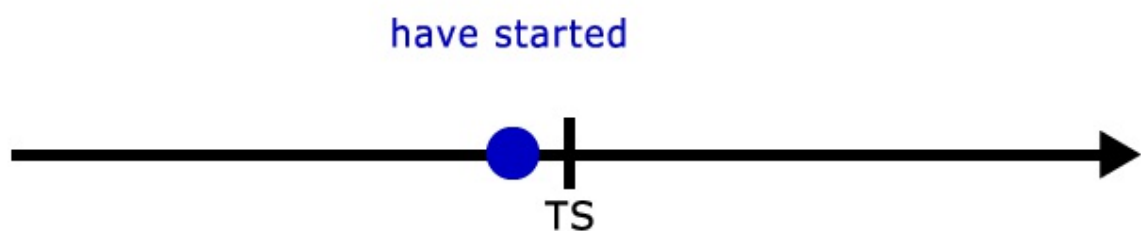
Related topics:

- [IT'S \(BEEN\) + DAYS / WEEKS / MONTHS / etc. + SINCE](#)
- [Present perfect continuous with FOR and SINCE](#)
- [Past simple to express a point in the past](#)
- [Past simple for actions happening over a period of time in the past](#)
- [Past perfect with FOR](#)
- [Future perfect with FOR](#)

Present perfect with JUST

The present perfect tense is used for recently completed actions, usually with the word *just*:

*I **have just started** a typing course.*



I have just started a typing course.

If the exact time is mentioned, the past simple is used:

*I **started** a typing course **a few weeks ago**.*

Just now also requires the past simple tense and means "a moment ago":

*I **spoke** to him **just now**. He says hi.*

Present perfect with YET and ALREADY

The time expressions *yet* and *already* are often used with the present perfect tense. *Yet* is used in negative and interrogative sentences:

I haven't finished yet.
Have you talked to him yet?

Already is usually used in affirmative sentences:

I've already told you more than I should.

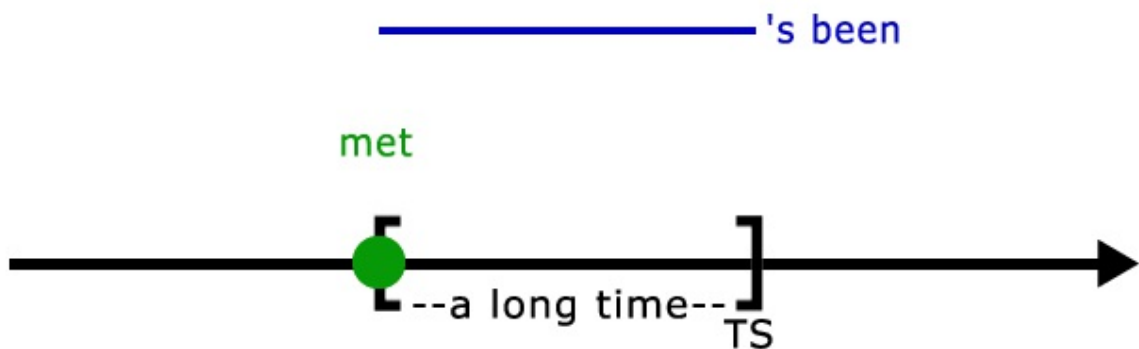
IT'S (BEEN) + DAYS / WEEKS / MONTHS / etc. + SINCE

The structure *it's (been) + days / weeks / months / etc. + since* is used to emphasise the length of time that has passed since a past event:

It's been weeks since his last blog post.
It's been a long time since I met him.
How long has it been since they moved away?

In the sentences above, *it's been* stands for *it has been* (present perfect); however, in everyday speech, it is more common to use the present simple instead of the present perfect:

It's weeks since his last blog post.
It's a long time since I met him.
How long is it since they moved away?



It's been a long time since I met him.

Related topics:

- [Present perfect with FOR and SINCE](#)
- [Past simple to express a point in the past](#)

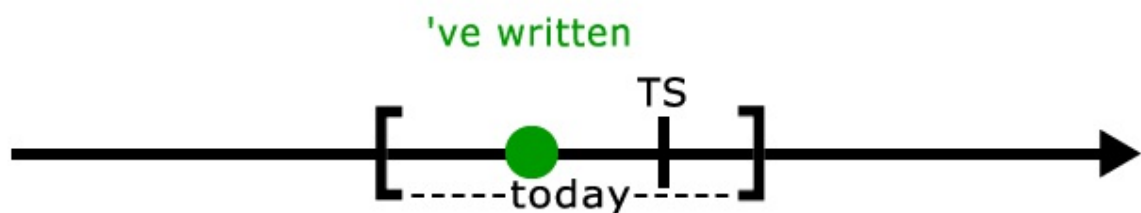
Present perfect with quantities

The present perfect tense is used to express quantities: how much we have done of something or how often we have done something in an incomplete period of time:

I've written two letters today.

*How much alcohol **have** you **consumed** in the past 24 hours?*

*I've **been** to the cinema three times this month.*



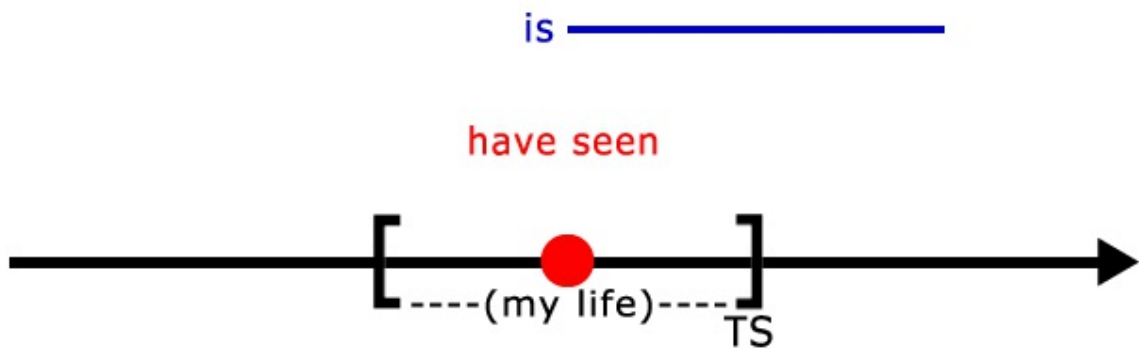
I've written two letters today.

Present perfect with superlative forms of adjectives

The present perfect is used with superlative forms of adjectives to express emphasis:

*This is **the first** time I **have been** to the Philippines.*

*This is **the worst** film I **have ever seen**.*



This is the worst film I have ever seen.

Related topics:

- [Past perfect with superlative forms of adjectives](#)

Present perfect with WHEN

When with present perfect refers to an indefinite time in an incomplete period of time and is used to indicate criticism:

When have you ever done the dishes? (any time in your life or since we met)

Related topics:

- [Present perfect for past events](#)

Present perfect continuous

- [Form: present perfect continuous](#)
- [Present perfect continuous with FOR and SINCE](#)
- [Present perfect continuous for continuous events that have just finished](#)
- [Present perfect continuous for habitual actions](#)

Form: present perfect continuous

HAVE/HAS + BEEN + PRESENT PARTICIPLE (VERB-ING)

The present perfect continuous (also called the present perfect progressive) is formed with *have/has* (the present tense forms of *have*) + *been* (the past participle form of *be*) + the present participle *-ing* form of the verb.

Affirmative

| Subject | Auxiliary | Verb (present participle) | |
|------------------|-------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| <i>I</i> | <i>have</i> | <i>been working</i> | <i>all week.</i> |
| <i>You</i> | | | |
| <i>We</i> | | | |
| <i>You</i> | | | |
| <i>They</i> | | | |
| <i>He/She/It</i> | <i>has</i> | | |

The following contracted forms are often used in spoken and in informal written language:

I have » ***I've***
you have » ***you've***
he/she/it has » ***he's/she's/it's***
we have » ***we've***
you have » ***you've***
they have » ***they've***

Negative

| Subject | Auxiliary 1 | <i>not</i> | Auxiliary 2 | Verb (present participle) | |
|----------|-------------|------------|-------------|---------------------------|--|
| <i>I</i> | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-----------|------|-----|------|---------|-----------|
| You | have | not | been | working | all week. |
| We | | | | | |
| You | | | | | |
| They | | | | | |
| He/She/It | has | | | | |

The contracted forms *haven't* and *hasn't* are often used instead of *have not* and *has not* in spoken and in informal written language.

Interrogative

| (Question word) | Auxiliary 1 | Subject | Auxiliary 2 | Verb (present participle) | |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|---------------------------|-----------|
| (Why) | have | I | been | working | all week? |
| | | you | | | |
| | | we | | | |
| | | you | | | |
| | | they | | | |
| | has | he/she/it | | | |

Related topics:

- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)

Present perfect continuous with FOR and SINCE

The question words *how long?* and *since when?*, and the prepositions *for* and *since* are used with the present perfect continuous tense to express events that started in the past and are still in progress in the present. *How long?* and *for* refer to an incomplete period of time, while *since when?* and *since* refer to a point in time:

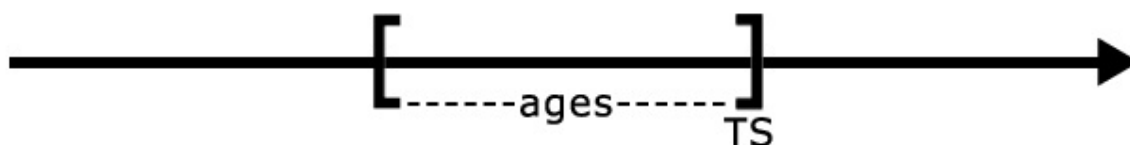
I've been waiting for you for ages.

He has been living here since last week.

"How long have you been learning Spanish?" "For two months."

"Since when have they been dating?" "Since October."

 've been waiting



I've been waiting for you for ages.

The point in time after *since* can also be expressed with a clause containing a verb in the past simple:

*He has been living here **since he started school.***

*They have been dating **since they first met last May.***

Related topics:

- [Present perfect with FOR and SINCE](#)
- [Past perfect continuous for continuous events in the past](#)
- [Future perfect continuous for continuous events in the future](#)

Present perfect continuous for continuous events that have just finished

The present perfect continuous tense is used to refer to continuous events that started in the past and have just finished but have a result in or an effect on the present moment. A time expression is not necessary:

*I've **been working** on the computer all day. My eyes are sore.*

*Your clothes are filthy! What **have you been doing**?*

*I've **been writing** this letter all week.*

~~~~~ 've been writing



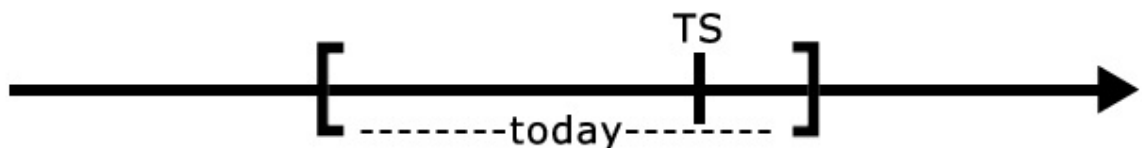
I've been writing this letter all week.

### Present perfect continuous for habitual actions

The present perfect continuous is used to express repeated or habitual actions happening in an incomplete period of time. A time expression is usually necessary:

*She **has been getting up** at 6 for the last two weeks.*  
*I've **been coughing** all day.*

..... 've been coughing



I've been coughing all day.

### Related topics:

- [Past perfect continuous for habitual actions in the past](#)

## Revision questions: present time

- Can we use the auxiliary *do* in the present simple tense in affirmative sentences?
- What is the difference in meaning between the following sentences?

*He always speaks very loudly.*

*He is always speaking very loudly.*

- What is the difference in meaning between the following sentences?

*I work as a waiter.*

*I am working as a waiter.*

- Can action verbs be used in the present simple tense?
- Is this sentence correct: *What are you thinking about his plans?*
- What is the difference in meaning between the following sentences?

*He wrote ten novels.*

*He has written ten novels.*

- What do we mean by an incomplete period of time?
- Can we use the past simple for an action happening in an incomplete period of time?
- Which tense is used with the time expression *just now*?
- What is the difference in meaning between the following sentences?

*I have called him today.*

*I've been calling him all day.*

## Exercises: present time

### Present time - Exercise 1

For each of the following sentences, choose the best explanation.

1. She started taking karate lessons six months ago.
  1. She is taking karate lessons for six months.
  2. She has been taking karate lessons for six months.
2. I've been in Canada for ten days.
  1. I arrived in Canada ten days ago.
  2. I spent ten days in Canada.
3. The last time she called me was two weeks ago.
  1. It's two weeks since she last called me.
  2. She didn't call me for two weeks.
4. This is the first time I've been to Paris.
  1. I've been to Paris once.
  2. I've never been to Paris before.
5. We haven't been on holiday for years.
  1. The last time we went on holiday was years ago.
  2. We didn't go on holiday for years.

### Present time - Exercise 2

Complete each sentence with one of the following time expressions: *already, always, for, just, never, rarely, since, still, usually, yet*.

1. This has ... happened to me before. It's the first time.
2. He has ... been abroad three times this year.
3. I've ... spoken to Kate. She says hi.
4. I have loved you ... the day I met you.
5. Whenever I ring her, the line is busy, and she ... calls me back.
6. Have you heard what I've ... said? Are you ... listening to me?
7. Bill has been trying to open that can of tuna ... the last half an hour.
8. We've ... wanted to go to Spain but have never been able to afford it.
9. I ... haven't done my homework.
10. When does the postman ... come?
11. Have you done the dishes ... ?
12. They're ... quarrelling about stupid things. It's getting on my nerves!
13. Where were you? I've been looking for you ... ages!

14. Hold on for a second. I'm ... brushing my teeth.
15. My children ... get sweets. Only on special occasions.

### **Present time - Exercise 3**

**Decide if the following sentences are correct or incorrect.**

1. Why do you continually disturb me?!
2. Czechs are drinking more and more coffee.
3. I'm listening to music since I've come home.
4. She has been to Egypt twice last year.
5. How long have you waiting here?
6. We've just got back from abroad.
7. Lucy is getting up very early these days.
8. Sam has been sitting on that bench since three hours.
9. What's the hottest place you've ever been to?
10. Since when has she been taking ballet lessons?

### **Present time - Exercise 4**

**Rewrite each sentence so that it contains the word(s) in capital letters and the meaning stays the same. Do not change the words given.**

1. I've never driven such a fast car. (FASTEST)
2. What's on your mind right now? (ABOUT)
3. Do you know how to make a website? (EVER)
4. The last time I took a sauna was two years ago. (HAVEN'T)
5. I haven't written to Tim for three months. (SINCE)
6. Leyla got a job as a waitress two weeks ago. (FOR)
7. When did they get engaged? (HOW LONG)
8. Jill hasn't completed the test yet. (IS)
9. What time is breakfast at the hotel? (SERVE BREAKFAST)
10. Ted has the irritating habit of biting his nails. (ALWAYS)

### **Present time - Exercise 5**

**Make questions with the appropriate present or past tenses and then discuss them with your partner.**

1. You | do | any sport? How long | do | it?

2. You | be | to the cinema or theatre | recently? What | you | see?
3. Is there a website that you visit regularly? How often | you | visit | it?
4. You | ever | lose | something very important to you? How | it | happen?
5. You | watch | any TV series | right now? How long | you | watch | it?
6. Where | you | live? How long | you | live | there?
7. Is there a restaurant or bar that you often go to? When | you | usually | go | there?
8. You | ever | be | abroad? Which foreign countries | you | be | to?
9. You | learn | another language | at the moment? How long | you | learn | it?
10. What is your daily routine during the week? What | you | do | at weekends?

## Answer key: present time

### Answer key - Present time - Exercise 1

1. She started taking karate lessons six months ago. **(2) She has been taking karate lessons for six months.**
2. I've been in Canada for ten days. **(1) I arrived in Canada ten days ago.**
3. The last time she called me was two weeks ago. **(1) It's two weeks since she last called me.**
4. This is the first time I've been to Paris. **(2) I've never been to Paris before.**
5. We haven't been on holiday for years. **(1) The last time we went on holiday was years ago.**

### Answer key - Present time - Exercise 2

1. This has **never** happened to me before. It's the first time.
2. He has **already** been abroad three times this year.
3. I've **just** spoken to Kate. She says hi.
4. I have loved you **since** the day I met you.
5. Whenever I ring her, the line is busy, and she **never** calls me back.
6. Have you heard what I've **just** said? Are you **still** listening to me?
7. Bill has been trying to open that can of tuna **for** the last half an hour.
8. We've **always** wanted to go to Spain but have never been able to afford it.
9. I **still** haven't done my homework.
10. When does the postman **usually** come?
11. Have you done the dishes **yet**?
12. They're **always** quarrelling about stupid things. It's getting on my nerves!
13. Where were you? I've been looking for you **for** ages!
14. Hold on for a second. I'm **just** brushing my teeth.

15. My children **rarely** get sweets. Only on special occasions.

### Answer key - Present time - Exercise 3

1. Why **are** you continually **disturbing** me?
2. Correct.
3. I've **been** listening to music since I **came** home.
4. She has been to Egypt twice. / She **went to** Egypt twice last year.
5. How long have you **been** waiting here?
6. Correct.
7. Correct.
8. Sam has been sitting on that bench **for** three hours.
9. Correct.
10. Correct.

### Answer key - Present time - Exercise 4

1. This is the fastest car I have ever driven.
2. What are you thinking about right now?
3. Have you ever made a website?
4. I haven't had/taken a sauna for two years.
5. It's three months since I last wrote to Tim.
6. Leyla has been working as a waitress for two weeks.
7. How long have they been engaged?
8. Jill is still taking/doing the test.
9. When do they serve breakfast at the hotel?
10. Ted is always biting his nails.

### Answer key - Present time - Exercise 5

1. Do you do any sport? How long have you been doing it?
2. Have you been to the cinema or theatre recently? What did you see?
3. Is there a website that you visit regularly? How often do you visit it?
4. Have you ever lost something very important to you? How did it happen?
5. Are you watching any TV series right now? How long have you been watching it?
6. Where do you live? How long have you been living there?
7. Is there a restaurant or bar that you often go to? When do you usually go there?
8. Have you ever been abroad? Which foreign countries have you been to?

9. Are you learning another language at the moment? How long have you been learning it?
10. What is your daily routine during the week? What do you do at weekends?



# Future time

- [Guiding questions: future time](#)
- [Future simple](#)
- [Future continuous](#)
- [Future perfect](#)
- [Future perfect continuous](#)
- [BE GOING TO](#)
- [Present simple for fixed future events \(schedules, timetables and itineraries\)](#)
- [Present continuous for fixed future arrangements](#)
- [The difference between WILL, BE GOING TO and the present continuous for future events](#)
- [Other expressions referring to future time](#)
- [Future time clauses](#)
- [Revision questions: future time](#)
- [Exercises: future time](#)

## Guiding questions: future time

- Which tenses can be used to express future time?
- What kinds of future events can be expressed with the present continuous tense?
- What do *be going to* and the future simple tense have in common?
- What is the difference between the future perfect and the future perfect continuous tenses?
- What is the difference between the future continuous and the future perfect continuous tenses?
- Besides tenses what other structures can be used to refer to future time?

# Future simple

- [Form: future simple](#)
- [Future simple for intentions \(offers, promises and decisions\)](#)
- [Future simple for predictions](#)
- [Future simple in complex sentences](#)

## Form: future simple

WILL + VERB

The future simple is formed with the modal *will* + simple infinitive without *to* in all persons.

### Affirmative

| Subject          | Auxiliary   | Verb (simple infinitive) |
|------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| <i>I</i>         | <i>will</i> | <i>help.</i>             |
| <i>You</i>       |             |                          |
| <i>He/She/It</i> |             |                          |
| <i>We</i>        |             |                          |
| <i>You</i>       |             |                          |
| <i>They</i>      |             |                          |

The following contracted forms are often used in spoken and in informal written language:

*I will* » ***I'll***  
*you will* » ***you'll***  
*he/she/it will* » ***he'll/she'll/it'll***  
*we will* » ***we'll***  
*you will* » ***you'll***  
*they will* » ***they'll***

### Negative

| Subject    | Auxiliary | <i>not</i> | Verb (simple infinitive) |
|------------|-----------|------------|--------------------------|
| <i>I</i>   |           |            |                          |
| <i>You</i> |           |            |                          |
|            |           |            |                          |

|                  |                       |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>He/She/It</i> | <i>will not help.</i> |
| <i>We</i>        |                       |
| <i>You</i>       |                       |
| <i>They</i>      |                       |

The contracted form *won't* is often used instead of *will not* in spoken and in informal written language.

## Interrogative

| (Question word) | Auxiliary   | Subject          | Verb (simple infinitive) |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>(When)</i>   | <i>will</i> | <i>I</i>         | <i>help?</i>             |
|                 |             | <i>you</i>       |                          |
|                 |             | <i>he/she/it</i> |                          |
|                 |             | <i>we</i>        |                          |
|                 |             | <i>you</i>       |                          |
|                 |             | <i>they</i>      |                          |

In British English, *shall* is often used instead of *will* in the first person in affirmative sentences with no change of meaning. *Shall* is more formal than *will*:

*Well, we **shall see** tomorrow.*

In first person interrogatives, *shall* expresses offers:

***Shall I open** the window?*

## Related topics:

- [Types of modals](#)
- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)

## Future simple for intentions (offers, promises and decisions)

The future simple tense is used to express future intentions that are decided at the time of speaking (spontaneous offers, promises and decisions):

*Come on, I'll **help** you with those bags.* (offer)

*I **will** always **love** you.* (promise)

*I'll **have** a wiener schnitzel.* (decision)

In the first person, *shall* can be used instead of *will* to announce intentions. *Shall* is more formal than *will*:

*I shall definitely **give up** smoking this year.*

### Related topics:

- [BE GOING TO for intentions](#)

## Future simple for predictions

The future simple is used to make predictions that are based on personal judgement, opinion or intuition, and not on present evidence. Whether or not the event will happen is not certain. Such predictions are often introduced by *I think / I don't think*:

*I don't think he'll **come** tonight.*

*I predict that Congress **will pass** an anti-piracy law soon.*

*If you ask him, he'll probably **give** you a lift.*

In the first person, *shall* can be used instead of *will* in formal styles:

*Whatever happens, we **shall** always **be** best friends.*

The future simple is also used to make general predictions about facts that are always true or events that always happen:

*Salty water **will freeze** at a lower temperature than pure water.*

*A gentleman **will hold** the door for a lady.*

### Quotes:

- *You will never find time for anything. If you want time, you must make it.* - [Charles Buxton](#)
- *Some days there won't be a song in your heart. Sing anyway.* - [Emory Austin](#)
- *You will never win if you never begin.* - [Helen Rowland](#)
- *If you do not sow in the spring, you will not reap in the autumn.* - [Irish proverb](#)
- *If you're in a bad situation, don't worry it'll change. If you're in a good situation, don't worry it'll change.* - [John A. Simone, Sr.](#)
- *Whoever gossips to you will gossip about you.* - [Spanish proverb](#)
- *Action will remove the doubts that theory cannot solve.* - [Tehyi Hsieh](#)

## Related topics:

- [Modals to express assumption: WILL, SHOULD, OUGHT TO](#)
- [BE GOING TO for predictions](#)

## Future simple in complex sentences

The future simple tense is often used in the main clause of complex sentences that refer to future time and contain clauses of condition, time or purpose. In the subordinate clause (starting with *if*, *when*, *as soon as*, *after*, *before*, *the moment* etc.), we usually use a present tense:

*If you have completed the course, you **will receive** a certificate.* (condition)

*As soon as I hear anything, I **will let** you know.* (time)

*I'm taking a book with me so that I'**ll have** something to read on the train.*

(purpose)



As soon as I hear anything, I'll let you know.

## Quotes:

- *Live as you will wish to have lived when you are dying.* - [Christian Furchtegott Gellert](#)
- *You will never win if you never begin.* - [Helen Rowland](#)
- *If you do not sow in the spring, you will not reap in the autumn.* - [Irish proverb](#)

## Related topics:

- [Future time clauses](#)

# Future continuous

- [Form: future continuous](#)
- [Future continuous for actions in progress at a specific point in the future](#)
- [Future continuous for actions happening over a period of time in the future](#)
- [Future continuous for temporary habitual actions in the future](#)
- [Future continuous for future arrangements](#)

## Form: future continuous

WILL + BE + PRESENT PARTICIPLE (VERB-ING)

The future continuous (also called the future progressive) is formed with the modal *will* + continuous infinitive without *to* (*be* + the present participle *-ing* form of the verb) in all persons.

### Affirmative

| Subject          | Auxiliary   | Verb (continuous infinitive) |                   |
|------------------|-------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>I</i>         | <i>will</i> | <i>be coming</i>             | <i>back soon.</i> |
| <i>You</i>       |             |                              |                   |
| <i>He/She/It</i> |             |                              |                   |
| <i>We</i>        |             |                              |                   |
| <i>You</i>       |             |                              |                   |
| <i>They</i>      |             |                              |                   |

The following contracted forms are often used in spoken and in informal written language:

*I will* » ***I'll***  
*you will* » ***you'll***  
*he/she/it will* » ***he'll/she'll/it'll***  
*we will* » ***we'll***  
*you will* » ***you'll***  
*they will* » ***they'll***

### Negative

| Subject | Auxiliary | <i>not</i> | Verb (continuous infinitive) |  |
|---------|-----------|------------|------------------------------|--|
|         |           |            |                              |  |

|           |      |     |           |            |
|-----------|------|-----|-----------|------------|
| I         | will | not | be coming | back soon. |
| You       |      |     |           |            |
| He/She/It |      |     |           |            |
| We        |      |     |           |            |
| You       |      |     |           |            |
| They      |      |     |           |            |

The contracted form *won't* is often used instead of *will not* in spoken and in informal written language.

## Interrogative

| (Question word) | Auxiliary | Subject   | Verb (continuous infinitive) |       |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------------|-------|
| (When)          | will      | I         | be coming                    | back? |
|                 |           | you       |                              |       |
|                 |           | he/she/it |                              |       |
|                 |           | we        |                              |       |
|                 |           | you       |                              |       |
|                 |           | they      |                              |       |

## Related topics:

- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)

## Future continuous for actions in progress at a specific point in the future

The future continuous tense is used to refer to actions that will be in progress at or around a specific point in time in the future. This point can be implied or expressed with a time expression or a clause with a verb in the present simple tense:

*At seven? I'll be **bathing** the baby then.*

*When you arrive, I'll be **waiting** for you outside the station.*

*This time next year, he **will be living** in India.*



'll be bathing 



At seven? I'll be bathing the baby then.

### Related topics:

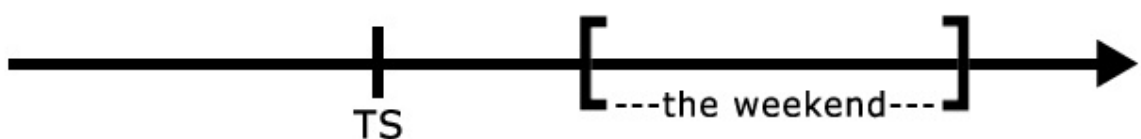
- [Past continuous for actions in progress at a specific point in the past](#)
- [Present continuous for actions in progress at the time of speaking](#)

### Future continuous for actions happening over a period of time in the future

The future continuous is used to describe actions which will continue over a period of time in the future. This period can be expressed with a time expression or a clause with a verb in the present continuous tense. In this case, the two actions will be happening simultaneously:

*Sorry, I can't go on the trip. I **will be working** the whole weekend.*  
*While you're studying, I'll be **practising** yoga.*

will be working 



I will be working the whole weekend.

## Related topics:

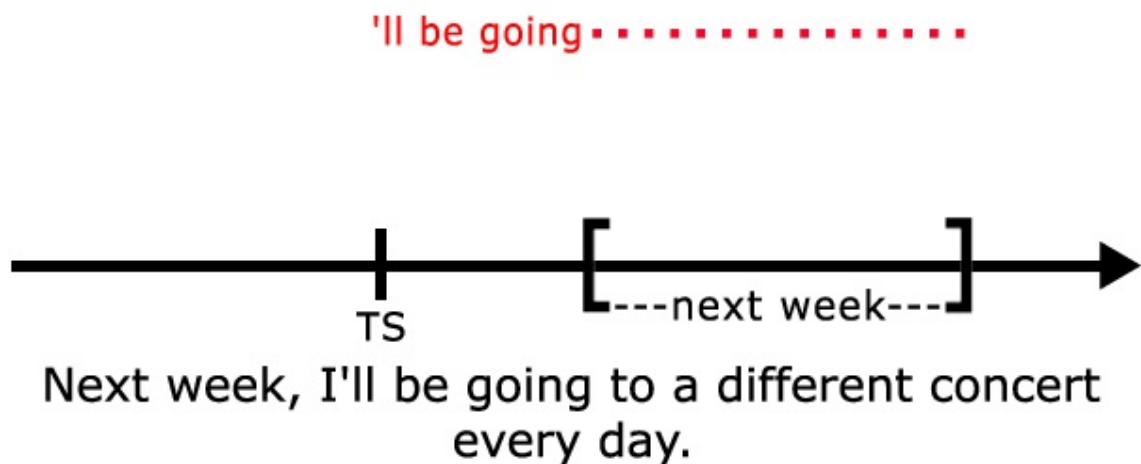
- [Past continuous for actions happening over a period of time in the past](#)

## Future continuous for temporary habitual actions in the future

The future continuous is used to express repeated or habitual actions in the future that will be temporary:

*I'm going on holiday tomorrow, but I'll **be checking** my e-mail at least once a day.*

*Next week, I'll **be going** to a different concert every day.*



## Related topics:

- [Past continuous for temporary habitual actions in the past](#)
- [Present continuous for temporary habitual actions in the present](#)

## Future continuous for future arrangements

The future continuous is used for future arrangements and plans that are less definite and formal:

*The band **will be performing** live at the end of March.*

*We **will be arriving** in Prague soon.*

will be arriving



We will be arriving in Prague soon.

**Related topics:**

- [Present continuous for fixed future arrangements](#)

# Future perfect

- [Form: future perfect](#)
- [Future perfect for actions completed before a point in the future](#)
- [Future perfect with FOR](#)

## Form: future perfect

WILL + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE

The future perfect is formed with the modal *will* + perfect infinitive without *to* (*have* + the past participle form of the verb) in all persons.

### Affirmative

| Subject          | Auxiliary   | Verb (perfect infinitive) |                 |
|------------------|-------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>I</i>         | <i>will</i> | <i>have finished</i>      | <i>by then.</i> |
| <i>You</i>       |             |                           |                 |
| <i>He/She/It</i> |             |                           |                 |
| <i>We</i>        |             |                           |                 |
| <i>You</i>       |             |                           |                 |
| <i>They</i>      |             |                           |                 |

The following contracted forms are often used in spoken and in informal written language:

*I will* » ***I'll***  
*you will* » ***you'll***  
*he/she/it will* » ***he'll/she'll/it'll***  
*we will* » ***we'll***  
*you will* » ***you'll***  
*they will* » ***they'll***

### Negative

| Subject    | Auxiliary | <i>not</i> | Verb (perfect infinitive) |  |
|------------|-----------|------------|---------------------------|--|
| <i>I</i>   |           |            |                           |  |
| <i>You</i> |           |            |                           |  |
|            |           |            |                           |  |

|                  |             |            |                      |                 |
|------------------|-------------|------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| <i>He/She/It</i> | <i>will</i> | <i>not</i> | <i>have finished</i> | <i>by then.</i> |
| <i>We</i>        |             |            |                      |                 |
| <i>You</i>       |             |            |                      |                 |
| <i>They</i>      |             |            |                      |                 |

The contracted form *won't* is often used instead of *will not* in spoken and in informal written language.

## Interrogative

| (Question word)     | Auxiliary   | Subject          | Verb (perfect infinitive) |
|---------------------|-------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>By what time</i> | <i>will</i> | <i>I</i>         | <i>have finished?</i>     |
|                     |             | <i>you</i>       |                           |
|                     |             | <i>he/she/it</i> |                           |
|                     |             | <i>we</i>        |                           |
|                     |             | <i>you</i>       |                           |
|                     |             | <i>they</i>      |                           |

## Related topics:

- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)
- [Appendix: irregular verb forms](#)

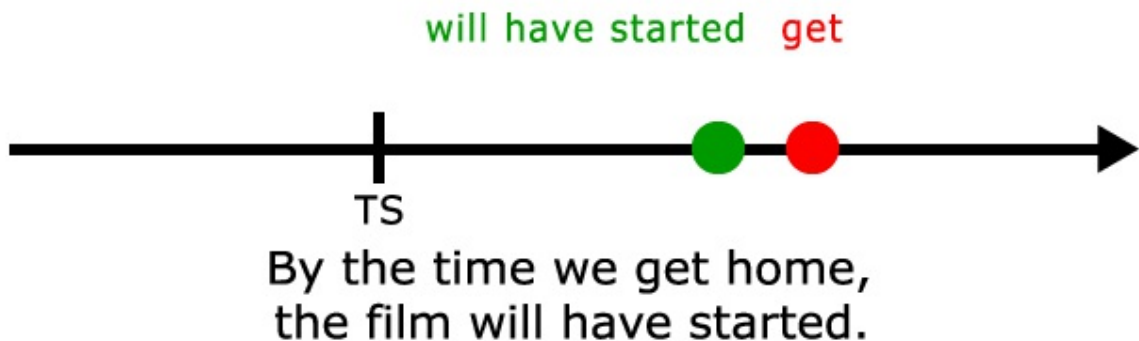
## Future perfect for actions completed before a point in the future

The future perfect tense is used to express that an action will be completed before a point in time in the future (any time up to that point). This point can be implied or expressed with a time expression or a clause with a verb in the present simple tense:

*It's no use calling him at work; he'll **have left**.*

*By next week, they'll **have finished** painting the rooms.*

*By the time we get home, the film **will have started**.*



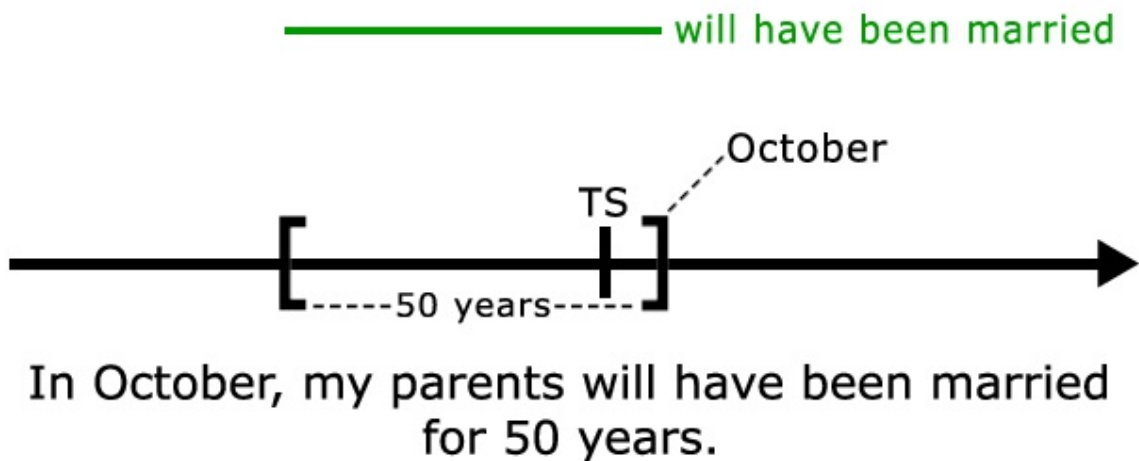
**Related topics:**

- [Past perfect for actions completed before a point in the past](#)
- [Present perfect for past events](#)

**Future perfect with FOR**

The preposition *for* is used with the future perfect tense to express that something will start before a point in time in the future (or has already started) and that it will still be true at that point:

*This time next week, I'll **have lived** in my new apartment for three days.*  
*In October, my parents **will have been** married for 50 years.*



**Related topics:**

- Past perfect with FOR
- Present perfect with FOR and SINCE

## Future perfect continuous

- [Form: future perfect continuous](#)
- [Future perfect continuous for continuous events in the future](#)

### Form: future perfect continuous

WILL + HAVE + BEEN + PRESENT PARTICIPLE (VERB-ING)

The future perfect continuous (also called the future perfect progressive) is formed with the modal *will* + perfect continuous infinitive without *to* (*have* + *been* + the present participle *-ing* form of the verb) in all persons.

### Affirmative

| Subject          | Auxiliary   | Verb (perfect continuous infinitive) |                                     |
|------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>I</i>         | <i>will</i> | <i>have been living</i>              | <i>here for five years by then.</i> |
| <i>You</i>       |             |                                      |                                     |
| <i>He/She/It</i> |             |                                      |                                     |
| <i>We</i>        |             |                                      |                                     |
| <i>You</i>       |             |                                      |                                     |
| <i>They</i>      |             |                                      |                                     |

The following contracted forms are often used in spoken and in informal written language:

*I will* » ***I'll***  
*you will* » ***you'll***  
*he/she/it will* » ***he'll/she'll/it'll***  
*we will* » ***we'll***  
*you will* » ***you'll***  
*they will* » ***they'll***

### Negative

| Subject    | Auxiliary | <i>not</i> | Verb (perfect continuous infinitive) |  |
|------------|-----------|------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| <i>I</i>   |           |            |                                      |  |
| <i>You</i> |           |            |                                      |  |



|                  |                                  |                                     |
|------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>He/She/It</i> | <i>will not have been living</i> | <i>here for five years by then.</i> |
| <i>We</i>        |                                  |                                     |
| <i>You</i>       |                                  |                                     |
| <i>They</i>      |                                  |                                     |

The contracted form *won't* is often used instead of *will not* in spoken and in informal written language.

## Interrogative

| (Question word) | Auxiliary   | Subject          | Verb (perfect continuous infinitive) |                      |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>How long</i> | <i>will</i> | <i>I</i>         | <i>have been living</i>              | <i>here by then?</i> |
|                 |             | <i>you</i>       |                                      |                      |
|                 |             | <i>he/she/it</i> |                                      |                      |
|                 |             | <i>we</i>        |                                      |                      |
|                 |             | <i>you</i>       |                                      |                      |
|                 |             | <i>they</i>      |                                      |                      |

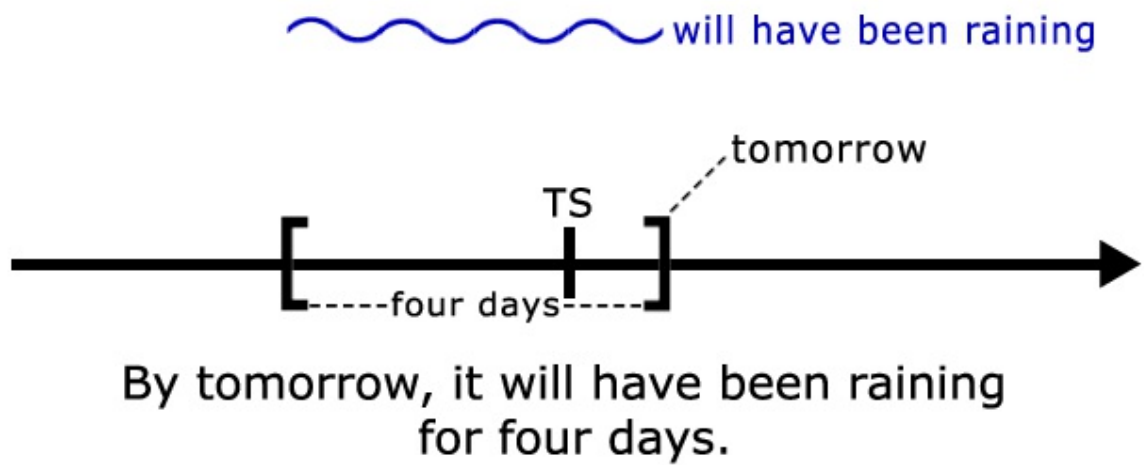
## Related topics:

- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)

## Future perfect continuous for continuous events in the future

The future perfect continuous tense is used to express events that will start before a point in time in the future (or have already started) and will still be in progress at that point:

*By tomorrow, it **will have been raining** for four days.*  
*Soon, he'll **have been running** for 4 hours.*



**Related topics:**

- [Past perfect continuous for continuous events in the past](#)
- [Present perfect continuous with FOR and SINCE](#)

# BE GOING TO

## BE GOING TO for intentions

*Be going to* is used to express future intentions that, at the moment of speaking, have already been decided:

*We **are going to redecorate** the living room next week.*

*Are you **going to propose** to her?*

*Do you think Sam's **going to apply** for the job?*

### Related topics:

- [Future simple for intentions \(offers, promises and decisions\)](#)

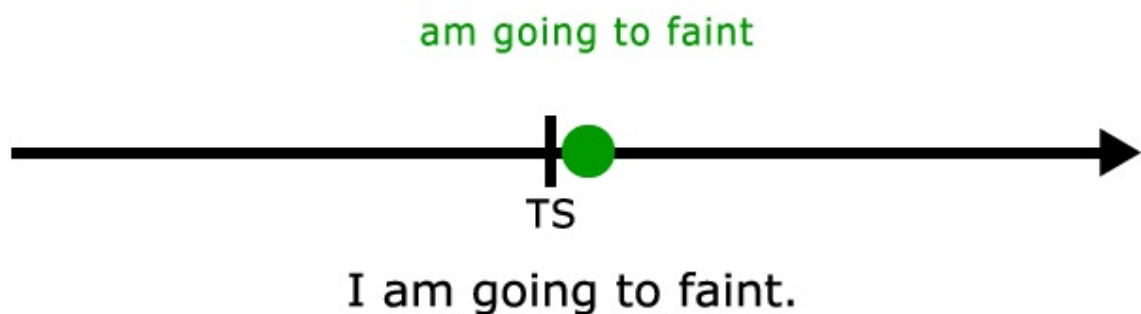
## BE GOING TO for predictions

*Be going to* is used to predict future events that are very near (and can be seen) or seem sure to happen. Such predictions are based on present evidence:

*I'm **going to faint**.*

*Look at the clouds; it's **going to rain**.*

*My sister **is going to have** a baby.*



### Quotes:

- *Live every day as if it were going to be your last; for one day you're sure to*

*be right.* - [Harry "Breaker" Harbord Morant](#)

**Related topics:**

- [Future simple for predictions](#)

## Present simple for fixed future events (schedules, timetables and itineraries)

When talking about schedules, timetables and itineraries, the present simple tense is used to refer to a future event that is planned and is not likely to change:

*I **have** a meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup>, but I**m** free on the following day.*

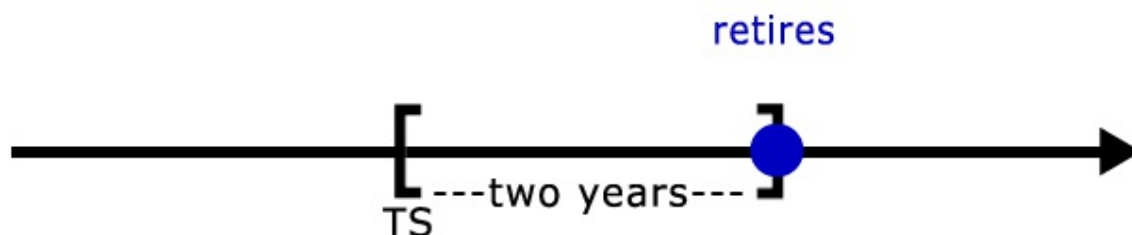
*What time **is** your flight?*

*The last train to Rome **leaves** at 22.30.*

*On day 6, we **visit** the pyramids.*

*His father **retires** in two years.*

*Christmas Eve **is** on a Tuesday this year.*



His father retires in two years.

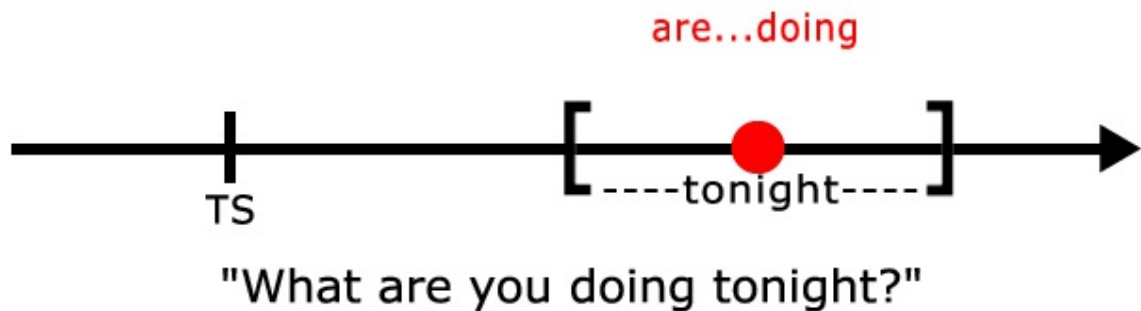
## Present continuous for fixed future arrangements

Used with a time expression, the present continuous tense can express fixed social or travel arrangements for the future:

"What **are** you **doing** tonight?" "I'm **going** out with some friends." (it is settled)

They **are getting** married next month. (they have made arrangements)

I'm **flying** to Istanbul on the 15<sup>th</sup>. (I have booked my ticket)



### Related topics:

- [Future continuous for future arrangements](#)

# The difference between WILL, BE GOING TO and the present continuous for future events

## WILL and BE GOING TO for future intentions

*Will* (future simple) is used to express future intentions that are decided at the time of speaking (spontaneous offers, promises and decisions):

*Come on, I'll **help** you with those bags.* (seeing that someone is struggling with their shopping bags)

*Be going to* is used to express future intentions that have already been decided before the time of speaking:

*I can't make it on Saturday. I'm **going to help** my parents around the house.* (referring to a decision that the speaker has made in the past)

## WILL and BE GOING TO for predictions

*Will* (future simple) is used to make predictions that are based on personal judgement, opinion or intuition:

*I'm sure you'll **have** a lovely time in Italy.* (opinion)

*Be going to* is used to make predictions that are based on present evidence. The predicted event is either very near (and can be seen) or seems sure to happen:

*My sister's **going to have** a baby.* (we can see that she is pregnant)

## BE GOING TO and present continuous for future plans

*Be going to* refers to future intentions that have been decided but have not been fully planned:

*We're **going to get** married.* (referring to a past decision)

The present continuous tense refers to fixed future events and emphasises that plans or arrangements have already been made:

*We **are getting** married next month.* (the wedding has already been arranged)

**Related topics:**

- [Future simple for intentions \(offers, promises and decisions\)](#)
- [Future simple for predictions](#)
- [BE GOING TO for intentions](#)
- [BE GOING TO for predictions](#)
- [Present continuous for fixed future arrangements](#)



## **Other expressions referring to future time**

This topic is discussed under [Modals » Other modal expressions](#).

## Future time clauses

In time clauses that refer to future time (clauses with *if, when, after, before, as soon as, once, until, while* etc.) we use the present tenses:

Say hi from me **if you see him**. (present simple)

Will you wait for me **until I get back**? (present simple)

**As soon as I arrive**, I'll give you a call. (present simple)

You can play in the garden **when you have finished your homework**.  
(present perfect)

I'll be waiting outside **while you are speaking to the doctor**. (present continuous)



As soon as I arrive, I'll give you a call.

### Quotes:

- *Live as you will wish to have lived when you are dying.* - [Christian Furchtegott Gellert](#)
- *Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.* - [Pablo Picasso](#)
- *When you get to the top of a mountain, keep climbing.* - [Zen saying](#)

### Related topics:

- [Future simple in complex sentences](#)
- [First conditional](#)

## Revision questions: future time

- Which present tenses can express future events?
- What is the difference between *be going to* and the present continuous tense when used to refer to future time?
- Which structure or tense can be used to express a plan that has already been decided before the time of speaking?
- What kind of predictions can be made by using the future simple tense?
- For what meaning can we use both the present continuous and the future continuous tenses?

## Exercises: future time

### Future time - Exercise 1

**Order the words to make sentences.**

1. will the By time get there have Daniel we left
2. reception hold Where the they going are to
3. as order as we finish will soon cleaning up We a pizza
4. By 50 written I have e-mails will tonight at least
5. This taking tomorrow time I be will a test
6. we Wednesday a meeting on having Are
7. I will don't it think rain
8. using In everybody 30 years' time be solar will power
9. Shall this go weekend we out
10. start When the does match

### Future time - Exercise 2

**Choose the best answer for each of the following sentences.**

1. Easter ... at the end of April this year.
  1. is
  2. will be
  3. is going to be
2. "I don't know how to use this printer." "All right, I ... it to you."
  1. 'm showing
  2. 'm going to show
  3. 'll show
3. Sorry, I can't go on the trip. I ... on Saturday.
  1. 'll work
  2. 'll be working
  3. 'll have worked
4. (In a supermarket) "Why do you need so much sugar?" "I ... a cake."
  1. 'll make
  2. 'm making
  3. 'm going to make
5. Watch out! We ... into that car.
  1. 'll crash
  2. 're crashing

3. 're going to crash
6. You must be exhausted. ... you a taxi?
  1. Shall I call
  2. Am I calling
  3. Am I going to call
7. If you fill in this form, we ... back to you as soon as possible.
  1. get
  2. 'll get
  3. 're getting
8. ... on holiday with her family in August?
  1. Is Barbara going
  2. Is Barbara going to go
  3. Will Barbara go
9. When you get as old as me, you ... what I mean.
  1. are going to understand
  2. will understand
  3. understand
10. I'm sorry you didn't get accepted to university. ... again next year?
  1. Do you apply
  2. Are you applying
  3. Are you going to apply

### **Future time - Exercise 3**

**Make sentences with the appropriate future forms.**

1. While | we | work | on this project | we | communicate | by e-mail
2. OK | I | have | a well-done steak
3. When | you | finish | work | today?
4. When | we | meet | on Thursday | I | tell | you | about everything
5. In October | Pablo | live | here | for six years
6. If | I | buy | some flour and eggs | you | make | some pancakes?
7. Emma | have | a baby | in March
8. Perhaps | he | be | late
9. He | hike | in the High Tatras | this weekend?
10. You | feel | better | after | you | take | these pills

### **Future time - Exercise 4**

**Rewrite each sentence, beginning as shown, so that the meaning stays the same.**

1. What do you intend to do?  
What are you ...
2. I'll soon finish studying. Then we can go for a walk.  
As soon as ...
3. Karen has a dentist's appointment at 6.  
Karen is ...
4. It will take them a month to redecorate their house.  
In a month's time, ...
5. Do you have any special plans for Saturday evening?  
Are you ...
6. The new motorway will take two years to build.  
In two years, they ...
7. What is the departure time of the first train to Cambridge?  
When ...
8. Ethan's birthday party is next Friday.  
Ethan will ...
9. My parents got married 19 years ago.  
Come next year, my parents ...
10. Sunrise is at 6.17 tomorrow.  
The sun ...

## **Future time - Exercise 5**

**Match the two halves of each sentence then discuss the questions with your partner. Ask for more details.**

1. Are you going ...
  2. Are you going to ...
  3. Do you think ...
  4. How long will you have ...
  5. How many children do you think ...
  6. What are you going to do first ...
  7. What do you think ...
  8. What's the next film ...
  9. When are you ...
  10. When is ...
- 
1. been learning English at the end of this school year?
  2. seeing your dentist?
  3. somewhere at the weekend?
  4. surf the Internet tonight?
  5. when you get home?

6. you are going to watch?
7. you will be doing this time tomorrow?
8. you will ever work abroad?
9. you will have?
10. your next exam?

## Answer key: future time

### Answer key - Future time - Exercise 1

1. By the time we get there, Daniel will have left.
2. Where are they going to hold the reception?
3. We will order a pizza as soon as we finish cleaning up.
4. By tonight I will have written at least 50 e-mails.
5. This time tomorrow, I will be taking a test.
6. Are we having a meeting on Wednesday?
7. I don't think it will rain.
8. In 30 years' time, everybody will be using solar power.
9. Shall we go out this weekend?
10. When does the match start?

### Answer key - Future time - Exercise 2

1. Easter ... at the end of April this year. **(1) is**
2. "I don't know how to use this printer." "All right, I ... it to you." **(3) 'll show**
3. Sorry, I can't go on the trip. I ... on Saturday. **(2) 'll be working**
4. (In a supermarket) "Why do you need so much sugar?" "I ... a cake." **(3) 'm going to make**
5. Watch out! We ... into that car. **(3) 're going to crash**
6. You must be exhausted. ... you a taxi? **(1) Shall I call**
7. If you fill in this form, we ... back to you as soon as possible. **(2) 'll get**
8. ... on holiday with her family in August? **(1) Is Barbara going**
9. When you get as old as me, you ... what I mean. **(2) will understand**
10. I'm sorry you didn't get accepted to university. ... again next year? **(3) Are you going to apply**

### Answer key - Future time - Exercise 3

1. While we are working on this project, we will be communicating by e-mail.

2. OK, I'll have a well-done steak.
3. When do you finish work today? / When are you finishing work today?
4. When we meet on Thursday, I'll tell you about everything.
5. In October, Pablo will have been living here for six years.
6. If I buy some flour and eggs, will you make some pancakes?
7. Emma is going to have a baby in March.
8. Perhaps he will be late.
9. Will he be hiking in the High Tatras this weekend?
10. You will feel better after you take these pills.

### Answer key - Future time - Exercise 4

1. What are you going to do?
2. As soon as I finish studying, we can go for a walk. / As soon as I have finished studying, we can go for a walk.
3. Karen is going to the dentist/dentist's at 6. / Karen is seeing her dentist at 6.
4. In a month's time, they will have redecorated their house.
5. Are you doing anything special on Saturday evening?
6. In two years, they will have built the new motorway.
7. When does the first train leave for Cambridge?
8. Ethan will be having a birthday party next Friday.
9. Come next year, my parents will have been married for 20 years.
10. The sun rises at 6.17 tomorrow.

### Answer key - Future time - Exercise 5

1. Are you going ... **(3) somewhere at the weekend?**
2. Are you going to ... **(4) surf the Internet tonight?**
3. Do you think ... **(8) you will ever work abroad?**
4. How long will you have ... **(1) been learning English at the end of this school year?**
5. How many children do you think ... **(9) you will have?**
6. What are you going to do first ... **(5) when you get home?**
7. What do you think ... **(7) you will be doing this time tomorrow?**
8. What's the next film ... **(6) you are going to watch?**
9. When are you ... **(2) seeing your dentist?**
10. When is ... **(10) your next exam?**



# Tenses in indirect speech

This topic is discussed under [Indirect speech » Changes in indirect speech » Tense changes in indirect speech](#).

# Chapter 2: Modals

- [Guiding questions: modals](#)
- [Types of modals](#)
- [Categories of meaning expressed by modals](#)
- [Other modal expressions](#)
- [Overview of modals](#)
- [Modals and adverbs](#)
- [Modals in indirect speech](#)
- [Revision questions: modals](#)
- [Exercises: modals](#)

# Guiding questions: modals

- Which form of the main verb is used after modal verbs?
- Can a modal follow another modal?
- Does a modal have only one meaning?
- Can the same meaning be expressed with different modals?
- How do we use modals to refer to past, present and future times?

# Types of modals

Modals include modal verbs, semi-modal verbs (also called marginal modals) and other modal expressions. They combine with main verbs and modify their meanings. A modal may have several different meanings, while similar meanings may be expressed by using different modals:

*He **can't** be at home; I've just met him.* (deduction)

*Unless you finish your homework, you **can't** go to the cinema.* (prohibition)

***Can** I help you?* (offer)

***May** I help you?* (offer)

## Modal verbs

The modal verbs (or modal auxiliary verbs) are: *can, could, may, might, will, shall, would, should* and *must*.

- Modal verbs always come first in a verb phrase and are followed by a bare infinitive. When used with a perfect infinitive, modal verbs usually refer to past time:

*I **could hear** the dog barking outside.* (modal + simple bare infinitive)

*You **must be joking**.* (modal + continuous bare infinitive)

*He **may have caught** the train.* (modal + perfect bare infinitive)

*You **must have been waiting** for hours.* (modal + perfect continuous bare infinitive)

Contracted forms of *will* and *would* are often used in spoken and in informal written language ('ll and 'd):

***I'd** tell you if I knew.*

***They'll** be here soon.*

- Modal verbs take no -s in the third person singular:

*He **might** be at the office.*

- Modal verbs form their negative and interrogative like other auxiliaries and not with *do*:

***I can't** swim.*

## *Can you swim?*

The following contracted negative forms are often used in spoken and in informal written language:

*cannot* » **can't**  
*could not* » **couldn't**  
*might not* » **mightn't**  
*will not* » **won't**  
*shall not* » **shan't**  
*would not* » **wouldn't**  
*should not* » **shouldn't**  
*must not* » **mustn't**

- Modal verbs have no proper past tense; however, *could*, *would*, *might* and *should* may be used to refer to past time:

*I could swim when I was five.*

- Modal verbs have no infinitive, *-ing* or past participle forms and cannot be followed by other modal verbs. When necessary, modal idioms or other expressions are used instead of them:

*\*If you want to be a sailor, you must can swim.*  
*If you want to be a sailor, you must be able to swim.*

*\*I have canned swim since the age of five.*  
*I have been able to swim since the age of five.*

## **Semi-modal verbs**

The semi-modal verbs (or marginal modals) are: *dare*, *need*, *used to* and *ought to*. They behave similarly to modal verbs but also share some characteristics with main verbs:

*How dare she criticise us?* (as a modal verb, the interrogative formed without *do*)

*He didn't dare to look back.* (as a main verb, followed by a *to*-infinitive and the negative formed with *do*)

*Need you make so much noise?* (as a modal verb, the interrogative formed without *do*)

*You needn't have been so rude.* (as a modal verb, the perfect infinitive used to refer to past time)

*Do you need to use the hairdryer?* (as a main verb, followed by a *to*-infinitive and the interrogative formed with *do*)

*They used to live by the sea.* (unlike a modal verb, followed by a *to*-infinitive)

*You ought to know that by now.* (unlike a modal verb, followed by a *to*-infinitive)

## Other modal expressions

Besides modal verbs and semi-modal verbs, there are other expressions which can express modal meanings. Some of these are formed with *be*:

*be able to*  
*be allowed to*  
*be about to*  
*be bound to*  
*be going to*  
*be likely to*  
*be obliged to*  
*be supposed to*  
etc.

Other expressions that carry modal meanings are: *be to*, *had better*, *have (got) to*, *would rather*.

Modal verbs, semi-modal verbs and other modal expressions are discussed in detail on the following pages.

### Related topics:

- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [The infinitive after modals](#)
- [Form: future simple](#)
- [Form: future continuous](#)
- [Form: future perfect](#)
- [Form: future perfect continuous](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)

# Categories of meaning expressed by modals

- Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO
- Modals to express advice: SHOULD, OUGHT TO, HAD BETTER
- Modals to express assumption: WILL, SHOULD, OUGHT TO
- Modals to express criticism: CAN, COULD, MIGHT, SHOULD
- The semi-modal DARE
- Modals to express deduction: MUST, CAN'T, COULDN'T
- Modals to express habits: WILL, WOULD, USED TO
- Modals to express intentions: BE GOING TO, WILL
- Modals to express necessity / obligation: MUST, HAVE (GOT) TO, NEED, SHOULD, OUGHT TO, SHALL
- Modals to express offers: CAN, COULD, WILL, SHALL, MAY
- Modals to express permission / prohibition: CAN, COULD, MAY, MIGHT, BE ALLOWED TO, MUSTN'T, BE TO
- Modals to express possibility: MAY, MIGHT, CAN, COULD
- Modals to express predictions: BE GOING TO, WILL
- Modals to express requests: CAN, COULD, WILL, WOULD
- Modals to express suggestions: SHOULD, COULD, MIGHT, SHALL
- The modal SHOULD to express surprise
- The modal WOULD to express unreal situations
- Modals to express willingness / unwillingness: WILL, WOULD

# Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO

## Present and future

*Can* and *be able to* can express present and future ability:

*Tom **can play** the piano.*

*We **can't enter** this street because it's blocked.*

*I **am not able to help** you at the moment.*

*If you ask him, he **can** probably **help** you.*

*I **will** probably **be able to get** there by 9.*

## Past

*Could* and *was/were able to* can express general past ability:

*I **could swim** when I was five.*

*I **was able to swim** when I was five.*

But the past ability to perform a particular action on one occasion is expressed with *was/were able to*:

*Although the current was strong, I **was able to swim** to the other bank. (I managed to swim to the other bank)*

In the sentence above *could* is not possible. However, this rule is relaxed in the negative and with verbs of the senses:

*I read it but I **couldn't understand** / **wasn't able to understand** it.*

*I **could see** / **was able to see** him through the window.*

*I **couldn't walk** / **wasn't able to walk** any further.*

*Be able to* is used to express past ability when *could* is grammatically not possible:

*I **have been able to swim** since I was five.*

## Quotes:

- *Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted. - [Albert Einstein](#)*



- *If one cannot invent a really convincing lie, it is often better to stick to the truth.* - [Angela Thirkell](#)
- *It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.* - [Aristotle](#)
- *No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.* - [Eleanor Roosevelt](#)
- *If you can find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere.* - [Frank A. Clark](#)
- *I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn't learn something from him.* - [Galileo Galilei](#)
- *There is no man living that cannot do more than he thinks he can.* - [Henry Ford](#)
- *A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment.* - [John Wooden](#)
- *It is the friends you can call up at 4 a.m. that matter.* - [Marlene Dietrich](#)
- *If you don't like something change it; if you can't change it, change the way you think about it.* - [Mary Engelbreit](#)
- *No river can return to its source, yet all rivers must have a beginning.* - [Native American proverb](#)
- *You must learn from the mistakes of others. You can't possibly live long enough to make them all yourself.* - [Samuel Levenson](#)
- *Action will remove the doubts that theory cannot solve.* - [Tehyi Hsieh](#)
- *Only in grammar can you be more than perfect.* - [William Safire](#)

## **Modals to express advice: SHOULD, OUGHT TO, HAD BETTER**

*Should, ought to and had better* can express advice:

*You **should** smoke less.*

*We'd **better** leave soon.*

*You **ought to** thank her.*

*Ought to* is less frequently used and is more formal.

# Modals to express assumption: WILL, SHOULD, OUGHT TO

## Present and future

*Will* and *should* + infinitive are used to express assumptions with reference to present and future time. Assumptions with *will* are more probable:

*"The phone's ringing." "That'll be for me."*

*There's no point in speaking louder. He won't understand.*

*I should get back before 9.*

*"Is it far from here?" "I should think so."*

*"We're going to the Swiss Alps next week." "That should be nice."*

*I have never tried to set up a website, but it shouldn't be too difficult.*

*Ought to* can be used instead of *should*, but it is less common:

*Anne ought to be at home by now.*

## Past

*Will*, *should* and *ought to* + perfect infinitive are used to express assumptions about past events:

*Some of you will have met me before.*

*The plane should have landed by now.*

## Related topics:

- [Future simple for predictions](#)

# Modals to express criticism: CAN, COULD, MIGHT, SHOULD

## Present and future

*Can, could, might* and *should/shouldn't* + infinitive are used to express criticism or disapproval with reference to present or future time:

*You **can be** really annoying, you know!*

*You **shouldn't be sitting** here just doing nothing!*

*You **might be** more polite.*

*George **could** really **help** you!*

## Past

*Could, might* and *should/shouldn't* + perfect infinitive are used to express criticism or disapproval with reference to past time:

*I **should have booked** a table in advance.*

*Of course, you feel sick. You **shouldn't have eaten** so much chocolate.*

*You **might have told** me you weren't coming!*

*George **could** really **have helped** you!*

## Quotes:

- *No city should be too large for a man to walk out of in a morning.* - [Cyril Connolly](#)

## The semi-modal DARE

*Dare* means "have the courage to do something" and can behave either as a modal verb or as a main verb:

- As a modal verb, *dare* is used in negative and interrogative sentences; it is followed by a bare infinitive:

*I **daren't think** how many victims there are.*

*How **dare** she **criticise** us?*

- *Dare* as a main verb can be followed by a bare infinitive or a *to*-infinitive:

***Do** you **dare (to)** **tell** him what happened to his bike?*

*Who **dares (to)** **argue** with me?*

*He **didn't dare (to)** **look** back.*

*No one **would have dared (to)** **think** about it.*

But in the expression *Don't you dare...*, it is always followed by a bare infinitive:

***Don't** you **dare** **interrupt** me!*

### Related topics:

- [The semi-modal NEED](#)

# Modals to express deduction: MUST, CAN'T, COULDN'T

## Present

*Must, can't* and *couldn't* + infinitive are used to express deductions about present events:

*That child is really talented. His parents **must be** proud of him.  
It's only 10 o'clock. He **can't/couldn't be** at home.*

## Past

*Must, can't* and *couldn't* + perfect infinitive are used to express deductions about past events:

*That dress looks expensive. It **must have cost** a fortune.  
It **can't/couldn't have been** Carla you saw this morning. She is away on holiday.*

## Related topics:

- [Modals to express possibility: MAY, MIGHT, CAN, COULD](#)

# Modals to express habits: WILL, WOULD, USED TO

## Present

*Would* can express annoying habits which are typical of a person:

*Tom **would do** something like that, **wouldn't** he? It's so typical of him!*

*Will* is used to emphasise the characteristics of a person rather than describing the person himself or herself:

*A friend **will** always **help** you. (this is one of the characteristics of a friend)*

## Past

### USED TO

*Used to* refers to past habits and states which were true in the past but are not true any more. It can be used with both action verbs and state verbs:

*On Sundays, my parents **used to take** me to dance school. (habit, action verb)*

*I **used to hate** dancing in those days. (state, state verb)*

The negative and interrogative forms of *used to* are:

*I **didn't use to like** dancing in those days.*

***Why did you use to hate** dancing?*

*Used to* + infinitive should not be confused with *be/get used to* + gerund (verb-ing):

*She **used to live** alone in a small apartment. (it was true in the past, but not any more)*

*She **was used to living** alone in a small apartment. (she was accustomed to it)*

*She **got used to living** alone in a small apartment. (she became accustomed to it)*

### WOULD

*Would* describes repeated past actions but not states. It can only be used with action verbs:

From time to time, he **would call** her to ask if she wanted to meet for lunch.

## USED TO or WOULD?

With action verbs, often either *used to* or *would* is possible:

*On Sundays, my parents **used to take** me to dance school.*

*On Sundays, my parents **would take** me to dance school.*

With state verbs, however, only *used to* is possible:

*\*I **would hate** dancing in those days.*

*I **used to hate** dancing in those days.*

## Quotes:

- *What you have become is the price you paid to get what you used to want. - [Mignon McLaughlin](#)*



## **Modals to express intentions: BE GOING TO, WILL**

This topic is discussed under [Future time » BE GOING TO » BE GOING TO for intentions](#) and [Future time » Future simple » Future simple for intentions \(offers, promises, decisions\)](#).

# Modals to express necessity / obligation: MUST, HAVE (GOT) TO, NEED, SHOULD, OUGHT TO, SHALL

- [Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE \(GOT\) TO](#)
- [The semi-modal NEED](#)
- [Modals to express obligation: SHOULD, OUGHT TO](#)
- [The modal SHALL to express obligation](#)

## Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE (GOT) TO

### Present and future

*Must* refers to obligations which come from the speaker and may be directed at the speaker or the listener:

*I really **must give up** smoking.* (directed at the speaker)

*You **must keep** this secret.* (directed at the listener)

*Have to* expresses external obligations, which come from outside of the speaker. These may be rules and regulations imposed by an external authority:

*I **have to get** to work by 9 every day.*

***Do you have to wear** a uniform at your school?*

Absence of obligation is expressed with the negative form of *have to*, not with *mustn't*. *Mustn't* is used to express that it is necessary not to do something:

*I **don't have to get up** early tomorrow. It's a holiday.* (I can get up late.)

*You **mustn't tell** anyone. It's a secret.* (Don't tell anyone.)

*Have got to* has the same meaning as *have to*, but it is more common in informal, spoken language. The affirmative, negative and interrogative forms of *have to* and *have got to* are:

| <i>have to</i>                                | <i>have got to</i>                             |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <i>I/you/we/they <b>have to</b> go.</i>       | <i>I/you/we/they <b>have got to</b> go.</i>    |
| <i>I/you/we/they <b>don't have to</b> go.</i> | <i>I/you/we/they <b>haven't got to</b> go.</i> |
| <i><b>Do I/you/we/they have to</b> go?</i>    | <i><b>Have I/you/we/they got to</b> go?</i>    |
| <i>He <b>has to</b> go.</i>                   | <i>He <b>has got to</b> go.</i>                |

|                                      |                                    |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>He <b>doesn't have to</b> go.</i> | <i>He <b>hasn't got to</b> go.</i> |
| <i><b>Does he have to</b> go?</i>    | <i><b>Has he got to</b> go?</i>    |

*Must and will have to* can be used to refer to future obligations:

*You **must be** home by 10 o'clock.*  
*I'll **have to pay** my bills next week.*

## Past

*Must* has no past form. Instead, we use *had to* to express past obligations:

*When I was at primary school, I **had to wear** a uniform.*  
*We **had to start** all over again.*

## Quotes:

- *Life is like riding a bicycle - in order to keep your balance, you must keep moving.* - [Albert Einstein](#)
- *A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.* - [Lao Tse](#)
- *If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.* - [Mark Twain](#)
- *Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.* - [Plato](#)
- *Some things have to be believed to be seen.* - [Ralph Hodgson](#)
- *You must learn from the mistakes of others. You can't possibly live long enough to make them all yourself.* - [Samuel Levenson](#)
- *To be successful, you have to have your heart in your business, and your business in your heart.* - [Thomas Watson, Sr.](#)
- *Life is a shipwreck but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats.* - [Voltaire](#)
- *A man must be master of his hours and days, not their servant.* - [William Frederick Book](#)

## The semi-modal NEED

### Present and future

*Need* can behave either as a modal verb or as a main verb:

- As a modal verb, *need* is most typically used in negative sentences or in affirmative sentences with a negative meaning. It expresses absence of obligation or necessity, and it is followed by a bare infinitive:

*You **needn't** worry about that.*  
*No one **need be** surprised at what happened.*  
*You **need** only just **ask**.*  
*I doubt whether I **need help** you.*

*Need* as a modal verb also occurs in interrogative sentences, but this use is much more formal:

***Need** you **make** so much noise?*

- *Need* as a main verb is followed by a *to*-infinitive and expresses that something is necessary. It can be used in affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences:

*Do you have a minute? I **need to talk** to you about something.*  
*I **don't need to be** told that I should lose weight.*  
***Do you need to use** the hairdryer?*  
*If you want good results, you **will need to work** harder.*

## Past

- The past tense of the main verb *need to* is *needed to*:

*I **needed to have** my hair cut.*  
*Why **did** they **need to change** the lock?*

The negative form *didn't need to* + *to*-infinitive normally refers to actions which were unnecessary and were not performed:

*We **didn't need to buy** any milk. We had plenty at home. (we didn't have to buy any milk, and we didn't buy any)*

- *Need* as a modal does not have a past tense form. *Needn't* + perfect bare infinitive (*have* + past participle), however, is used for actions which were performed but were unnecessary:

*We **needn't have bought** any milk. We still have plenty at home. (we bought some milk, but it wasn't necessary)*

## Quotes:

- *Gossip needn't be false to be evil - there's a lot of truth that shouldn't be passed around.* - [Frank A. Clark](#)

## Related topics:

- [The semi-modal DARE](#)

## Modals to express obligation: SHOULD, OUGHT TO

### Present and future

*Should* and *ought to* + infinitive express obligation and duty. *Should* is used when we offer a subjective opinion, while *ought to* has a more general and more objective meaning:

*I think you **should** leave.*

*We **ought to** protect the environment.*

### Past

*Should* and *ought to* + perfect infinitive express that an action which was desirable was not performed:

*You **should have consulted** a doctor.*

*You **ought to have told** me earlier. Why didn't you tell me?*

### Quotes:

- *Gossip needn't be false to be evil - there's a lot of truth that shouldn't be passed around.* - [Frank A. Clark](#)
- *We should read to give our souls a chance to luxuriate.* - [Henry Miller](#)
- *Every English poet should master the rules of grammar before he attempts to bend or break them.* - [Robert Graves](#)

## The modal SHALL to express obligation

*Shall* is used to express formal rules and regulations or commands in an archaic style:

*Visitors **shall be** accompanied at all times by a security guard.*

*You **shall not** kill.*

## **Modals to express offers: CAN, COULD, WILL, SHALL, MAY**

*Can, could, will, shall and may* are used to express offers:

***Can I help you?***

***May I carry your suitcase, Madam?*** (only in first-person questions)

***I could give you a lift.***

***Shall I copy this document for you?*** (only in first-person questions)

***I will make you a coffee.***

# Modals to express permission / prohibition: CAN, COULD, MAY, MIGHT, BE ALLOWED TO, MUSTN'T, BE TO

## Present and future

*Can* and *may* are used to give permission. *May* is more formal and less common in everyday contexts:

*You **can** borrow my car if you want.*

*Children **may** use the pool with adult supervision.*

The negative forms *cannot/can't*, *mustn't* and *may not* (more formal) are used to express prohibitions:

*I'm sorry, but you **can't** stay here.*

*You **mustn't** touch that Ming vase.*

*Non-committee members **may not** vote on committee issues.*

Used in the negative, *be to* can also express prohibitions:

*You **are not to** do that again!*

*Can*, *could* and *may* are used to ask for permission. *Can* is the most direct of the three, *could* is more formal and tentative, and *may* is the most formal:

***Can** I use your phone?*

***Could** I have a glass of water?*

***May** I start my presentation?*

*Might*, which has a more tentative meaning, is very formal and is rarely used:

***Might** I ask you a question?*

When we talk about permission but we are not actually giving, refusing or asking for it, we can use *can/can't* or *be allowed to*:

*Students **can** choose any topic for their project.*

*We **can't** eat in the library.*

***Are** we **allowed to** smoke in this restaurant?*

***Will** journalists **be allowed to** ask questions?*

## Past

*Could* can be used to express general permission in the past:

*When I was a child, I **could do** basically anything that I wanted to do.*

But when we talk about a particular action which was permitted and performed, we use *was/were allowed to*:

*Although I was underage, I **was allowed to enter** the race.*



# Modals to express possibility: MAY, MIGHT, CAN, COULD

## Present and future

*May* and *might* + infinitive are used to express present or future possibility. *May* expresses a greater degree of certainty:

*You should ask him. He **may/might know** Susan's telephone number.*  
(Perhaps he knows her number.)

*I **may/might see** you later.* (Perhaps I will see you later.)

*You should introduce yourself; he **may/might not remember** you.* (Perhaps she doesn't/won't remember you.)

*May* and *might* are usually not used to introduce a question. Instead, we can use *Do you think?* or *be likely to / be likely that*:

***Do you think** he **may/might know** Susan's telephone number?*

***Are you likely to get** here before 8?*

***Is it likely that** you will get here before 8?*

*Could* can be used instead of *may* and *might* with the verb *be*:

*You **could be** right.*

*They **could still be waiting** for us.*

The negative form *couldn't* is often used with comparative adjectives:

*The food is delicious, and the staff **couldn't be** more polite.* (they are very polite)

Except for this use, *couldn't* expresses negative deduction, not possibility:

*It's only 10 o'clock. He **couldn't be** at home.* (He is usually at work at this time of the day.)

*Can* may express general possibility:

*Winters in Minnesota **can be** really cold.*

## Past

*May, might and could* + perfect infinitive express uncertainty with reference to past actions:

*We haven't heard from him for ten years. He **may/might/could have died**.*  
(Perhaps he has died, but we don't know.)

But when we want to say that something was possible but did not happen, we use *might* or *could*:

*He was very careless when crossing the road. He **might/could have died**.*  
(He didn't die.)

*I **could have caught** the bus if I had hurried.* (I didn't hurry, so I didn't catch the bus.)

*Couldn't* + perfect infinitive is often used with comparative adjectives:

*It was a great year, and I **couldn't have been** happier.* (I was very happy)

*May/might not* + perfect infinitive is used for uncertainty, but *could not* + perfect infinitive (except for the case above) expresses deduction:

*I had better call Anne. She **may/might not have read** my e-mail.*  
(uncertainty)

*It **couldn't have been** John you saw this morning. He is away on holiday.*  
(deduction)

### Quotes:

- *It is never too late to be who you might have been.* - [George Eliot](#)
- *If you don't know where you're going, you might never get there.* - [Yogi Berra](#)

### Related topics:

- [Modals to express deduction: MUST, CAN'T, COULDN'T](#)

## **Modals to express predictions: BE GOING TO, WILL**

This topic is discussed under [Future time » BE GOING TO » BE GOING TO for predictions](#) and [Future time » Future simple » Future simple for predictions](#).

## **Modals to express requests: CAN, COULD, WILL, WOULD**

*Can, could, will and would* are used to express requests:

*Can you lend me \$10?*

*Can I borrow your car?*

*Could you tell me where the train station is?*

*Could I have a cigarette?*

*Will you turn off your mobile phone, please?*

*Would you open the door for me?*

*Would you mind stepping outside for a moment?*

## Modals to express suggestions: SHOULD, COULD, MIGHT, SHALL

*Should, could, might and shall* are used to express suggestions:

*Shouldn't we have a pizza instead?*

You *could talk* to your parents and *ask* them.

You *might consider* taking up meditation.

*Shall we throw* a party sometime next week?

*Might* is often used with *want* or *like* to add politeness:

*I thought you might want/like to read this.*

*May/might as well* is often used in everyday conversation to suggest something when you can't think of anything better to do:

*We may as well call it off.*

You *might just as well order* it on the internet.

### Quotes:

- *No city should be too large for a man to walk out of in a morning.* - [Cyril Connolly](#)

## The modal **SHOULD** to express surprise

*Should* in *that*-clauses is used as an alternative to present or past tenses to express surprise or disbelief:

*I'm sorry that he **should feel** that way.*

*It's funny that we **should be living** in the same block of flats.*

*It's surprising that she **should have said** that.*

# The modal **WOULD** to express unreal situations

## Present and future

*Would* + infinitive can refer to unreal situations in the present or future. An unreal situation is one which is not true in the present or one which may or may not happen in the future:

*It **would be** nice to live by the sea.* (I don't live by the sea)

*It **would be** great to go hiking in the Appalachians again.* (I may or may not go)

*Would* is often used in the main clause of a sentence in the second conditional:

*I **wouldn't do** that if I were you.* (I am not you)

*I **would help** you if you asked me to.* (you may or may not ask me)

## Past

*Would* + perfect infinitive refers to unreal situations in the past. We imagine a hypothetical past situation which did not happen. We often use an *if*-clause to describe the situation:

*It **would have been** wonderful to meet you in person.*

*I **would have helped** you if you had asked me to.* (you didn't ask me)

## Quotes:

- *What would I do if I had only six months left to live? I'd type faster.* - [Isaac Asimov](#)
- *If it weren't for the fact that the TV set and the refrigerator are so far apart, some of us wouldn't get any exercise at all.* - [Joey Adams](#)
- *If people behaved like governments, you'd call the cops.* - [Kelvin Throop](#)
- *The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears.* - [Native American proverb](#)
- *How old would you be if you didn't know how old you were?* - [Satchel Paige](#)
- *We would accomplish many more things if we did not think of them as impossible.* - [Vince Lombardi](#)

## Related topics:

- [Second conditional](#)

- [Third conditional](#)



# Modals to express willingness / unwillingness: WILL, WOULD

## Present

*Will* can express willingness in the present:

*I **will take** you to the airport. I have nothing to do tomorrow.  
If you **will wait** for a moment, I'll see if Mr Hawking is available.*

*Won't* can express unwillingness or refusal:

*My bank **won't allow** me to make international transactions.  
Greg just **won't answer** the phone.  
The door **won't open**.*

## Past

*Wouldn't* can express unwillingness or refusal in the past:

*I took the phone back to the shop, but they **wouldn't give** me a replacement.  
Try as I might, the door **wouldn't open**.*

## Quotes:

- *If cats could talk, they wouldn't.* - [Nan Porter](#)
- *I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.* - [Thomas Edison](#)

# Other modal expressions

- [BE ABOUT + TO-infinitive](#)
- [BE BOUND + TO-infinitive](#)
- [BE DUE + TO-infinitive](#)
- [BE LIKELY + TO-infinitive / IT IS LIKELY + THAT-clause](#)
- [BE ON THE EDGE / POINT / VERGE OF \(doing\) something](#)
- [BE + TO-infinitive](#)

## **BE ABOUT + TO-infinitive**

*Be about + to-infinitive* refers to arranged actions that happen in the immediate future. It is often used with *just*:

*Hurry up! The ceremony **is about to begin!***

*"Do you have a minute?" "I'm sorry, I'm **just about to leave.**"*

## **BE BOUND + TO-infinitive**

*Be bound + to-infinitive* is used to refer to future events which are certain or very likely to happen:

*Kevin is stuck in a traffic jam, so he **is bound to be** late.*

### **Quotes:**

- *April is a promise that May is bound to keep.* - [Hal Borland](#)

## **BE DUE + TO-infinitive**

*Be due + to-infinitive* is used to refer to fixed events happening at or within a specific time:

*The film **is due to start** at 8 pm.*

*Half of our employees **are due to retire** in five years.*

*Negotiations **were due to take place** later that week.*

## **BE LIKELY + TO-infinitive / IT IS LIKELY + THAT-clause**

*Be likely + to-infinitive* and *it is likely + that-clause* are used for future events which are probably going to happen:

*Smokers **are more likely to develop** lung cancer compared to non-smokers.  
It **is likely that** he will win the race.*

## **BE ON THE EDGE / POINT / VERGE OF (doing) something**

The expressions *be on the edge / point / verge of (doing) something* refer to actions that happen in the near future and have a meaning similar to *be about to*:

*She is on the point of bursting into tears.*

*Researchers are on the verge of a breakthrough.*

## BE + TO-infinitive

Be + to-infinitive is used to express:

- official arrangements:

*The Prime Minister **is to visit** India next month.*

- official orders:

*At the end of the course, all students **are to take** a written exam.*

- things that should be done:

*What **am I to do**?*

- a possible aim when saying what should be done to reach it:

*If you **are to work** here for more than three months, you must have a residence permit.*

- prohibition (only in the negative):

*You **are not to do** that again.*

Be + to-infinitive can also be used in the past:

*Mr Jones **was to speak** at the meeting. (it was arranged and he did)*

But *was/were + to + perfect infinitive* means that the arranged event did not actually happen:

*Mr Jones **was to have spoken** at the meeting, but he had to cancel because of his illness.*

### Quotes:

- *Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood.* - [Marie Curie](#)



# Overview of modals

Modal verbs, semi-modal verbs (also called marginal modals) and other modal expressions are listed in alphabetical order on the following pages. For a detailed discussion of each meaning click on the links.

## BE ABLE TO

- [General ability](#)

*I am not able to help you at the moment.*

*I will probably be able to get there by nine.*

*I was able to swim when I was 5.*

- ["Manage to"](#)

*Although the current was strong, I was able to swim to the other bank.*

## BE ALLOWED TO

- [General permission](#)

*Are we allowed to smoke in this restaurant?*

*Will journalists be allowed to ask questions?*

- [Permission + action performed](#)

*Although I was underage, I was allowed to enter the race.*

## BE BOUND TO

- [Probability, certainty](#)

*Kevin is stuck in a traffic jam, so he is bound to be late.*

## BE DUE TO

- [Arrangements](#)

*The film is due to start at 8 pm.*

*Negotiations were due to take place later that week.*

## BE GOING TO

- [Intention](#)

*Do you think Sam's **going to apply** for the job?  
I was **going to call** you, but my battery died.*

- [Prediction](#)

*My sister **is going to have** a baby.  
The sky was dark; it **was going to rain**.*

## BE LIKELY TO

- [Probability](#)

*Smokers **are more likely to develop** lung cancer compared to non-smokers.  
He knew that he **was likely to be** promoted.*

## BE LIKELY THAT

- [Probability](#)

***It is likely that** he will win the race.  
**It was likely that** Mrs Hancock would become president.*

## BE TO

- [Arrangements + action performed](#)

*Mr Jones **was to speak** at the meeting.*

- [Arrangements + action not performed](#)

*Mr Jones **was to have spoken** at the meeting, but he had to cancel because of his illness.*

- [Obligation](#)

*What **am I to do**?*

- [Official arrangements](#)

The Prime Minister **is to visit** India next month.

- [Official orders](#)

At the end of the course, all students **are to take** a written exam.

- [Prohibition](#)

You **are not to do** that again!

## CAN

- [Ability](#)

Tom **can play** the piano.

If you ask him, he **can probably help** you.

- [Criticism](#)

You **can be** really annoying, you know!

- [Offers](#)

**Can I help** you?

- [Permission](#)

You **can borrow** my car if you want.

**Can I use** your phone?

Students **can choose** any topic for their project.

- [Possibility](#)

Winters in Minnesota **can be** really cold.

- [Requests](#)

**Can you lend** me \$10?

**Can I borrow** your car?

## CAN'T

- [Ability](#)

We **can't enter** this street because it's blocked.

- [Deduction](#)

*It's only 10 o'clock. He **can't be** at home.*

*It **can't have been** Carla you saw this morning. She is away on holiday.*

- [Prohibition](#)

*I'm sorry, but you **can't stay** here.*

*We **can't eat** in the library.*

## COULD

- [Ability](#)

*I **could see** him through the window.*

- [Criticism](#)

*George **could** really **help** you!*

*George **could** really **have helped** you!*

- [Offers](#)

*I **could give** you a lift.*

- [General permission](#)

*When I was a child, I **could do** basically anything that I wanted to do.*

- [Asking for permission](#)

***Could I have** a glass of water?*

- [Possibility](#)

*You **could be** right.*

*I **could have caught** the bus if I had hurried.*

- [Suggestions](#)

*You **could talk** to your parents and ask them.*

- [Requests](#)

*Could you tell me where the train station is?*

- [Uncertainty](#)

*We haven't heard from him for 10 years. He **could have died**.*

## COULDN'T

- [Ability](#)

*She **couldn't speak** German then.  
I **couldn't walk** any further.*

- [Deduction](#)

*It's only 10 o'clock. He **couldn't be** at home.  
It **couldn't have been** Carla you saw this morning. She is away on holiday.*

- [Possibility](#)

*The food is delicious and the staff **couldn't be** more polite.  
It was a great year, and I **couldn't have been** happier.*

## DARE

- ["Have the courage to do something"](#)

*How **dare** she **criticise** us?  
I **daren't think** how many victims there are.*

## DARE (TO)

- ["Have the courage to do something"](#)

*Do you **dare (to)** tell him what happened to his bike?  
Don't you **dare interrupt** me!  
Who **dares (to)** argue with me?  
He **didn't dare (to)** look back.*

## HAD BETTER

- [Advice](#)

*We'd better leave soon.*

## HAVE TO

- [Necessity, obligation](#)

*I **have to** get to work by 9 every day.*

*You **don't have to** answer that question.*

*Do you **have to** wear a uniform at your school?*

*We **had to** start all over again.*

*I **didn't have to** wait long.*

*What **did** you **have to do** that for?*

## HAVE GOT TO

- [Necessity, obligation](#)

*I've **got to be** home soon.*

*You **haven't got to go** already, have you?*

*Has he **got to pay** in advance?*

## MAY

- [Offers](#)

*May I **carry** your suitcase, Madam?*

- [Permission](#)

*Children **may use** the pool with adult supervision.*

*May I **start** my presentation?*

- [Possibility, uncertainty](#)

*You should ask him. He **may know** Susan's telephone number.*

*I **may have told** you this before.*

## MAY NOT

- [Possibility, uncertainty](#)

*You should introduce yourself; he **may not remember** you.*

*I had better call Anne. She **may not have read** my e-mail.*

- [Prohibition](#)

*Non-committee members **may not vote** on committee issues.*

## MIGHT

- [Criticism](#)

*You **might be** more polite.*

*You **might have told** me you weren't coming!*

- [Permission](#)

***Might I ask** you a question?*

- [Possibility, uncertainty](#)

*I **might see** you later.*

*I should call Anne. She **might not have read** my e-mail.*

- [Suggestions](#)

*You **might consider** taking up meditation.*

*I thought you **might want to read** this.*

*You **might just as well order** it on the internet.*

## MUST

- [Deduction](#)

*That child is really talented. His parents **must be** proud of him.*

*That dress looks expensive. It **must have cost** a fortune.*

- [Obligation](#)

*I really **must give up** smoking.*

*You **must keep** this secret.*

## MUSTN'T

- [Prohibition](#)

*You **mustn't touch** that Ming vase.*

## NEED

- [Necessity, obligation](#)

*You **needn't** worry about that.*

*You **need only just ask**.*

***Need** you **make** so much noise?*

*We **needn't have bought** any milk. We still have plenty at home.*

## NEED TO

- [Necessity, obligation](#)

*Do you have a minute? I **need to talk** to you about something.*

*I **don't need to be told** that I should lose weight.*

*Do you **need to use** the hairdryer?*

*If you want good results, you **will need to work** harder.*

*I **needed to have** my hair cut.*

*Why **did** they **need to change** the lock?*

*We **didn't need to buy** any milk. We had plenty at home.*

## OUGHT TO

- [Advice](#)

*You **ought to thank** her.*

- [Assumption](#)

*Anne **ought to be** at home by now.*

- [Obligation](#)

*We **ought to protect** the environment.*

*You **ought to have told** me earlier. Why didn't you tell me?*

## SHALL

- [Formal rules and regulations, commands](#)

*Visitors **shall be accompanied** at all times by a security guard.*

*You **shall not kill**.*



- [Offers](#)

*Shall I copy this document for you?*

- [Suggestions](#)

*Shall we throw a party sometime next week?*

## SHOULD

- [Advice](#)

*You should smoke less.*

- [Assumption](#)

*I should get back before 9.*

*I have never tried setting up a website, but it shouldn't be too difficult.*

*The plane should have landed by now.*

- [Criticism](#)

*You shouldn't be sitting here just doing nothing!*

*I should have booked a table in advance.*

- [Obligation](#)

*I think you should leave.*

*You should have consulted a doctor.*

- [Suggestions](#)

*Shouldn't we have a pizza instead?*

- [Surprise](#)

*I'm sorry that he should feel that way.*

*It's surprising that she should have said that.*

## USED TO

- [Past habits and states](#)

*On Sundays, my parents used to take me to dance school.*

*I **didn't use to like** dancing in those days.*

## WILL

- [Assumption](#)

*"The phone's ringing." "That'll **be** for me."  
There's no point in speaking louder. He **won't understand**.  
Some of you **will have met** me before.*

- [Habits](#)

*A friend **will** always **help** you.*

- [Intentions \(spontaneous offers, promises, decisions\)](#)

*Come on, I'll **help** you with those bags.  
I **will** always **love** you.  
I'll **have** a wiener schnitzel.*

- [Prediction](#)

*If you ask him, he'll probably **give** you a lift.  
Salty water **will freeze** at a lower temperature than pure water.*

- [Requests](#)

***Will** you **turn off** your mobile phone, please?*

- [Willingness](#)

*I **will take** you to the airport. I have nothing to do tomorrow.  
If you **will wait** for a moment, I'll see if Mr Hawking is available.*

## WON'T

- [Unwillingness, refusal](#)

*My bank **won't allow** me to make international transactions.  
Greg just **won't answer** the phone.  
The door **won't open**.*

## WOULD

- [Habitual, repeated actions](#)

*From time to time, he **would call** her to ask if she wanted to meet for lunch.*

- [Annoying habits](#)

*Tom **would do** something like that, wouldn't he? It's so typical of him!*

- [Requests](#)

***Would** you **open** the door for me?*

***Would** you **mind** stepping outside for a moment?*

- [Unreal situations](#)

*It **would be** nice to live by the sea.*

*It **would be** great to go hiking in the Appalachians again.*

*I **would help** you if you asked me to.*

*It **would have been** wonderful to meet you in person.*

*I **would have helped** you if you had asked me to.*

## WOULDN'T

- [Unwillingness](#)

*I took the phone back to the shop, but they **wouldn't give** me a replacement.*

*Try as I might, the door **wouldn't open**.*

# Modals and adverbs

Adverbs are often used with modals to add to their meaning:

***Surely** you can't have said that to her!*

*I might **just** tell you all about it.*

*I could **easily** have been hurt.*

*You **really** shouldn't have gone to so much trouble.*

*I will **definitely** call you tomorrow.*

*You can't **possibly** be serious.*

*She **obviously** must have forgotten it.*

*He could **probably** help us a lot.*

*I can't **exactly** remember when I first met her.*

*You should **absolutely** take up that course.*

# Modals in indirect speech

This topic is discussed under [Indirect speech » Changes in indirect speech » Modal changes in indirect speech](#).

# Revision questions: modals

- What is the past equivalent of *I must give up smoking*: *I had to give up smoking* or *I must have given up smoking*?
- What time does *It was going to rain* refer to?
- Can we use a perfect infinitive after a modal verb that refers to past time?
- What does *He might have died* mean?
- What is the difference between *I didn't need to worry*, *I needn't have worried* and *I shouldn't have worried*?
- What does *can't* in *You can't be serious* express: ability, deduction or prohibition?
- Which modals can be used to express suggestions, offers and requests?
- What is the difference in usage between *can* and *may* for permission?
- What is the difference in usage between *used to* and *would* for past habits?
- Can *will* be used to refer to past time?

# Exercises: modals

## Modals - Exercise 1

**Match the sentences with the meanings of modals.**

1. Can you tell me the way to the nearest ATM?
2. Can you swim?
3. Can I help you?
4. You must not use a dictionary during the exam.
5. She must have been feeling lonely.
6. You must tell me the truth.
7. Shall we order something?
8. You should've asked me first.
9. They might be taking a nap.
10. We needn't have hurried after all.

1. ability
2. criticism
3. deduction
4. necessity
5. obligation
6. offer
7. possibility
8. prohibition
9. request
10. suggestion

## Modals - Exercise 2

**Match the sentences which have a similar meaning.**

1. It wasn't a good idea for her to buy that car.
2. It would be a good idea for her to buy that car.
3. I'm sure she bought that car.
4. It's possible that she bought that car.
5. It wasn't necessary for her to buy that car, but she did.
6. It isn't necessary for her to buy that car.
7. Her plan is to buy that car.
8. She has enough money to buy that car.
9. She had enough money but she didn't buy that car.

10. It's possible that she won't buy that car.

1. She can buy that car.
2. She could have bought that car.
3. She is going to buy that car.
4. She may have bought that car.
5. She might not buy that car.
6. She must have bought that car.
7. She needn't buy that car.
8. She needn't have bought that car.
9. She should buy that car.
10. She shouldn't have bought that car.

## **Modals - Exercise 3**

**Choose the best answer for each of the following sentences.**

1. You ... so much fast food! It's very unhealthy.
  1. needn't eat
  2. shouldn't eat
  3. don't have to eat
2. I'm not sure, but I think I ... in the garden when the postman came.
  1. may have been weeding
  2. can have been weeding
  3. must have been weeding
3. ... a bit louder? It's very noisy in here.
  1. Need you talk
  2. Must you talk
  3. Would you talk
4. You ... in this part of the restaurant. There's a No Smoking sign!
  1. mustn't smoke
  2. needn't smoke
  3. don't have to smoke
5. Oliver left early last night and we ... in touch with him since.
  1. couldn't get
  2. weren't able to get
  3. haven't been able to get
6. ... the wrong number?
  1. Could I have dialled
  2. Must I have dialled
  3. Need I have dialled
7. Sorry, I'm late. I ... some shopping.
  1. must have done



2. had to do
3. need to do
8. You ... me you were not coming. I was expecting you. Why didn't you call?
  1. might have told
  2. must have told
  3. had to tell
9. You ... lost! Next time take a map with you.
  1. could have got
  2. may have got
  3. should have got
10. That was a long journey. You ... exhausted!
  1. have to be
  2. must be
  3. can be

## Modals - Exercise 4

**Complete each sentence with one of the following modals and the appropriate form of the verb in brackets.**

can, could, had better, have to, may, need, used to, will

1. Isabella ... here for very long. She only speaks a few words of Hungarian. (NOT LIVE)
2. Look at all the leftover sandwiches! We ... so much food for the party. (NOT PREPARE)
3. Can you see that turn left sign? It means we ... left here. (TURN)
4. It was a great time, and I ... happier. (NOT BE)
5. You ... packing if you want to catch the 3.30 plane. (START)
6. I ... much when I was in secondary school, but now I do. (NOT READ)
7. ... you ... this for me, please? (HOLD)
8. Pupils ... in the corridor. It's a school rule. (NOT RUN)
9. We ... more often, don't you think? (GO OUT)
10. ... I ... you something to drink? (GET)

## Modals - Exercise 5

**Complete the questions with the modals below and then discuss them with your partner. Ask for more information.**

be able to, be allowed to, be going to, can, could, have to, should, used to, will, would

1. ... you play a musical instrument?
2. ... you swim when you were 6 years old?
3. ... you like to ... speak five languages?
4. Did you ... wear a uniform when you were at school?
5. Do you think you ... study harder?
6. ... you stay out late when you were a teenager?
7. Do you think you should ... use your mobile during an exam?
8. Is there any food that you ... like but you don't like now?
9. What ... you ... do after this lesson?
10. Do you think you ... ever speak perfect English?

## Answer key: modals

### Answer key - Modals - Exercise 1

1. Can you tell me the way to the nearest ATM? **(9) request**
2. Can you swim? **(1) ability**
3. Can I help you? **(6) offer**
4. You must not use a dictionary during the exam. **(8) prohibition**
5. She must have been feeling lonely. **(3) deduction**
6. You must tell me the truth. **(5) obligation**
7. Shall we order something? **(10) suggestion**
8. You should've asked me first. **(2) criticism**
9. They might be taking a nap. **(7) possibility**
10. We needn't have hurried after all. **(4) necessity**

### Answer key - Modals - Exercise 2

1. It wasn't a good idea for her to buy that car. **(10) She shouldn't have bought that car.**
2. It would be a good idea for her to buy that car. **(9) She should buy that car.**
3. I'm sure she bought that car. **(6) She must have bought that car.**
4. It's possible that she bought that car. **(4) She may have bought that car.**
5. It wasn't necessary for her to buy that car, but she did. **(8) She needn't have bought that car.**
6. It isn't necessary for her to buy that car. **(7) She needn't buy that car.**
7. Her plan is to buy that car. **(3) She is going to buy that car.**
8. She has enough money to buy that car. **(1) She can buy that car.**
9. She had enough money but she didn't buy that car. **(2) She could have bought that car.**
10. It's possible that she won't buy that car. **(5) She might not buy that car.**

## Answer key - Modals - Exercise 3

1. You ... so much fast food! It's very unhealthy. **(2) shouldn't eat**
2. I'm not sure, but I think I ... in the garden when the postman came. **(1) may have been weeding**
3. ... a bit louder? It's very noisy in here. **(3) Would you talk**
4. You ... in this part of the restaurant. There's a No Smoking sign! **(1) mustn't smoke**
5. Oliver left early last night and we ... in touch with him since. **(3) haven't been able to get**
6. ... the wrong number? **(1) Could I have dialled**
7. Sorry, I'm late. I ... some shopping. **(2) had to do**
8. You ... me you were not coming. I was expecting you. Why didn't you call? **(1) might have told**
9. You ... lost! Next time take a map with you. **(1) could have got**
10. That was a long journey. You ... exhausted! **(2) must be**

## Answer key - Modals - Exercise 4

1. Isabella **can't have been living** here for very long. She only speaks a few words of Hungarian.
2. Look at all the leftover sandwiches! We **needn't have prepared** so much food for the party.
3. Can you see that turn left sign? It means we **have to turn** left here.
4. It was a great time, and I **couldn't have been** happier.
5. You **had better start** packing if you want to catch the 3.30 plane. / You **need to start** packing if you want to catch the 3.30 plane.
6. I **didn't use to read** much when I was in secondary school, but now I do.
7. **Will/Can/Could** you **hold** this for me, please?
8. Pupils **may not run** in the corridor. / Pupils **can't run** in the corridor. It's a school rule.
9. We **could go out** more often, don't you think?
10. **Can/Could/May** I **get** you something to drink?

## Answer key - Modals - Exercise 5

1. **Can** you play a musical instrument?
2. **Could** you swim when you were 6 years old?
3. **Would** you like to **be able to** speak five languages?
4. Did you **have to** wear a uniform when you were at school?
5. Do you think you **should** study harder?
6. **Could** you stay out late when you were a teenager?

7. Do you think you should **be allowed to** use your mobile during an exam?
8. Is there any food that you **used to** like but you don't like now?
9. What **are** you **going to** do after this lesson?
10. Do you think you **will** ever speak perfect English?

# Chapter 3: Conditionals and unreal tenses

- [Guiding questions: conditionals and unreal tenses](#)
- [Unreal tenses](#)
- [Conditionals](#)
- [WISH / IF ONLY](#)
- [IT'S \(HIGH\) TIME](#)
- [AS IF / AS THOUGH](#)
- [WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER](#)
- [Conditionals in indirect speech](#)
- [Revision questions: conditionals and unreal tenses](#)
- [Exercises: conditionals and unreal tenses](#)

# Guiding questions: conditionals and unreal tenses

- What are the types of conditionals?
- What are unreal tenses?
- Which conditionals can be mixed?
- Which modals can be used in conditionals?
- What is the similarity between conditionals and sentences starting with *I wish...* / *If only...*?

# Unreal tenses

Unreal tenses are verb forms used in subordinate clauses that express unreal or hypothetical situations:

- The past subjunctive, which has the same form as the past simple tense, is used to refer to present or future time:

*I wish you **were** here. (you are not here)*

*What would you do if you **won** the lottery? (you probably won't win the lottery)*

- The past perfect subjunctive, which has the same form as the past perfect tense, is used to refer to past time:

*If I **had gone** to bed earlier, I wouldn't have overslept. (I didn't go to bed earlier)*

*He seems as if he **hadn't slept** for days. (it seems that he hasn't slept for days, but actually he has)*

Unreal tenses are used in second and third conditionals and after *wish / if only, as if / as though, it's (high) time* and *would rather / would sooner*.

## Related topics:

- [Past subjunctive](#)
- [Past perfect subjunctive](#)

# Conditionals

Conditional sentences usually consist of a subordinate *if*-clause and a main clause. The order of the clauses is optional, but if the *if*-clause is first, a comma is used to separate the two clauses:

*You might have been accepted if you had applied earlier.  
If you had applied earlier, you might have been accepted.*

If the *if*-clause is first, we can use *then* in the main clause:

*If you had applied earlier, **then** you might have been accepted.*

The different types of conditionals, which are discussed on the following pages, may refer to different times (future, present, past) and express different degrees of reality. The choice of verb forms used in conditionals depends on whether the condition is true, probable or unreal.

If the condition is true or probable, we use real tenses:

*If you **missed** the 6 o'clock train, you **won't get** here before 7.* (the condition is true: you missed the train; here *missed* refers to the past and *won't get* to future time)

*If you **miss** the 6 o'clock train, you **won't get** here before 7.* (the condition is probable: you may miss the train; here *miss* and *won't get* refer to future time)

If the condition is unreal, we use unreal tenses:

*If you **missed** the 6 o'clock train, you **wouldn't get** here before 7.* (the condition is unreal or improbable: you probably won't miss the train; here the past subjunctive form *missed* and *wouldn't get* refer to future time)

*If you **had missed** the 6 o'clock train, you **wouldn't have got** here before 7.* (the condition is unreal: you didn't miss the train; here the past perfect subjunctive form *had missed* and *wouldn't have got* refer to past time)

- [Zero conditional](#)
- [First conditional](#)
- [Second conditional](#)
- [Third conditional](#)



- Mixed conditionals
- IF, EVEN IF, ONLY IF, AS LONG AS, PROVIDED, SUPPOSING, UNLESS, BUT FOR, IF NECESSARY, IF SO, IN CASE etc.
- Less likely conditions
- Conditionals and inversion

# Zero conditional

IF + PRESENT TENSE | PRESENT TENSE  
IF + PAST TENSE | PAST TENSE

The zero conditional expresses that something is (or was) always true or that one action is (or was) always followed by another:

*If you **heat** water to 100 degrees Celsius, it **boils**.*  
*If John **is cursing**, it **means** that he **is** very angry.*

*If I **got** home late, my mom **scolded** me.*  
*If she **was** sad, she just **stared** into the distance without saying a word.*

In this type of conditional, we can use *when* instead of *if*:

***If/When** John is cursing, it means that he is very angry.*

## Quotes:

- *If one cannot invent a really convincing lie, it is often better to stick to the truth. - [Angela Thirkell](#)*
- *If you can find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere. - [Frank A. Clark](#)*
- *The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you are still a rat. - [Lily Tomlin](#)*
- *If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything. - [Mark Twain](#)*
- *If you don't know where you're going, you might never get there. - [Yogi Berra](#)*

## Related topics:

- [Present simple for general truths](#)

# First conditional

IF + PRESENT TENSE | WILL + INFINITIVE

The first conditional describes a probable future situation. If the condition is fulfilled, the action in the main clause is likely to happen:

*If we **don't leave** soon, we **will miss** the train.  
If you **ask** him, he **will probably help** you.*

In this type of conditional, the present tenses in the *if*-clause usually refer to future time and their use is similar to that in future time clauses. Sometimes, however, a present tense in the *if*-clause can refer to present time:

*If you **are** hungry, you'll find some sandwiches in the fridge.*

Compare the zero and the first conditionals:

*If I **drink** too much, I usually **get** a hangover the following day.* (zero conditional to refer to a general situation; one action is always followed by another)

*If I **drink** too much, I **will get** a hangover tomorrow.* (first conditional to refer to one specific future situation)

## Quotes:

- *If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.* - [Booker T. Washington](#)
- *You will never find time for anything. If you want time, you must make it.* - [Charles Buxton](#)
- *You will never win if you never begin.* - [Helen Rowland](#)
- *If you do not sow in the spring, you will not reap in the autumn.* - [Irish proverb](#)
- *If you're in a bad situation, don't worry it'll change. If you're in a good situation, don't worry it'll change.* - [John A. Simone, Sr.](#)

## Related topics:

- [Future time clauses](#)

## Present continuous in the first conditional

The present continuous can be used in the *if*-clause of a sentence in the first conditional to refer to a present action or a future arrangement:

*If you **are looking** for Molly, you'll find her upstairs in her room.* (present action)

*If you **are staying** for the weekend, we'll go to the cinema.* (future arrangement)

### Related topics:

- [Present continuous for actions in progress at the time of speaking](#)
- [Present continuous for fixed future arrangements](#)

## Present perfect in the first conditional

The present perfect in the *if*-clause of a sentence in the first conditional emphasises that one action depends on the completion of another:

*If I've **finished** writing my paper by tonight, I'll go out with my friends.*

## Imperatives in the first conditional

Imperatives can be used to replace either clause of the first conditional:

*If you've done the dishes, please **mop** the floor.*

***Tidy up** your room, and you can go out to play football with your friends.*

### Quotes:

- *If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.* - [Booker T. Washington](#)
- *If you don't think every day is a good day, just try missing one.* - [Cavett Robert](#)
- *If you're in a bad situation, don't worry it'll change. If you're in a good situation, don't worry it'll change.* - [John A. Simone, Sr.](#)
- *If you want to be happy, be.* - [Leo Tolstoy](#)
- *If you don't like something change it; if you can't change it, change the way you think about it.* - [Mary Engelbreit](#)

## Modals in the first conditional

## Main clause

We can use modals other than *will* in the main clause of a sentence in the first conditional:

*If you ask George, he **may/might be** able to help you.* (possibility)

*You **can/may leave** the room if you've finished the test.* (permission)

*If he doesn't come soon, we **must / will have to leave** without him.*  
(obligation)

*If you ever go to Chicago, you **should take** a boat trip on the river.*  
(suggestion)

*If you don't watch your steps, you **are going to fall** over.* (prediction)

## If-clause

We can use *be going to* in the *if*-clause to express intention:

*If you **are going to speak** like that, you'll have to leave.*

*Should* in the *if*-clause makes the condition less likely:

*If you **should see** Kate, say hi from me.*

In the *if*-clause, willingness can be expressed by *will* and refusal by *won't*. In this sense *will* and *won't* are always stressed in speech and cannot be contracted with the subject in writing:

*If you **will take** me to the airport tomorrow, I won't have to take a taxi.*

*If Greg **won't answer** the phone, I'll speak to his roommate.*

We can also use *will* in the *if*-clause to express a polite request. Sometimes the main clause is omitted:

*If you **will wait** for a moment, I'll see if Mr Hawking is available.*

*If you'll just **fill in** this form, please.*

## Quotes:

- *You will never find time for anything. If you want time, you must make it.* -  
[Charles Buxton](#)

## Related topics:

- [BE GOING TO](#)

- Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE (GOT) TO
- Modals to express permission / prohibition: CAN, COULD, MAY, MIGHT, BE ALLOWED TO, MUSTN'T, BE TO
- Modals to express possibility: MAY, MIGHT, CAN, COULD
- Modals to express requests: CAN, COULD, WILL, WOULD
- Modals to express suggestions: SHOULD, COULD, MIGHT, SHALL
- Modals to express willingness / unwillingness: WILL, WOULD

## Second conditional

IF + PAST SUBJUNCTIVE | WOULD + INFINITIVE (SIMPLE OR CONTINUOUS)

The second conditional can describe an unreal situation with reference to the present. We imagine a hypothetical situation which contrasts with reality:

*If I **knew** the answer, I'd **tell** you.*

Here *If I knew the answer* means that I don't know the answer.

In the *if*-clause, we use the past subjunctive form of the verb, which is identical to the past simple tense except in the case of the verb *be*. Traditionally, the past subjunctive form of *be* is *were* for all persons including the first and third person singular. However, nowadays *I/he/she/it was* is more common, while *were* is mainly used in formal styles and in the set phrase *if I were you*:

*If I **lived** by the sea, I would be lying on the beach right now.*

*If he **was/were** taller, he would make a good basketball player.*

*If I **were** you, I'd stop smoking.*

The second conditional can also express a theoretically possible but unlikely future situation. In the following examples, the conditions in the *if*-clause are possible but are not likely to be fulfilled:

*If the Third World War **broke out**, it **would** probably **mean** the end of humankind.*

*If you **missed** the 6 o'clock train, you **wouldn't get** here before 7.*

*If I **lost** my job, I **would be** in serious trouble.*

Compare the first and second conditionals when they refer to possible future actions:

*If you **miss** the 6 o'clock train, you **won't get** here before 7. (first conditional, the condition is probable, you may miss the train)*

*If you **missed** the 6 o'clock train, you **wouldn't get** here before 7. (second conditional, the condition is possible but unlikely, you probably won't miss the train)*

Sometimes a sentence may look like a second conditional, but in fact it is not:

*If he **was** angry, he **would** always **shout** and **slam** doors.*

This is actually a zero conditional that refers to past time. Here *was* in the *if*-clause is not a past subjunctive but the past tense of *be*, while *would* in the main clause expresses repeated past actions.

### Quotes:

- *What would I do if I had only six months left to live? I'd type faster.* - [Isaac Asimov](#)
- *If it weren't for the fact that the TV set and the refrigerator are so far apart, some of us wouldn't get any exercise at all.* - [Joey Adams](#)
- *If people behaved like governments, you'd call the cops.* - [Kelvin Throop](#)
- *If cats could talk, they wouldn't.* - [Nan Porter](#)
- *The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears.* - [Native American proverb](#)
- *How old would you be if you didn't know how old you were?* - [Satchel Paige](#)
- *We would accomplish many more things if we did not think of them as impossible.* - [Vince Lombardi](#)

### Related topics:

- [Past subjunctive](#)
- [The modal WOULD to express unreal situations](#)
- [Wishes about the present](#)
- [IT'S \(HIGH\) TIME](#)
- [AS IF / AS THOUGH](#)
- [WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + simple or continuous infinitive](#)
- [WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + clause with the past subjunctive](#)

## Past continuous subjunctive in the second conditional

The past continuous subjunctive can be used in the *if*-clause of a sentence in the second conditional to express an unreal action in the present which is imagined as continuous:

*If it **wasn't raining**, we would have lunch outside.* (it is raining)

*If we **were staying** at the other hotel, we wouldn't have such a nice view of the river.* (we are not staying at the other hotel)

*If the kids **weren't shouting** all the time, perhaps I wouldn't feel so stressed.* (the kids are shouting all the time)

## Modals in the second conditional



## Main clause

We can use modals other than *would* in the main clause of a sentence in the second conditional:

*If no one was late, we **could start** the meeting on time. (ability)*

*If you asked George, he **might be** able to help you. (possibility)*

## If-clause

We can use *could* in the *if*-clause to express ability, possibility or permission:

*I'd go to the beach with you if I **could swim**. (ability)*

*If you **could be** a famous person, who would you be? (possibility)*

*I wouldn't go to bars if people **could smoke** inside. (permission)*

*Were to* in the *if*-clause makes the condition even less likely:

*If he **were to propose** to you now, what would you say?*

We can use *would* in the *if*-clause to express requests. Sometimes, the main clause is omitted:

*If you'd just **fill in** this form, please.*

## Related topics:

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Modals to express permission / prohibition: CAN, COULD, MAY, MIGHT, BE ALLOWED TO, MUSTN'T, BE TO](#)
- [Modals to express possibility: MAY, MIGHT, CAN, COULD](#)

## Third conditional

IF + PAST PERFECT SUBJUNCTIVE | WOULD + PERFECT INFINITIVE

The third conditional describes an unreal situation with reference to the past. We imagine a hypothetical situation, something that did not happen:

*If the driver **had fastened** his seat belt, he **would probably have survived** the accident.*

Here *If the driver had fastened his seat belt* means that he did not fasten his seat belt.

In the *if*-clause, we use the past perfect subjunctive form of the verb, which is identical to the past perfect tense:

*If we **had booked** our flight earlier, it would have been cheaper.*

*If you **had taken** a taxi, you would have caught the train.*

*If I **had revised** more, I would have done better on my exam.*

### Quotes:

- *If the Romans had been obliged to learn Latin, they would never have found time to conquer the world.* - [Heinrich Heine](#)

### Related topics:

- [Past perfect subjunctive](#)
- [The modal WOULD to express unreal situations](#)
- [Wishes about the past](#)
- [AS IF / AS THOUGH](#)
- [WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + perfect infinitive](#)
- [WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + clause with the past perfect subjunctive](#)

## Past perfect continuous subjunctive in the third conditional

The past perfect continuous subjunctive can be used in the *if*-clause of a sentence in the third conditional to express an unreal action in the past which is imagined as continuous:

*If the driver **had been wearing** a seat belt, he would probably have survived*

*the accident.*

*If I **had been living** in New York at the time, I would have gone to the show.*

*If I **hadn't been working** all day, I would have gone jogging.*

## **Modals in the third conditional**

### **Main clause**

We can use modals other than *would* in the main clause of a sentence in the third conditional:

*If I had had the right tools, I **could have fixed** my bike. (ability)*

*If the weather had been worse, they **might not have reached** the top.*

*(possibility)*

### **If-clause**

We can use *could* + perfect infinitive in the *if*-clause to express ability or possibility:

*If he **could have got** to the station on time, he might have caught the train.*

*(ability)*

*If I **could have known** this would happen, I'd never have started dating him.*

*(possibility)*

*Were to* + perfect infinitive is also possible in the *if*-clause; however, it is less common:

*If he **were to have asked** me, I would have said yes.*

### **Related topics:**

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Modals to express possibility: MAY, MIGHT, CAN, COULD](#)

# Mixed conditionals

We can mix the second and third conditionals:

IF + 2ND CONDITIONAL | 3RD CONDITIONAL

This type of mixed conditional expresses a general condition with an imaginary result in the past:

*If I **spoke** better English, I **could have got** the job.* (I don't speak English well enough, so I didn't get the job)

*If you **were** smarter, you **wouldn't have borrowed** money in the first place.* (you are not smart; that's why you borrowed money)

IF + 3RD CONDITIONAL | 2ND CONDITIONAL

This type of mixed conditional expresses a hypothetical condition in the past with an imaginary result in the present:

*If we **had followed** the sign, we **wouldn't be** lost now.* (we didn't follow the sign, and now we are lost)

*If you **had drunk** less last night, you **wouldn't have** a hangover.* (you drank too much last night; that's why you have a hangover now)

## Related topics:

- [Second conditional](#)
- [Third conditional](#)

# **IF, EVEN IF, ONLY IF, AS LONG AS, PROVIDED, SUPPOSING, UNLESS, BUT FOR, IF NECESSARY, IF SO, IN CASE etc.**

## **IF and WHEN**

*When* can replace *if* in zero conditionals:

*If you heat water to 100 degrees Celsius, it boils.*

*When you heat water to 100 degrees Celsius, it boils.*

In the other types of conditionals, we cannot use *when* instead of *if*.

## **EVEN IF**

*Even if* emphasises that something will happen, would happen or would have happened whatever the condition:

*Even if we leave right now, we still won't catch the train.*

*I wouldn't go into the water even if I could swim.*

*Even if we had booked our flight earlier, it wouldn't have been cheaper.*

## **ONLY IF**

*Only if* makes the condition more restrictive:

*Acetaminophen is dangerous to children only if dosage is too high.*

If the *if*-clause is first, the subject and the auxiliary in the main clause are inverted:

*Only if you like classical music is it worth coming tonight.*

## **SO/AS LONG AS, PROVIDING/PROVIDED (THAT)**

*So/As long as* and *providing/provided (that)* can be used instead of *if* to express a condition. Note that *providing/provided (that)* is a bit formal:

*You can stay here as long as you keep quiet.*

*Provided/Providing (that) the bills are paid, tenants will not be evicted.*

## **SUPPOSE/SUPPOSING, WHAT IF**

*Suppose/supposing* and *what if* can replace *if*, mainly in everyday conversation, and are often used without a main clause:

*Suppose/supposing you won the lottery, what would you do?*

*Suppose/supposing you can't find a job?*

*What if you are not accepted to university? What will you do then?*

## **UNLESS**

*Unless* is followed by an affirmative verb to express "if ... not":

*My leg's broken. I can't stand up **unless you help me.*** (I can't stand up **if you don't help me.**)

## **IF IT WEREN'T FOR / IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR, BUT FOR**

These expressions mean "without". They are used in second and third conditionals and are usually followed by a noun phrase:

*If it weren't for Miguel, we wouldn't know what to do now.* (Without Miguel...)

*If it hadn't been for your foolishness, we wouldn't have got lost.* (If you hadn't been such a fool...)

*But for your help, I would have been in big trouble.* (Without your help... / If you hadn't helped me...)

## **IF IN DOUBT, IF POSSIBLE, IF NECESSARY etc.**

We can make the *if*-clause shorter by omitting the subject and the verb *be*:

*If (you are) in doubt, consult a dictionary.*

In certain idiomatic expressions, the subject and *be* are normally omitted:

*If necessary, you can call Jake at home.*

*I'd like a seat by the window **if possible.***

## **IF SO, IF NOT**

*If so* and *if not* can stand for an *if*-clause which is understood from the context:

*"According to the weather forecast, it might rain tomorrow." "If so, we'll go hiking another day."*

*I hope Peter gets here soon. **If not**, we'll have to start without him.*

## **IN CASE and IF**

An *in case*-clause gives a reason while an *if*-clause describes a condition:

*I'll buy a sandwich **in case I get hungry**.* (I'll buy a sandwich because I may get hungry later.)

*I'll buy a sandwich **if I get hungry**.* (I'll buy a sandwich when I get hungry.)

We can use *should* after *in case*:

*Take an umbrella **in case it should rain**.*

### **Quotes:**

- *To be wronged is nothing unless you continue to remember it.* - [Confucius](#)
- *Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared.* - [Edward Vernon Rickenbacker](#)
- *If it weren't for the fact that the TV set and the refrigerator are so far apart, some of us wouldn't get any exercise at all.* - [Joey Adams](#)
- *The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you are still a rat.* - [Lily Tomlin](#)

# Less likely conditions

## First conditional

In the first conditional, *happen to* and *should* can be used in the *if*-clause to express that something is possible but not very likely:

*If you **happen to see** Kate, say hi from me.*

*If you **should see** Kate, say hi from me.*

## Second conditional

In the second conditional, we can use *were to* for unlikelihood:

*If he **were to propose** to you now, what would you say?*

## Third conditional

Here *were to* + perfect infinitive expresses an imaginary past action which was very unlikely:

*If he **were to have asked** me, I would have said yes.*



## Conditionals and inversion

In formal English, the subject and the auxiliary can be inverted in the *if*-clause with *if* omitted:

***Should you see Kate***, say hi from me. (if you should see Kate)

***Were he to propose to you now***, what would you say? (if he were to propose to you)

***Were I you***, I would stop smoking. (if I were you)

***Were it not for Miguel***, we wouldn't know what to do now. (if it weren't for Miguel)

***Had we booked our flight earlier***, it would have been cheaper. (if we had booked our flight earlier)

***Had it not been for your foolishness***, we wouldn't have got lost. (if it hadn't been for your foolishness)

### Related topics:

- [Subject-auxiliary inversion](#)

# WISH / IF ONLY

We can make second and third conditionals more emphatic by placing *only* after *if*:

***If (only) I knew the answer, I'd tell you.***

***If (only) I had revised more, I would have done better on my exam.***

*If only* can be replaced with *I wish*, and the main clause can be omitted:

***I wish I knew the answer.***

***I wish I had revised more.***

Patterns introduced with *I wish...* are used to express wishes about the present, past and future.

- [Wishes about the present](#)
- [Wishes about the past](#)
- [Wishes about the future](#)

# Wishes about the present

WISH / IF ONLY + PAST SUBJUNCTIVE

This pattern is used to express wishes or regrets about the present:

*I wish I lived nearer. Then we could meet more often.* (I'm sorry that I don't live nearer)

*Cathy wishes she had blond hair.* (Cathy is sorry that she doesn't have blond hair)

Instead of the past subjunctive, we can use *could* + infinitive:

*You're brilliant. I wish I could play the guitar like you.* (I'm sorry that I can't play the guitar like you)

## Quotes:

- *Advice is what we ask for when we already know the answer but wish we didn't.* - [Erica Jong](#)
- *I wish we could put up some of the Christmas spirit in jars and open a jar of it every month.* - [Harlan Miller](#)

## Related topics:

- [Past subjunctive](#)
- [Second conditional](#)

# Wishes about the past

WISH / IF ONLY + PAST PERFECT SUBJUNCTIVE

This pattern is used to express wishes or regrets about the past:

*I wish I had never **told** him my secret.* (I'm sorry that I told him my secret)  
*Santiago wishes he **hadn't spent** so much money last night.* (Santiago regrets spending so much money last night)

Instead of the past perfect subjunctive, we can use *could* + perfect infinitive:

*If only I **could have been** there. I'm sure it was a great concert.* (I'm sorry that I couldn't be there)

## Related topics:

- [Past perfect subjunctive](#)
- [Third conditional](#)

## Wishes about the future

WISH / IF ONLY + WOULD

This pattern is used for wishes about the future when there is a chance that something may happen or somebody (but not the person who wishes) may change their behaviour:

*I wish it would stop snowing.*

*I wish Mark would call me back.*

*I wish more people would read my blog.*

*Wish + would* can also express not-so-polite requests or complaints:

*I wish you wouldn't smoke in here.*

# IT'S (HIGH) TIME

IT'S (HIGH) TIME + PAST SUBJUNCTIVE

*It's (high) time* + past subjunctive expresses that something should be done and that it is already a bit late:

*It's time you went to bed. You'll have to get up early tomorrow.*

*It's high time I bought a new pair of jeans.*

*It's about time this road was completed. They've been working on it for months.*

When we say that the right time has arrived for something and we are still in time, we can use the following patterns:

*It's time (for you) to go to bed.*

*It's time to say goodbye.*

*It's time for breakfast.*

**Related topics:**

- [Past subjunctive](#)
- [Second conditional](#)

# AS IF / AS THOUGH

Clauses that start with *as if / as though* describe an unreal or improbable situation if they are followed by an unreal tense (the past subjunctive or the past perfect subjunctive). Otherwise, they express that the statement is true.

The past subjunctive after *as if / as though* indicates an unreal situation in the present. However, if the situation is true, we use a real tense to express present time:

*He looks as if he **knew** the answer.* (he gives the impression that he knows the answer, but he (probably) doesn't know or we don't know whether he knows or not)

*He looks as if he **knows** the answer.* (he knows the answer)

If we put the verb preceding *as if / as though* into the past tense, the present simple *knows* changes into past simple, whereas the past subjunctive *knew* stays the same. Therefore, both sentences will read as follows:

*He **looked** as if he **knew** the answer.*

Consequently, the meaning of this sentence (whether he knew the answer or not) can only be deduced from the context.

The past perfect subjunctive after *as if / as though* is used to refer to an unreal past situation. If the situation is true, we use a real tense to express past time:

*He seems as if he **hadn't slept** for days.* (it seems that he hasn't slept for days, but he (probably) has or we don't know whether he has or not)

*He seems as if he **hasn't slept** for days.* (he hasn't slept for days)

If the preceding verb is put into the past tense, the present perfect *hasn't slept* changes into past perfect, while the past perfect subjunctive *hadn't slept* stays the same:

*He **seemed** as if he **hadn't slept** for days.*

## Quotes:

- *Most of us spend our lives as if we had another one in the bank.* - [Ben Irwin](#)
- *Parents often talk about the younger generation as if they didn't have anything to do with it.* - [Haim Ginott](#)

- *Live every day as if it were going to be your last; for one day you're sure to be right.* - [Harry "Breaker" Harbord Morant](#)
- *As if you could kill time without injuring eternity.* - [Henry David Thoreau](#)

**Related topics:**

- [Past perfect subjunctive](#)
- [Past subjunctive](#)
- [Second conditional](#)
- [Third conditional](#)



# WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER

*Would rather/sooner* has a meaning similar to *would prefer* and can be followed by a bare infinitive or by a clause with the past subjunctive or the past perfect subjunctive. There is no difference in meaning between *would rather* and *would sooner*, but *would rather* is more common.

- [WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + bare infinitive](#)
- [WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + clause](#)

## **WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + bare infinitive**

*Would rather/sooner* is followed by a bare infinitive if the subject of *would rather/sooner* is the same as the doer of the action expressed by the following verb.

## **WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + simple or continuous infinitive**

*Would rather/sooner* + simple or continuous infinitive expresses preferences about the present:

*I'd rather go by bike than walk.* (I'd prefer to go by bike rather than walk.)  
*Where would you rather sleep?* (Where would you prefer to sleep?)  
*I'd rather be writing my paper.* (I'd prefer to be writing my paper.)

The negative is *would rather not*:

*I would rather not go out tonight.* (I'd prefer not to go out tonight.)

If we leave out *rather*, we get the main clause of a sentence in the second conditional:

*Where would you sleep (if you could choose)?*

### **Quotes:**

- *I'd rather have roses on my table than diamonds on my neck.* - [Emma Goldman](#)

### **Related topics:**

- [Second conditional](#)

## **WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + perfect infinitive**

*Would rather/sooner* + perfect infinitive expresses preferences about the past and means that the desired action was not performed:

***Would you rather have had*** pork than beef? (Would you have preferred pork to beef?)

***I'd rather have walked***, but I went by bus because it was raining. (I would have liked to walk, but I went by bus because it was raining.)

If we omit *rather*, we get the main clause of a sentence in the third conditional:

***I would have walked*** (if it hadn't been raining).

**Related topics:**

- [Third conditional](#)

## WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + clause

*Would rather/sooner* is followed by a clause if the subject of *would rather/sooner* is different from the doer of the action expressed by the following verb.

## WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + clause with the past subjunctive

*Would rather/sooner* + clause with the past subjunctive expresses that we would like someone else to do something.

*I'd rather you **didn't smoke** in here.* (I'd prefer you not to smoke in here.)

*Tim **would sooner I returned** his camera.* (Tim would like me to return his camera.)

*Where **would you rather I slept?*** (Where would you prefer me to sleep?)

This pattern can be rephrased by using a second conditional with *prefer*:

*I **would prefer** it if you **didn't smoke** in here.*

### Related topics:

- [Past subjunctive](#)
- [Second conditional](#)

## WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + clause with the past perfect subjunctive

*Would rather/sooner* + clause with the past perfect subjunctive expresses preferences or wishes about the past. The subject of *would rather/sooner* and the subject of the subjunctive are different:

*I'd rather this whole thing **had never happened**.* (I wish it had never happened.)

*What **would you rather I had done?*** (What would you have preferred me to do?)

This pattern can be rephrased by using a third conditional with *prefer*:

*I'd prefer it if this whole thing **had never happened**.*

## Related topics:

- [Past perfect subjunctive](#)
- [Third conditional](#)

# Conditionals in indirect speech

This topic is discussed under [Indirect speech » Changes in indirect speech » Conditionals and unreal tenses in indirect speech](#).

# Revision questions: conditionals and unreal tenses

- When can *if* be replaced with *when* in conditional sentences?
- What is the difference between a real and an unreal situation?
- What is the difference between real and unreal tenses?
- Which modals can we use in the main clauses of sentences in the different types of conditionals?
- Can we use the modals *will* or *would* in the *if*-clause?
- Why is the sentence *If I lied to my parents, they would punish me* ambiguous?
- Which types of conditionals can be mixed?
- What is the difference between *if* and *in case*?
- Which modals can we use in the different types of conditionals to express that a condition is less likely?
- When can we invert the subject and auxiliary in the *if*-clause?
- What is common in sentences introduced with *I wish...* and the second and third conditionals?
- What does *wish* + *would* express?
- When is *as if* / *as though* followed by a real tense?

# Exercises: conditionals and unreal tenses

## Conditionals and unreal tenses - Exercise 1

Match the two halves of each sentence.

1. I wouldn't have gone into the water ...
  2. If I didn't have to sit here, ...
  3. If I don't get enough sleep, ...
  4. If I don't hurry, ...
  5. If I had got up earlier, ...
  6. I wouldn't have missed the train ...
  7. If I stayed out late with some friends, ...
  8. I'd get better marks ...
  9. I could take a walk by the river ...
  10. I can't help you ...
- 
1. I always called my parents to let them know.
  2. unless you tell me what's wrong.
  3. if it weren't so windy.
  4. if I studied harder.
  5. I'd probably be relaxing at home right now.
  6. I might be late.
  7. I'm tired and grumpy the entire day.
  8. I wouldn't have to take a taxi.
  9. even if I could swim.
  10. if I hadn't overslept.

## Conditionals and unreal tenses - Exercise 2

Complete each sentence with the appropriate form of the verb in brackets and then identify the type of conditional: 0, 1, 2, 3 or mixed.

1. If I ... you, I would use a safer password. (BE)
2. Would you stop working if you ... the jackpot? (WIN)
3. I'll buy this jacket unless I ... a better one. (FIND)
4. If you ... all night, you wouldn't be so tired now. (NOT PARTY)
5. Miguel could've given you a lift if you ... him. (ASK)
6. Sometimes it helps if you ... the set-top box. (RESTART)
7. The students will be glad if we ... the test. (CANCEL)
8. Martin is always angry if we ... late. (BE)



9. I get a cramp if I ... before swimming. (NOT WARM UP)
10. Even if I ... enough cash, I wouldn't have bought that ugly T-shirt. (HAVE)

### Conditionals and unreal tenses - Exercise 3

**Rewrite each sentence, beginning as shown, so that the meaning stays the same.**

1. It would be nice to be able to speak Italian.  
I wish ...
2. Where would you rather be right now?  
Where do you wish ...
3. We could have done without this film. It was boring.  
I wish ...
4. Would it be better if we were living by the sea?  
Do you wish ...
5. I'd prefer you not to eat in the living room.  
I'd rather ...
6. Jenny regrets that she hasn't been invited to the conference.  
Jenny wishes ...
7. Do you think I should move to a new apartment?  
Is it time ...
8. The neighbours have been playing the same song all day long. I can't stand it any longer.  
I wish ...
9. Would you have preferred to have a lasagna?  
Would you rather ...
10. She is only 16, but she looks 30 because of the way she dresses.  
She dresses as if ...

### Conditionals and unreal tenses - Exercise 4

**Based on the following situations, create sentences with conditionals, unreal tenses and related structures.**

1. You are too short to be a professional basketball player. What do you say?
2. You see that your girlfriend regrets buying the green blouse, not the red one.  
What do you ask?
3. You are expecting to get a positive answer after a job interview because you want to quit your current job. What do you say?
4. You are annoyed because your friend didn't tell you he is not coming on the trip. What do you say?

5. During a test, you realize you didn't practise enough. What do you say?
6. Your friends want to go to the pub, but you don't. What do you say?
7. Unfortunately, you do not have enough money to buy a new smartphone. What do you say?
8. Instead of spaghetti, you would like to have pizza for lunch. What do you say?
9. It's drizzling and you see that your flatmate is going outside without taking an umbrella. Warn him.
10. You miss your spouse. What do you tell him or her on the phone?

## Conditionals and unreal tenses - Exercise 5

**Discuss the questions with your partner. Ask for more information.**

1. If you could choose your ideal job, what would it be?
2. Where would you rather be right now?
3. Do you sometimes wish you were a different person?
4. If you found a wallet in the street with a lot of money in it, would you keep it?
5. Where would you live if you could choose anywhere in the world?
6. If you could change one thing about your past, what would you change?
7. What would you do if you won the jackpot on the lottery?
8. If you could be an animal, what animal would you be?
9. Would you rather be rich and ugly or poor and good-looking?
10. If you could change one thing about your appearance, what would it be?

## Answer key: conditionals and unreal tenses

### [Answer key - Conditionals and unreal tenses - Exercise 1](#)

1. I wouldn't have gone into the water ... **(9) even if I could swim.**
2. If I didn't have to sit here, ... **(5) I'd probably be relaxing at home right now.**
3. If I don't get enough sleep, ... **(7) I'm tired and grumpy the entire day.**
4. If I don't hurry, ... **(6) I might be late.**
5. If I had got up earlier, ... **(8) I wouldn't have to take a taxi.**
6. I wouldn't have missed the train ... **(10) if I hadn't overslept.**
7. If I stayed out late with some friends, ... **(1) I always called my parents to**

**let them know.**

8. I'd get better marks ... **(4) if I studied harder.**
9. I could take a walk by the river ... **(3) if it weren't so windy.**
10. I can't help you ... **(2) unless you tell me what's wrong.**

## [Answer key - Conditionals and unreal tenses - Exercise 2](#)

1. If I **were** you, I would use a safer password. **(type 2)**
2. Would you stop working if you **won** the jackpot? **(type 2)**
3. I'll buy this jacket unless I **find** a better one. **(type 1)**
4. If you **hadn't been partying** all night, you wouldn't be so tired now. **(mixed)**
5. Miguel could've given you a lift if you **had asked** him. **(type 3)**
6. Sometimes it helps if you **restart** the set-top box. **(type 0)**
7. The students will be glad if we **cancel** the test. **(type 1)**
8. Martin is always angry if we **are** late. **(type 0)**
9. I get a cramp if I **don't warm up** before swimming. **(type 0)**
10. Even if I **had had** enough cash, I wouldn't have bought that ugly T-shirt. **(type 3)**

## [Answer key - Conditionals and unreal tenses - Exercise 3](#)

1. I wish I could speak Italian. / I wish I was/were able to speak Italian.
2. Where do you wish you were right now?
3. I wish we hadn't watched this film.
4. Do you wish we were living by the sea?
5. I'd rather you didn't eat in the living room.
6. Jenny wishes she had been invited to the conference.
7. Is it time I moved to a new apartment?
8. I wish the neighbours would stop playing the same song.
9. Would you rather have had a lasagna?
10. She dresses as if she was/were 30 although she is only 16.

## [Answer key - Conditionals and unreal tenses - Exercise 4](#)

1. I wish I were/was taller. /  
If only I were/was taller. /  
If I were/was taller, I could become a professional basketball player.

2. Would you rather have bought the red blouse? /  
Do you wish you had bought the red blouse?
3. If I get a positive answer, I can quit my current job. /  
If I got a positive answer, I could quit my current job.
4. I wish you had told me you are not coming on the trip. /  
If only you had told me you are not coming on the trip. /  
I'd rather you had told me you are not coming on the trip.
5. I wish I had practised more. /  
If only I had practised more.
6. I'd rather not go to the pub.
7. I wish I had enough money. /  
If only I had enough money. /  
If I had enough money, I could/would buy a new smartphone.
8. I'd rather have pizza for lunch.
9. If you don't take an umbrella, you'll get wet.
10. I wish you were here. /  
If only you were here.

# Chapter 4: Indirect speech

- [Guiding questions: indirect speech](#)
- [The difference between direct and indirect speech](#)
- [Punctuation in direct speech](#)
- [Changes in indirect speech](#)
- [Reporting questions](#)
- [Reporting statements](#)
- [Reporting imperatives](#)
- [Common reporting verbs](#)
- [Impersonal reporting](#)
- [Revision questions: indirect speech](#)
- [Exercises: indirect speech](#)

# Guiding questions: indirect speech

- What is direct speech and what is indirect speech?
- What is the word order in indirect questions?
- When do tenses change in indirect speech?
- What other changes are there in indirect speech?
- Besides *say*, *tell* and *ask*, what other reporting verbs can be used in indirect speech?

# The difference between direct and indirect speech

Direct speech is when we report what someone says by repeating the exact words. In writing, we use inverted commas:

*David: I have to talk to you about something.* (original statement)  
*"I have to talk to you about something," said David.* (direct speech)

*Michelle: I'll call them tomorrow.* (original statement)  
*Michelle said, "I'll call them tomorrow."* (direct speech)

Indirect speech (also called reported speech) is when we give the same meaning of what someone says without repeating the exact words. In this case, we do not use inverted commas and certain changes may be necessary:

*David: I have to talk to you about something.* (original statement)  
*David said he had to talk to me about something.* (indirect speech)

*Michelle: I'll call them tomorrow.* (original statement)  
*Michelle promised she would call them the next day.* (indirect speech)

We also use indirect speech when we report inner thoughts:

*I had no idea where my keys were.* (Where are my keys?)  
*She knew that the lock had been changed.* (The lock has been changed.)

# Punctuation in direct speech

We use inverted commas (also called quotation marks, quotes or speech marks) to indicate direct speech. Double quotes (") are preferred in American English, while single quotes (') are more common in British English:

*"I'm coming home late tonight," she said. (American English)*

*'I'm coming home late tonight,' she said. (British English)*

If we quote within direct speech, we use the other style for the embedded quotation:

*"She said, 'I'm coming home late tonight'," recalled Jim. (American English)*

*'She said, "I'm coming home late tonight",' recalled Jim. (British English)*

As can be seen in the examples above, a comma (,) is used at the end of the quotation, before the closing speech mark.

A comma is also used before the quotation if we start the sentence with the reporting clause. In this case the terminal full stop (.) comes before the closing speech mark:

*She added, "Don't expect me before 11."*

If the quotation is a question or exclamation, the terminal marks (? and !) also come before the closing speech marks:

*"Hurry up!" he shouted.*

*She asked, "Am I late?"*

The quotation normally begins with a capital letter, except if it is interrupted by a reporting clause, in which case the first letter of the continuation is not capitalised:

*"I'm coming home late tonight," she said and added, "don't expect me before 11."*

## Related topics:

- [Subject-verb inversion in direct speech](#)



# Changes in indirect speech

In order to understand changes in indirect speech, we must bear in mind that words are always spoken in context: somebody says something to someone at a specific place and time. When we report something, changes are made to the original words if there are changes in the context (people, place or time).

- [Changes in place, time and person in indirect speech](#)
- [Tense changes in indirect speech](#)
- [Modal changes in indirect speech](#)
- [Conditionals and unreal tenses in indirect speech](#)

## Changes in place, time and person in indirect speech

No changes are made to words referring to place, time or person if we report something at the same place, around the same time, or involving the same people:

*Dimitrios: I'll meet you **here**.*

*Dimitrios said he would meet me **here**.* (reported at the same place)

*Cara: My train leaves **at 9.30 tomorrow**.*

*Cara says her train leaves **at 9.30 tomorrow**.* (reported on the same day)

*Richard: I can help **you**, Stephanie.*

*I told you I could help **you**.* (reported by Richard to Stephanie)

*I told Stephanie I could help **her**.* (reported by Richard to a third person)

Changes are made if there are changes in place, time or people:

*Dimitrios: I'll meet you **here**.*

*Dimitrios said he would meet me **at the café**.* (reported at a different place)

*Cara: My train leaves **at 9.30 tomorrow**.*

*Cara said her train leaves **at 9.30 today**.* (reported on the next day)

*Richard: I can help **you**, Stephanie.*

*Richard told me **he** could help **me**.* (reported by Stephanie)

*Richard told Stephanie **he** could help **her**.* (reported by a third person)

*I told Stephanie I could help **her**.* (reported by Richard to a third person)

The following list shows some typical changes of time expressions in indirect speech. Bear in mind that the changes are not automatic; they depend on the context:

**Direct speech** » Indirect speech

**now** » then / at that time

**tonight** » last night, that night, on Monday night

**today** » yesterday, that day, on Monday

**yesterday** » the day before / the previous day, on Sunday

**last night** » the previous night / the night before, on Sunday night

**tomorrow** » today, the following day, on Tuesday

**this week** » last week, that week

**last month** » the previous month / the month before, in June

**next year** » this year, the following year / the year after, in 1996

*five minutes ago » five minutes before  
in two hours' time » two hours later*

# Tense changes in indirect speech

## No tense changes

There are no tense changes in indirect speech if:

- the reporting verb is in a present tense; this is often the case with simultaneous reporting or when the original words were spoken a short time ago and are still relevant:

*Joanna: I **have** just **arrived** in Hanoi.*

*Joanna says she **has** just **arrived** in Hanoi. (reporting a recent telephone conversation; the reporting verb *says* is in present simple)*

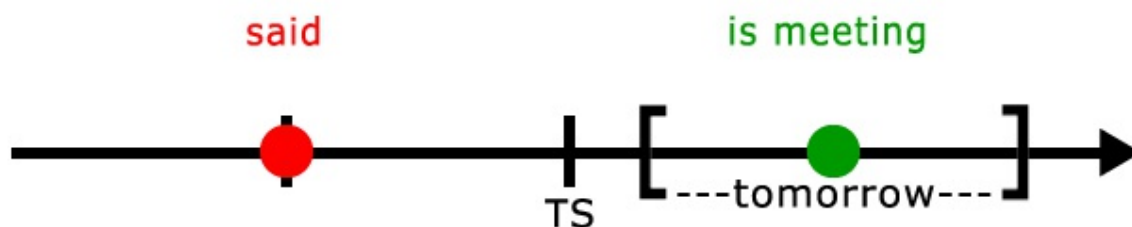
- the reported words are true at the time of reporting:

*George: I'm **meeting** Karen tomorrow.*

*George said he **is meeting** Karen tomorrow. (reported on the same day, *tomorrow* still refers to tomorrow)*

Compare:

*George said he **was meeting** Karen the following day. (reported days later, the meeting has already happened)*



George said he is meeting Karen tomorrow.



George said he was meeting Karen the following day.

- the reported words express a general truth:

*Copernicus: The planets **revolve** around the sun.*

*Copernicus stated that the planets **revolve** around the sun. (it is a general truth)*

Compare:

*Once, people believed that the earth **was** flat. (the reported words are no longer true; people do not believe that the earth is flat)*

- the reported words refer to an unreal situation:

*Mike: I wish I **was** a year older; then I could enter the race.*

*Mike wished he **was** a year older, so he could enter the race. (he is not older)*

## Tense changes

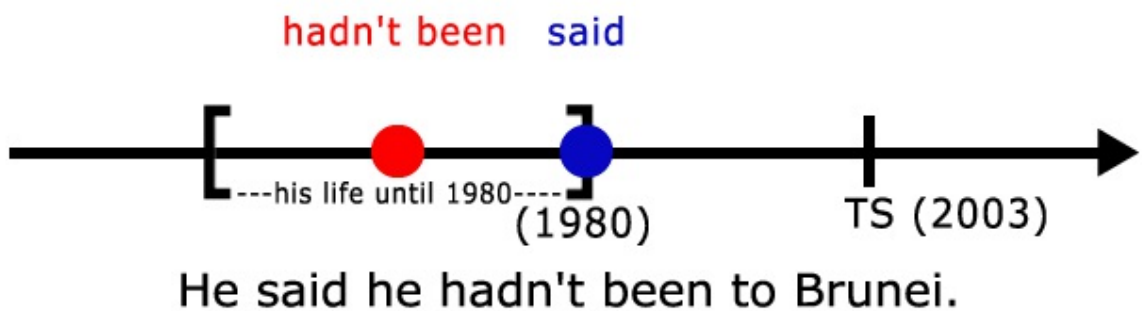
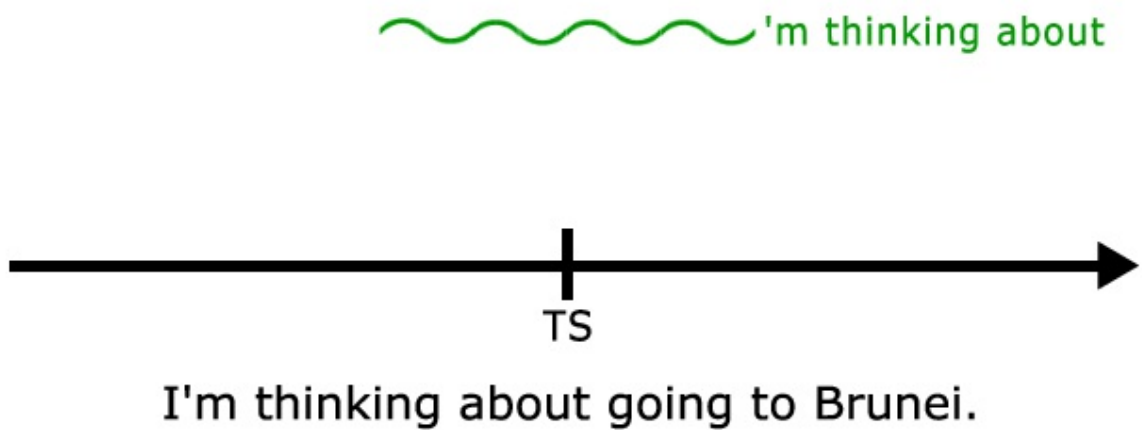
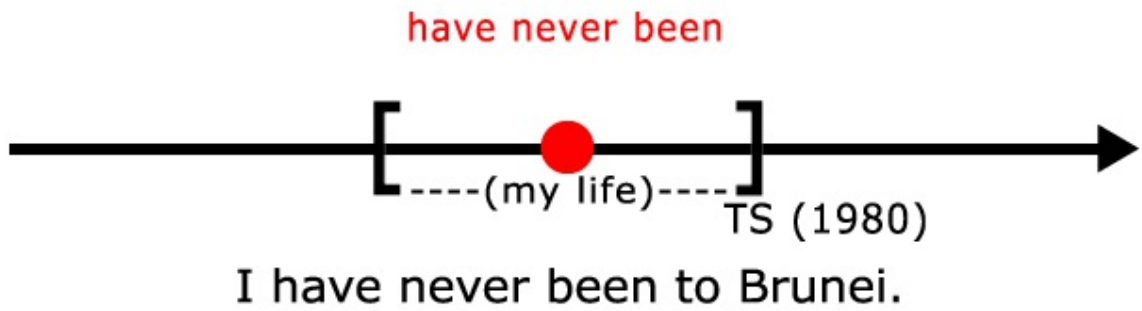
Tenses change in indirect speech if:

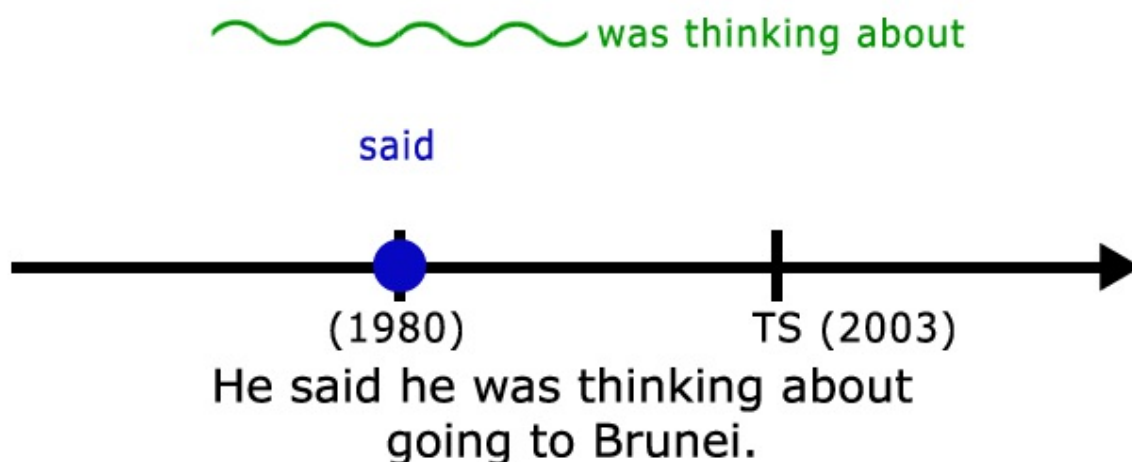
- the reported words are no longer true or are out-of-date; this is often the case when we report something after the reference point of the original statement and the reporting verb is in a past tense:

*Philip in 1980: I **have** never **been** to Brunei, but I'm **thinking** about going there. (the reference point of the present perfect and the present continuous is 1980)*

*When I met Philip in 1980, he said he **had** never **been** to Brunei, but he*

*was thinking about going there.* (reported years later; the reported words are out of date)





- we want to report objectively; when we do not know whether the reported words are true, and we do not want to suggest that they are:

*Tim: Sorry, I can't go to work this week. I'm ill.*

*Tim isn't coming to work this week. He said that he **was** ill.*

## Tense backshift

As can be seen in the examples above, the verbs in the present perfect, present continuous and present simple tenses in the original statements changed into their corresponding past equivalents (past perfect, past continuous and past simple) in indirect speech. This process is called tense backshift. Note that tense backshift is based on how tenses relate to each other in general:

*When I **met** Philip in 1980, he **said** he **had** never **been** to Brunei.*

*When I **arrived** at work, I **remembered** that I **hadn't** **locked** the door to my apartment.*

(two consecutive actions and an earlier action)

*When I **met** Philip in 1980, he **said** he **was** **thinking** about going to Brunei.*

*When I **entered** the room, I **saw** that she **was** **studying**.*

(two consecutive actions and a background action in progress)

*Tim **said** that he **was** ill.*

*I **went** outside. It **was** a warm day.*

(a past action and a past state)

Tense backshift:

| Direct speech | Indirect speech |
|---------------|-----------------|
|               |                 |

|                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| present simple             | past simple             |
| present continuous         | past continuous         |
| present perfect            | past perfect            |
| present perfect continuous | past perfect continuous |
| past simple                | past perfect            |
| past continuous            | past perfect continuous |

The past perfect and past perfect continuous tenses do not change.

In complex sentences, the past simple and past continuous may remain unchanged if the temporal relationship between the events in the clauses is clear from the context:

*John: When I **got** home, I **went** to bed straight away.*

*John told me that when he **got** home he **went** to bed straight away.*

*Bill: I **was reading** a book when I **heard** the crash.*

*Bill said that he **was reading** a book when he **heard** the crash.*

*Helen: When I **was writing** my thesis, I **spent** a lot of time at the library.*

*Helen recalled that when she **was writing** her thesis she **spent** a lot of time at the library.*

*Tim: My friends **were enjoying** themselves playing cards while I **was studying** in my room.*

*Tim grumbled that his friends **were enjoying** themselves playing cards while he **was studying** in his room.*

*Chris: When I **got** to her house, she had been waiting for hours.*

*Chris said that when he **got** to her house she had been waiting for hours.*

### Quotes:

- *I had been told that the training procedure with cats was difficult. It's not. Mine had me trained in two days. - [Bill Dana](#)*



## Modal changes in indirect speech

Similarly to tenses, modals change in indirect speech if the reported words are no longer true or are out-of-date:

**Direct speech** » Indirect speech

*can* (ability, present) » *could*

*can* (ability, future) » *would be able to*

*may* (possibility) » *might*

*may* (permission, present) » *could*

*may* (permission, future) » *would be allowed to*

*must* (obligation, present) » *must / had to*

*must* (obligation, future) » *must / would have to*

*needn't* (necessity, present) » *didn't have to / didn't need to*

*needn't* (necessity, future) » *wouldn't have to*

*shall* (future time) » *would*

*shall* (offers, suggestions) » *should*

*will* » *would*

The following modals do not change:

*could*

*would*

*might*

*must* (deduction)

*mustn't*

*had better*

*should*

*ought to*

*used to*

# Conditionals and unreal tenses in indirect speech

When we report conditionals and statements that refer to unreal situations, some tenses and modals may change if the reported words are no longer true or are out-of-date.

- [Zero conditional in indirect speech](#)
- [First conditional in indirect speech](#)
- [Second conditional in indirect speech](#)
- [Third conditional in indirect speech](#)
- [WISH / IF ONLY, WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER, IT'S \(HIGH\) TIME, AS IF / AS THOUGH in indirect speech](#)

## Zero conditional in indirect speech

When we report zero conditionals, the following tense changes may occur:

### Present time

*Anne: If John **is cursing**, it **means** that he **is** very angry.*

*Anne said that if John **is cursing**, it **means** that he **is** very angry. (it is still true)*

*Anne said that if John **was cursing**, it **meant** that he **was** very angry. (referring to a past habit)*

### Past time

*Jenny: If I **got** home late, my mom **scolded** me.*

*Jenny recalled that if she **got** home late, her mother **used to scold** / **would scold** her.*

Note that past tenses in the *if*-clause do not normally change.

## First conditional in indirect speech

When we report first conditionals, the following changes may occur:

*Mark: If we **leave** now, we **can catch** the train.*

*Mark said that if we **leave** now, we **can catch** the train. (reported simultaneously; we can still catch the train)*

Mark said that if we **left**, we **could catch** the train. (the reported words are out-of-date; the train has already left)

## Second conditional in indirect speech

When we report second conditionals, the following changes may occur:

### Future time

Catherine: *If I **lost** my job, I **would be** in serious trouble.* (referring to a possible future situation)

Catherine said that if she **lost** her job, she **would be** in serious trouble. (the reported words are true; she might still lose her job)

Catherine said that if she **had lost** her job, she **would have been** in serious trouble. (the reported words are out-of-date; it's not possible that she will lose her job)

### Present time

Paul: *If I **knew** the answer, I'd **tell** you.* (referring to an unreal present situation)

Paul said that if he **knew** the answer, he'd **tell** us.

## Third conditional in indirect speech

When we report third conditionals, there are no changes in the verb forms:

Tom: *If we **had booked** our flight earlier, it **would have been** cheaper.* (referring to an unreal past situation)

Tom remarked that if they **had booked** their flight earlier, it **would have been** cheaper.

## WISH / IF ONLY, WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER, IT'S (HIGH) TIME, AS IF / AS THOUGH in indirect speech

Unreal tenses after *wish / if only, would rather / would sooner, it's (high) time* and *as if / as though* do not change in indirect speech:

Susan: *I wish I **lived** in the mountains.*

Susan said she wished she **lived** in the mountains.

Charles: If only we **hadn't missed** the train.

Charles wished they **hadn't missed** the train.

Carol: I'd rather **go** by bike than **walk**.

Carol said that she **would** rather **go** by bike than **walk**.

Mr Wilkins: I would rather you **didn't smoke** in here.

Mr Wilkins said he would rather I **didn't smoke** in his office.

Newspaper article: It's high time the government **did** something about this problem.

The article said that it was high time the government **did** something about the problem.

Jane: He looks as if he **knew** the answer.

Jane said that he looked as if he **knew** the answer.

# Reporting questions

When we report questions, there is no inversion of the subject and auxiliary in the reported clause (the word order is the same as in statements) and we do not use a question mark.

## Yes/no questions

REPORTING CLAUSE + IF/WHETHER-CLAUSE (WITH NO INVERSION)

When reporting a yes/no question, we use *if* or *whether*:

*Alex: **Have you booked tickets for the concert?***

*Alex was wondering **if/whether I had booked tickets for the concert.***

*Jasmine: **Is there a wireless network available in the library?***

*Jasmine inquired **if/whether there was a wireless network available in the library.***

*Peter: **Is it cold outside?***

*Peter wants to know **if/whether it is cold outside or not.***

*Peter wants to know **whether or not it is cold outside.***

## Wh-questions

REPORTING CLAUSE + WH-CLAUSE (WITH NO INVERSION)

When we report a *wh*-question, we repeat the original question word (*who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *how* etc.) in the reported clause:

*Rebecca: **Where do you live?***

*Rebecca asked me **where I lived.***

*Tim: **Who are you waiting for?***

*Tim wanted to know **who I was waiting for.***

A *wh*-clause can be used to report exclamations:

*Ivan: **How funny!***

*Ivan exclaimed **how funny it was.***

Examples of reporting verbs used to report questions:

***ask, inquire, know, remember, want to know, wonder***

We can use an indirect question after other reporting verbs when we are not reporting a question but we are talking about the answer to a question:

*I've told you before **why I don't like shopping malls.***  
*She didn't say **what time she would be back.***

When we want to make a question more polite, we often introduce the sentence with expressions such as *Could you tell me...?*, *Do you know...?* etc. and continue with an indirect question:

*Could you tell me **how I can get to the railway station?***  
*Do you know **if this shop sells second-hand records?***  
*Can you remember **what time the play starts?***

**Related topics:**

- [SAY, TELL and ASK](#)
- [Question word + TO-infinitive](#)

# Reporting statements

REPORTING CLAUSE + THAT-CLAUSE

When we report a statement, we often use a *that*-clause after the reporting clause:

*Tom: I don't know her.*

*Tom told me that he didn't know her.*

*That* is often omitted after certain reporting verbs in informal styles:

*Tom told me he didn't know her.*

Examples of reporting verbs used to report statements:

*add, admit, agree, announce, answer, argue, boast, claim, comment, complain, confirm, deny, doubt, estimate, exclaim, explain, fear, insist, mention, observe, promise, propose, remark, repeat, reply, report, reveal, be rumoured, say, state, suggest, suppose, tell, warn*

**Related topics:**

- [SAY, TELL and ASK](#)

# Reporting imperatives

REPORTING VERB + SOMEBODY + TO-INFINITIVE

When we report an imperative sentence or a request, we usually use a *to*-infinitive structure:

*Mother: **Put away your toys, Johnny.***

*Johnny's mother told him **to put away his toys.***

*Teacher: **Everybody, please stand up.***

*The teacher asked the class **to stand up.***

*Examiner: **Could you speak a bit louder?***

*The examiner asked me **to speak louder.***

Examples of reporting verbs used to report imperatives and requests:

***ask, beg, command, forbid, instruct, order, remind, request, tell, urge, warn, want***

**Related topics:**

- [SAY, TELL and ASK](#)



# Common reporting verbs

On the following pages, you will find reporting verbs which can be used in indirect speech to express various meanings.

- [Reporting verb + THAT-clause](#)
- [Reporting verb + THAT-clause with SHOULD + infinitive](#)
- [Reporting verb + THAT-clause with the present subjunctive](#)
- [Reporting verb + gerund](#)
- [Reporting verb + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Reporting verb + object + TO-infinitive](#)
- [SAY, TELL and ASK](#)

## Reporting verb + THAT-clause

VERB + THAT-CLAUSE

Examples of reporting verbs used with a *that*-clause:

**add, admit, agree, answer, believe, claim, complain, confess, confirm, decide, deny, doubt, explain, feel, hope, insist, mention, promise, repeat, reply, say, suggest**

*Employee: ... and so far I haven't received a negative response to my work.  
The employee **added** that up to that point he hadn't received a negative response to his work.*

*George: Well, I had difficulty answering some of the questions.  
George **admitted** that he had had difficulty answering some of the questions.*

*Chris: Yes, it was a great film.  
Chris **agreed** that the film was great.*

*Matthew: Do you want to have a cup of coffee sometime?  
Joanna: Sorry, but you're not my type.  
When Matthew asked her out, Joanna **answered/replied** that he was not her type.*

*Rev. Johansson: All humans are born equal.  
Reverend Johansson **believes** that all humans are born equal.*

*Julie to her neighbour's wife: You may not believe me, but I saw your husband with a blonde girl in the disco on Saturday.  
Julie **claimed** that she had seen her neighbour with a blonde girl in the disco on Saturday.*

*Student to his friend: I hate having to write tons of essays every semester.  
The student **complained** that he had to write a lot of essays.*

*Julie to her neighbour: Yes, it was me who started that ugly rumour about you. I'm sorry.  
Julie **confessed** that she had started an ugly rumour about her neighbour.*

*Secretary to a colleague: That's right, the meeting is on Tuesday.  
The secretary **confirmed** that the meeting was on Tuesday.*

Customer: I don't think I'll buy this notebook after all.  
The customer **decided** that he wouldn't buy the notebook.

Francesco: No, I didn't bump your car.  
Francesco **denied** that he had bumped my car.

Student: I don't think that we could convince the professor that this is not plagiarism.  
The student **doubted** that they could convince the professor that it was not plagiarism.

Jill: I can make fire with a stick. You know, my father taught me how to do it when I was a child.  
Jill **explained** that her father had taught her how to make fire with a stick when she was a child.

Alex: Well, I think we should back her up in this terrible situation.  
Alex **felt** that they should back her up in that terrible situation.

Chef: I hope nobody will notice that this is not turkey but pork.  
The chef **was hoping** that nobody would notice that it was not turkey but pork.

Secretary to boss: I'm absolutely sure that I shredded those documents.  
The secretary **insisted** that she had shredded the documents.

Tom: Once I get back to school, I'm going to take up swimming again.  
Tom **mentioned** that he was going to take up swimming again.

David: I will be on time, I promise.  
David **promised** that he would be on time.

Wife to husband: As I've told you before, I'd like to invite Dan and Margaret as well.  
The wife **repeated** that she wanted to invite Dan and Margaret as well.

Camila: It may have been Mario who bumped your car.  
Camila **suggested** that it might have been Mario who had bumped my car.

## Reporting verb + THAT-clause with SHOULD + infinitive

VERB + THAT-CLAUSE WITH SHOULD + INFINITIVE

Examples of reporting verbs used with a *that*-clause with *should*:

**advise, agree, demand, insist, prefer, propose, recommend, request, suggest, urge**

Carlos: *I think you should visit a specialist.*  
Carlos **advised** that I should visit a specialist.

Susan: *Yes, you are right, Harry. You'd better accept that offer.*  
Susan **agreed** that Harry should accept the offer.

Customer: *I want you to give me a full refund.*  
The customer **demanded** that the company should give him a full refund.

Mike: *You really must try my new muffin recipe.*  
Mike **insisted** that I should try his new muffin recipe.

Howard: *I'd rather you came to my party, and not to Ryan's.*  
Howard **preferred** that I should go to his party.

Jill: *How about going to the sauna tonight?*  
Jill **proposed / recommended / suggested** that we should go to the sauna.

Employees: *Could we have the staff meeting on Tuesday instead?*  
The employees **requested** that the staff meeting should be on Tuesday.

Green activists: *The nuclear plant must immediately be shut down.*  
Green activists **urged** that the nuclear plant should be shut down.

The present subjunctive can replace *should* + infinitive in a *that*-clause in formal and literary styles:

Carlos: *I think you should visit a specialist.*  
Carlos advised that I **visit** a specialist.

# Reporting verb + THAT-clause with the present subjunctive

## VERB + THAT-CLAUSE WITH PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE

The present subjunctive can be used in a *that*-clause instead of *should* + infinitive in formal and literary styles.

Examples of reporting verbs used with a *that*-clause with the present subjunctive:

***advise, agree, demand, insist, prefer, propose, recommend, request, suggest, urge***

*Carlos: I think you should visit a specialist.*

*Carlos **advised** that I visit a specialist.*

*Susan: Yes, you are right, Harry. You'd better accept that offer.*

*Susan **agreed** that Harry accept the offer.*

*Customer: I want you to give me a full refund.*

*The customer **demanded** that the company give him a full refund.*

*Mike: You really must try my new muffin recipe.*

*Mike **insisted** that I try his new muffin recipe.*

*Howard: I'd rather you came to my party, and not to Ryan's.*

*Howard **preferred** that I go to his party.*

*Jill: How about going to the sauna tonight?*

*Jill **proposed** / **recommended** / **suggested** that we go to the sauna.*

*Employees: Could we have the staff meeting on Tuesday instead?*

*The employees **requested** that the staff meeting be on Tuesday.*

*Green activists: The nuclear plant must immediately be shut down.*

*Green activists **urged** that the nuclear plant be shut down.*

## Related topics:

- [Present subjunctive](#)

# Reporting verb + gerund

VERB (+ PREPOSITION) + GERUND

Examples of reporting verbs used with a gerund:

**accuse somebody of, admit (to), apologise for, confess (to), complain about, deny, insist on, prohibit, suggest**

Angela: *I think it was you who told my secret.*

Angela **accused me of** telling her secret.

Mario: *Yes, I bumped your car.*

Mario **admitted (to)** bumping my car.

Student to professor: *I am sorry for being late.*

The student **apologised (to the professor) for** being late.

Julie to her neighbour: *Yes, it was me who started that ugly rumour about you. I'm sorry.*

Julie **confessed (to)** starting an ugly rumour about her neighbour.

Student to his friend: *I hate having to write tons of essays every semester.*

The student **complained (to his friend) about** having to write a lot of essays.

Francesco: *No, I didn't bump your car.*

Francesco **denied** bumping my car.

Wife to husband: *I do want to invite Dan and Margaret as well.*

The wife **insisted on** inviting Dan and Margaret as well.

Museum sign: *No smoking*

They **prohibit** smoking in the museum.

Jill: *What about going to the sauna tonight?*

Jill **suggested** going to the sauna.

## Related topics:

- [The forms of the gerund](#)
- [Verb + gerund](#)
- [Preposition + gerund](#)

# Reporting verb + TO-infinitive

VERB + TO-INFINITIVE

Examples of reporting verbs used with the to-infinitive:

**agree, claim, decide, demand, hope, offer, prefer, promise, refuse, threaten**

*Jim: All right, I'll do it.*

*Jim **agreed** to do it.*

*Al-Qaida: We have captured two US marines.*

*Al-Qaida **claims** to have captured two US marines.*

*Customer: I don't think I'll buy this notebook after all.*

*The customer **decided** not to buy the notebook.*

*Judge: I want to see the documents.*

*The judge **demanded** to see the documents.*

*Susan: I hope I'll get to the airport in time.*

*Susan **was hoping** to get to the airport in time.*

*Ben: I can take you home if you want.*

*Ben **offered** to take me home.*

*Spokesman: Well, I would rather not say anything at this point.*

*The spokesman **preferred** not to say anything.*

*Jill: I will be on time, I promise.*

*Jill **promised** to be on time.*

*Sportsman: No, I won't answer any questions about my private life.*

*The sportsman **refused** to answer questions concerning his private life.*

*Young man on the bridge: Don't come any closer or I'll jump.*

*The disturbed young man **threatened** to jump off the bridge.*

## Related topics:

- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [Verb + TO-infinitive](#)

# Reporting verb + object + TO-infinitive

VERB + OBJECT + TO-INFINITIVE

Examples of reporting verbs used with an object and the to-infinitive:

**ask, advise, allow, beg, command, encourage, forbid, instruct, invite, order, permit, persuade, prefer, recommend, remind, request, tell, urge, warn, want**

Customs officer: *Please empty your pockets, madam.*  
The officer **asked** the woman to empty her pockets.

Carlos: *I think you should visit a specialist.*  
Carlos **advised** me to visit a specialist.

Professor: *You mustn't use a dictionary while writing the test.*  
The professor did not **allow** us to use a dictionary while writing the test.

Chris: *Please tell me what really happened.*  
Chris **begged** her to tell him what had happened.

Sergeant: *Fire!*  
The sergeant **commanded** the firing squad to shoot.

Uncle Joe: *Have you ever thought of starting scuba diving? I guess you'd love it.*  
My uncle Joe **encouraged** me to take up scuba diving.

Mother to Luke: *You must not talk to Ellie again.*  
Luke's mother **forbade** him to talk to Ellie again.

Doctor to patient: *You must exercise at least 30 minutes a day.*  
The doctor **instructed** the patient to exercise at least 30 minutes a day.

I: *Why don't you come in for a coffee?*  
I **invited** him to come inside and have a cup of coffee.

Police to photographers at an accident scene: *No pictures!*  
The police **ordered** the photographers not to take any pictures of the accident scene.

School regulation: *Teachers are not to use corporal punishment in the classroom.*



The rules **don't permit** teachers to beat students at this school.

Matt: Be a vegetarian; it's better for your health.

Victoria: But I like bacon!

Matt: You don't know what those pigs have been eating.

Victoria: Yuck! You're right. I've never thought about it that way. I won't eat meat any more.

Matt **persuaded** Victoria to become a vegetarian.

Health specialist: I think it would be better if people consumed much less fat and sugar.

The health specialist would **prefer** people not to consume so much fat and sugar.

Thesis consultant to student: You should read the Thesis Guide before you start your research.

The thesis consultant **recommended** the student to read the Thesis Guide before starting the research. (the to-infinitive after recommend is less common in everyday contexts)

David: Don't forget to buy some milk.

David **reminded** me to buy some milk.

Sign: Do not take photographs, please

Visitors **are requested** not to take photographs.

Teacher to pupils: Open your books to page 10.

The teacher **told** the pupils to open their books to page 10.

Mother to child: Don't tease that dog! It will bite you!

The mother **warned** her child not to tease the dog.

Green activists: The nuclear plant must be shut down immediately.

Green activists **urged** the government to shut down the nuclear plant.

Boss to secretary: Will you rewrite this letter, please? There are far too many mistakes in it.

The boss **wanted** her secretary to rewrite the letter.

### **Related topics:**

- [Verb + object + TO-infinitive](#)

# SAY, TELL and ASK

## SAY SOMETHING

The direct object of *say* can be a noun, a *that*-clause (*that* can be omitted in informal styles) or an indirect question (in negatives and questions when the information is not actually reported):

*Laura never says anything when asked.*

*Can you say your name again?*

*David says he's exhausted.*

*They said that they would wait for me.*

*She didn't say what time she would be back.*

## SAY SOMETHING TO SOMEONE

When we use *to* + indirect object after *say*, we do not normally use a *that*-clause:

*He didn't say anything to me about the job.*

*"See you soon," Linda said to him.*

## TELL SOMEONE SOMETHING

*Tell* is usually followed by an indirect object and a direct object:

*Has he told you the news?*

*Could you tell me your name, please?*

*They told me that they would wait for me.*

*She didn't tell me what time she would be back.*

## Phrases with TELL

In some of the phrases below, an indirect object is optional:

*My father told (us) a very interesting story.*

*You must always tell (me) the truth.*

*John told (you) a lie.*

*No one can tell the future.*

*Can you tell the time in English?*

## ASK (SOMEONE) + indirect question

We can use *ask* to report questions:

*Rebecca asked (me) where I lived.*

*The guide asked (us) if we had visited the museum before.*

### **ASK/TELL SOMEONE + TO-infinitive**

We can use *ask* or *tell* to report imperatives or requests:

*Johnny's mother told him to put away his toys.*

*The examiner asked me to speak louder.*

### **Quotes:**

- *Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.* - [Plato](#)

### **Related topics:**

- [Reporting statements](#)
- [Reporting questions](#)
- [Reporting imperatives](#)

# Impersonal reporting

Some reporting verbs can be made impersonal with the personal pronoun *it* and the passive voice when the agent (the doer) of the action is unimportant, unknown or obvious.

Examples of such verbs are: *agree, announce, believe, claim, confirm, consider, decide, estimate, expect, fear, feel, hope, imply, know, predict, reckon, recommend, report, rumour, say, state, suggest, suppose, think* etc.:

***It has been agreed** to prohibit smoking in public places.*

***It is rumoured** that the government will implement new taxes.*

## Related topics:

- [Passive voice with reporting verbs](#)

# Revision questions: indirect speech

- How do we punctuate the following sentence?

*I have never been to Mexico Joe said and added but I'd like to go one day*

- When do words that refer to place, time or person change in indirect speech?
- When do tenses not change in indirect speech even if the reporting verb is in the past tense?
- What was the original statement? (There are three possible answers.)

*He said he had eaten too much.*

- How do we report a yes/no question?
- What is the word order after the expression *Could you tell me...?*
- Which reporting verbs can we use to report imperatives?
- Which of the following sentences are incorrect and why?

*He suggested me to have a haircut.*

*I demand to know the truth.*

*The boy admitted to steal the computer.*

*They insisted that I should pay in advance.*

*He said me to go home immediately.*

# Exercises: indirect speech

## Indirect speech - Exercise 1

Fill in each gap with the appropriate form of *say*, *tell* or *ask*.

1. When I asked him about the debt, he didn't ... a word.
2. Can you ... me what happened?
3. Jasmine ... she would be back soon.
4. I ... Mia if she wanted to join us.
5. Did they ... what time the ceremony began?
6. You mustn't ... lies. You must always ... the truth.
7. Could you ... it a bit louder? I can't hear well.
8. Linda ... to me that she was sorry.
9. Why did you ... what my blood type was?
10. You mustn't ... anyone that you've spoken to me.

## Indirect speech - Exercise 2

Turn the following direct questions into indirect ones, beginning as shown.

1. Why is he shouting?  
I have no idea ...
2. Does Carol like chocolate?  
Do you know ...
3. Did I tell you about the decision?  
I can't remember ...
4. How much is that coat?  
Why don't you ask the shop assistant ...
5. What does this word mean?  
Who can tell me ...
6. Who wrote War and Peace?  
I can't remember ...
7. Where did she find cranberries in January?  
I wonder ...
8. What's the purpose of your visit?  
May I ask you ...
9. Is there a bank near here?  
Could you tell me ...
10. Where does he live?  
I wish I knew ...

## Indirect speech - Exercise 3

**Decide if the following sentences are correct or incorrect.**

1. Sarah admitted to break the Ming vase.
2. Can you tell me what are you doing here?
3. The secretary told me to fill in the form.
4. Paul said he will arrive the following day.
5. Why didn't Andy agree to pick up the kids after school?
6. Don't worry. I didn't say him anything.
7. She should apologise for ruining your holiday plans.
8. Do you know why I said that?
9. The professor didn't remember we met earlier.
10. David was accused for shoplifting.

## Indirect speech - Exercise 4

**Rewrite each sentence, beginning as shown, so that the meaning stays the same.**

1. "Where do I have to write my client number?" I asked the operator.  
I asked the operator ...
2. Eric said that we had passed that same road sign two hours earlier.  
Eric said, "...
3. The patient said, "I am not taking any medications now."  
The patient said that ...
4. "I last spoke to Matt yesterday," she said.  
She told me that ...
5. They told me they might be late.  
They said, " ...
6. "Have you ever been to Denmark?" Niels asked.  
Niels asked me ...
7. "I can't come tonight," he said.  
He said ...
8. I asked Matteo what he was doing there on his own.  
I asked, "Matteo, ...
9. "Shall we meet here tomorrow?" she asked the team.  
She said ...
10. Mike said he would call me back the following week.  
Mike said, "...

## Indirect speech - Exercise 5

**Turn the following direct questions into indirect ones, beginning as shown. Ask your partner.**

1. Do you have any brothers or sisters?  
Can I ask you ...
2. Is there a good restaurant near where you live?  
Do you know ...
3. What's the time?  
Could you tell me ...
4. Where did you buy your shoes?  
Do you mind if I ask ...
5. Do you go to the gym regularly?  
Can I ask you ...
6. What are your five favourite movies?  
Can you tell me ...
7. Which area of grammar is the most difficult for you?  
Would you mind telling me ...
8. How long have you been learning English?  
Do you remember ...
9. When is your birthday?  
Will you tell me ...
10. Can you play chess?  
I wonder ...

## **Answer key: indirect speech**

### **[Answer key - Indirect speech - Exercise 1](#)**

1. When I asked him about the debt, he didn't **say** a word.
2. Can you **tell** me what happened?
3. Jasmine **said** she would be back soon.
4. I **asked** Mia if she wanted to join us.
5. Did they **say** what time the ceremony began?
6. You mustn't **tell** lies. You must always **tell** the truth.
7. Could you **say** it a bit louder? I can't hear well.
8. Linda **said** to me that she was sorry.
9. Why did you **ask** what my blood type was?
10. You mustn't **tell** anyone that you've spoken to me.

### **[Answer key - Indirect speech - Exercise 2](#)**

1. I have no idea why he is shouting.



2. Do you know if/whether Carol likes chocolate?
3. I can't remember if/whether I told you about the decision.
4. Why don't you ask the shop assistant how much that coat is?
5. Who can tell me what this word means?
6. I can't remember who wrote War and Peace.
7. I wonder where she found cranberries in January.
8. May I ask you what the purpose of your visit is?
9. Could you tell me if there is a bank near here?
10. I wish I knew where he lives.

### Answer key - Indirect speech - Exercise 3

1. Sarah admitted **(to) breaking** the Ming vase.
2. Can you tell me what **you are** doing here?
3. Correct.
4. Paul said he **would** arrive the following day.
5. Correct.
6. Don't worry. I didn't **tell** him anything.
7. Correct.
8. Correct.
9. The professor didn't remember we **had** met earlier.
10. David was accused **of** shoplifting.

### Answer key - Indirect speech - Exercise 4

1. I asked the operator where I had to write my client number.
2. Eric said, "We passed this same road sign two hours ago."
3. The patient said that he/she is not taking any medications (now). (the reported words are still true)  
The patient said that he/she was not taking any medications (then). (the reported words are out-of-date)
4. She told me that she had last spoken to Matt yesterday. (reported on the same day)  
She told me that she had last spoken to Matt the day before / the previous day. (reported later)
5. They said, "We may/might be late."
6. Niels asked me if I had ever been to Denmark.
7. He said he can't come tonight. (reported on the same day)  
He said he couldn't come last night. (reported on the following day)  
He said he couldn't come that night. (reported later)
8. I asked, "Matteo, what are you doing here on your own?"
9. She said the team should meet there the next/following day.

10. Mike said, "I will call you back next week."

## **Answer key - Indirect speech - Exercise 5**

1. Can I ask you if you have any brothers or sisters?
2. Do you know if there is a good restaurant near where you live?
3. Could you tell me what the time is?
4. Do you mind if I ask where you bought your shoes?
5. Can I ask you if you go to the gym regularly?
6. Can you tell me what your five favourite movies are?
7. Would you mind telling me which area of grammar is the most difficult for you?
8. Do you remember how long you have been learning English?
9. Will you tell me when your birthday is?
10. I wonder if you can play chess.

# Chapter 5: Passive voice and causative structures

- [Guiding questions: passive voice and causative structures](#)
- [Passive voice](#)
- [Causative structures](#)
- [Revision questions: passive voice and causative structures](#)
- [Exercises: passive voice and causative structures](#)

# Guiding questions: passive voice and causative structures

- How do we form the passive voice? Which other verb can we use instead of *be*?
- What verbs cannot be passive?
- When and why is the passive voice preferred over the active voice?
- What is the agent of an action? When is it not mentioned in a passive sentence?
- When and how can the passive voice be used with reporting verbs?
- What is a causative structure?

# Passive voice

- [The difference between the active and passive voice](#)
- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [Verbs which cannot be used in the passive voice](#)
- [Ditransitive verbs in the passive voice](#)
- [The agent with the passive voice](#)
- [The use of the passive voice](#)
- [The passive with GET](#)
- [Passive voice with reporting verbs](#)

## The difference between the active and passive voice

Voice shows the relation of the subject of the sentence to the action of the verb.

In the active voice, the subject is the agent (or doer) of the action:

*Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin in 1928.*

With the passive voice, the subject is the recipient of the action. It is the person or thing that the action is directed at:

*Penicillin was discovered by Alexander Fleming in 1928.*

The starting point of a sentence is usually the subject. It provides the theme of the message, which is old information, while new information is supplied near the end of the sentence.

With the active voice, the theme is the agent. We say something about the doer of the action, who or which is the subject of the sentence:

*Alexander Fleming was a Scottish biologist, pharmacologist and botanist.  
He discovered penicillin in 1928.*

With the passive voice, the theme, or old information, is the recipient of the action. We say something about the recipient, who or which is the subject of the sentence:

*Penicillin is an antibiotic that kills most bacteria. It was discovered by Alexander Fleming in 1928.*

## Form: passive voice

BE + PAST PARTICIPLE

The passive is formed by making the object of the active sentence the subject of the new sentence and using the appropriate form of *be* + the past participle form of the verb. *Be* is in the same tense as the verb in the active sentence.

Active sentence:

SUBJECT + **VERB** + OBJECT

*Alexander Fleming **discovered** penicillin in 1928.*

Passive sentence:

SUBJECT + **BE** + **PAST PARTICIPLE** (+ AGENT)

*Penicillin **was discovered** by Alexander Fleming in 1928.*

### Passive forms

The following list shows examples of passive forms in different tenses and modal constructions. The corresponding active sentences are given in parentheses:

- Present simple

*The book **is published**.* (They **publish** the book.)

- Present continuous

*The book **is being published**.* (They **are publishing** the book.)

- Present perfect

*The book **has been published**.* (They **have published** the book.)

- Past simple

*The book **was published**.* (They **published** the book.)

- Past continuous

*The book **was being published**.* (They **were publishing** the book.)

- Past perfect

*The book **had been published**.* (They **had published** the book.)

- Future simple

*The book **will be published**.* (They **will publish** the book.)

- Future continuous

*The book **will be being published**.* (They **will be publishing** the book.)

- Future perfect

*The book **will have been published**.* (They **will have published** the book.)

- Modal simple

*The book **is going to be published**.* (They **are going to publish** the book.)

- Modal simple

*The book **can be published**.* (They **can publish** the book.)

- Modal continuous

*The book **might be being published**.* (They **might be publishing** the book.)

- Modal perfect

*The book **should have been published**.* (They **should have published** the book.)

Perfect continuous forms are also possible in the passive voice; however, they are less common:

*His novels **have been being published** since the 1960s.* (They **have been publishing** his novels since the 1960s.)

*His novels **might have been being published** at that time.* (They **might have been publishing** his novels at that time.)

Questions and negatives are formed the same way as in active sentences:



*Was the book **published**?*  
*Will the book **be published**?*  
*The book **hasn't been published**.*  
*The book **shouldn't have been published**.*

In the case of verb + preposition, the preposition comes after the verb in the passive sentence:

*My house **was broken into** last week. (Someone **broke into** my house last week.)*  
*He **is often laughed at**. (People often **laugh at** him.)*  
*The ship **has been lost sight of**. (They **have lost sight of** the ship.)*

Infinitives, gerunds and participles can also have passive forms:

*Josh always **needs to be told** what to do. (Other people always need to tell Josh what to do.)*  
*I hate **being lied to**. (I hate people lying to me.)*  
*Authorities refused to reveal any information about the case **being investigated**. (Authorities refused to reveal any information about the case which they were investigating.)*

### Quotes:

- *Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted. - [Albert Einstein](#)*
- *Lost time is never found again. - [Benjamin Franklin](#)*
- *I had been told that the training procedure with cats was difficult. It's not. Mine had me trained in two days. - [Bill Dana](#)*
- *To be wronged is nothing unless you continue to remember it. - [Confucius](#)*
- *People are not disturbed by things, but by the view they take of them. - [Epictetus](#)*
- *If the Romans had been obliged to learn Latin, they would never have found time to conquer the world. - [Heinrich Heine](#)*
- *Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished. - [Lao Tse](#)*
- *Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood. - [Marie Curie](#)*
- *Some things have to be believed to be seen. - [Ralph Hodgson](#)*
- *You live longer once you realize that any time spent being unhappy is wasted. - [Ruth E. Renkl](#)*

### Related topics:

- [The passive with GET](#)
- [The forms of the infinitive](#)

- [The forms of the gerund](#)
- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)
- [Appendix: irregular verb forms](#)

# Verbs which cannot be used in the passive voice

## Intransitive verbs

Intransitive verbs (verbs that do not take an object) cannot be passive. For this reason, the following sentences have no passive equivalents:

*We **arrived** home late at night.*

***Did** you **sleep** well?*

*He **was running** too fast.*

## Certain state verbs

Certain state verbs are not used in the passive even if they are transitive. Examples of such verbs are: *belong, have (own), lack, resemble, suit* etc. The following sentences cannot be made passive:

*Joanne **has** two brothers.*

***Does** this bag **belong to** you?*

*Unfortunately, Friday **doesn't suit** me.*

Remember that some state verbs also have active meanings (e.g. *measure, fit* and *weigh*). If these verbs are used with the active meaning, they can be passive:

*The truck **weighed** 2.5 tons. (Its weight was 2.5 tons.) (active sentence, stative meaning, cannot be made passive)*

*They **weighed** the truck before and after loading the cargo. (They measured its weight.) (active sentence, active meaning, can be made passive)*

*The truck **was weighed** before and after loading the cargo. (passive sentence)*

There are state verbs which can normally be passive:

*Nothing **is known** about the thief.*

*She **is loved** by all her friends.*

*I have the feeling I've **been misunderstood**.*

## Verbs which are always passive

Some verbs are used almost exclusively in the passive voice:

*He **was born** into a wealthy family.*

*When your order **is shipped**, we will send you a confirmation e-mail.*

*The victims **were hospitalised** immediately.*

*The room **was strewn** with books and magazines.*

*The area **is mainly populated** by families with small children.*

## **Active verbs with a passive meaning**

Some verbs are used in the active form with a passive meaning:

*The company's new phone **doesn't sell** as well as the last one. (Fewer people buy it.)*

*The sign on the door **read** "No entry". (That is what you read on it.)*

*The trousers have been mended, and now the hole **doesn't show**. (It can't be seen.)*

Active gerunds after *need*, *require* and *want* also have passive meanings:

*The walls **need painting**. (They should be painted.)*

*Liquid nitrogen **requires careful handling**. (It should be handled carefully.)*

*The dog **wants feeding**. (It should be fed.)*

## **Passive verbs with an active meaning**

Some verbs can be used in the passive form with an active meaning:

*My parents **are retired** now. (My parents have retired.)*

***Are you finished** yet? (Have you finished yet?)*

*Those days **are gone**. (Those days have gone.)*

## **Related topics:**

- [State verbs and action verbs](#)

## Ditransitive verbs in the passive voice

Ditransitive verbs have both a direct object and an indirect object. If the direct object is not a personal pronoun, the order of the objects is optional, but if the **direct object** comes first, the indirect object is preceded by a preposition, usually *to*:

*The company paid the customer \$500 as compensation.*

*The company paid \$500 to the customer as compensation.*

If the **direct object** is a personal pronoun, it always comes before the indirect object:

*The compensation was \$500, and the company paid **it** to the customer without delay.*

In the passive voice, either of the two objects can be the subject of the sentence. If the **direct object** is the subject of the passive sentence, the indirect object is preceded by a preposition:

*The customer was paid \$500 as compensation.*

*\$500 was paid to the customer as compensation.*

Examples of ditransitive verbs:

***allow, ask, award, bake, bring, build, buy, charge, cook, forgive, give, grant, hand, leave, make, offer, order, owe, pass, pay, promise, read, save, sell, send, show, teach, tell, throw, write***

## The agent with the passive voice

The agent is the person or thing that performs the action and is the subject of the active sentence. In most passive sentences, the agent is not mentioned. If it is mentioned, however, it is usually preceded by the preposition *by*:

*The pigeons were dispersed **by a tourist walking past**. (A tourist walking past dispersed the pigeons.)*

*He was hit **by a falling branch** while walking in the woods. (A falling branch hit him while he was walking in the woods.)*

The instrument is an object that is not the doer of the action but something that the doer uses in performing the action. If it is mentioned in the passive sentence, it is preceded by the preposition *with*:

*The crowds were dispersed **with tear gas**. (The police dispersed the crowds with tear gas.)*

*He was hit **with a branch** while walking in the woods. (Someone hit him with a branch while he was walking in the woods.)*

(In the two passive sentences above, the agent is not mentioned. In the first sentence the identity of the agent is obvious, while in the second one it is unknown.)

*With* is also often used with the verbs *fill*, *crowd*, *cram* and *pack*:

*The bottle was **filled with** whiskey.*

*The hall was **crowded with** people standing and lying on the floor.*

*Our room is **crammed with** furniture.*

The preposition *in* is often used with *cover*:

*When I looked out the window in the morning, I saw that the streets **were covered in** snow.*

## The use of the passive voice

The passive voice is more common in formal written English. It is often used in newspapers, academic and scientific writing and reports, which attempt to be less personal. Most passive sentences do not have an agent, as the focus of the sentence is not on the doer of the action but on its recipient. As a rule, the agent is only mentioned in the passive sentence if it is important new information which cannot be omitted:

*The Lord of the Rings was written **by J. R. R. Tolkien.***

*While Tony was walking home last night, he was mugged **by a group of young men**, who stole his mobile phone and wallet.*

The passive voice is preferred over the active in the following cases:

### Change of focus

We use the passive voice when we want to shift the focus of attention from the agent to the recipient of the action. If the agent is not important information, it is usually omitted in the passive sentence:

***The flood** killed 24 people. (focus on *the flood*, the agent)*

*24 **people** were killed by the flood. (focus on *24 people*, the recipient)*

***The water in the nearby pool** reflected her figure. (focus on *the water in the nearby pool*, the agent)*

***Her figure** was reflected in the nearby pool. (focus on *her figure*, the recipient)*

### Unknown or unimportant agent

We use the passive voice when we do not know who is performing the action or if the identity of the agent is not important. In this case the agent is omitted in the passive sentence:

*Tom's bike has been stolen. (unknown agent)*

*I was advised to apply for a visa in advance. (unimportant agent)*

### Generalised agent

We use the passive voice with a generalised agent, i.e. when the subject of the active sentence is *you, one, we, people, everybody* etc.:

*The Venus de Milo can be seen at the Louvre. (You can see the Venus de Milo at the Louvre.)*

*Smart phones are used for many different things. (We/People use smart phones for many different things.)*

## **Obvious agent**

We use the passive voice when the identity of the agent is obvious. In this case the agent is usually omitted in the passive sentence:

*The murderer has been arrested. (The police have arrested the murderer.)*

## **Impersonality**

We use the passive voice when we do not want to mention the agent because:

- we want to avoid naming the specific person responsible for the action,
- we want to sound objective or tactful without revealing the source of information or
- it would be inappropriate or embarrassing to mention the agent:

*It has been decided to cancel next week's meeting.*

*I regret to inform you that your application has been rejected.*

*Mistakes have been made.*

## **Description of processes**

We often use the passive voice in describing processes, when the emphasis is on the actions and not on the people who perform them. The agent is usually omitted:

*Then the pig is disembowelled and cut into two.*

*After they had been picked, the grapes were crushed with bare feet.*



# The passive with GET

GET + PAST PARTICIPLE

*Get* is often used instead of *be* in the passive voice in informal spoken English to refer to an action that happens by accident or unexpectedly:

*Their car **got stolen** in front of their house last night.  
Jerry **got fired** because he was always late for work.*

*Get* expresses action and change and is only used with action verbs, not state verbs:

*Jerry **was fired** because he was always late for work.  
Jerry **got fired** because he was always late for work. (fire is an action verb)*

*Nothing **is known** about the thief.  
\*Nothing **gets known** about the thief. (know is a state verb)*

As *get* in the passive voice expresses action, it makes it possible to differentiate between an action and a state if it is not otherwise clear:

*The living room window **was broken**. (state or action)  
The living room window **got broken**. (action)*

The passive with *be* and the agent mentioned also makes the distinction clear:

*The living room window **was broken by the burglar**. (action)*

A reflexive pronoun after *get* indicates that the recipient of the action is in some way involved in or responsible for what happened:

*He **got injured** while playing football. (it was an accident)  
He **got himself injured** while trying bike stunts. (it was partly his fault)*

The *get* passive is also used in certain idiomatic expressions:

***get dressed, get washed, get engaged, get married, get divorced, get lost, get mixed up, get started***

*I took a shower and **got dressed**.  
When **did** they **get married**?  
**Have** you ever **got lost** while travelling?*

## Quotes:

- *The secret of getting ahead is getting started.* - [Mark Twain](#)

## Related topics:

- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [State verbs and action verbs](#)

## Passive voice with reporting verbs

If we want to avoid mentioning the generalised agents *we*, *they*, *people*, *everybody*, *one* etc. with reporting verbs, we can use the following passive patterns:

1. *it* + passive reporting verb + *that*-clause

In this pattern, the generalised agent + active reporting verb is replaced with *it* + passive reporting verb:

***Everybody knows that my grandfather likes red wine.***  
***It is known that my grandfather likes red wine.***

2. subject + passive reporting verb + *to*-infinitive

In this pattern we start with the subject of the reported clause, which is followed by the passive reporting verb and the *to*-infinitive form of the verb in the reported clause:

***Everybody knows that my grandfather likes red wine.***  
***My grandfather is known to like red wine.***

The reporting verb (*is known*) is in the same tense as it was in the active sentence (*knows*). The type of *to*-infinitive we use (*to like*) corresponds to the temporal relationship between the action of reporting and the reported event. This temporal relationship can be of two basic types:

- The reporting and the reported event happen simultaneously (as in the example above).
- The reported event happens before the reporting.

Examples of reporting verbs which can be used with the patterns above:

***allege, assume, believe, claim, consider, declare, discover, estimate, expect, feel, find, intend, know, observe, presume, prove, report, reveal, say, see, show, suppose, think, understand***

## Reporting a simultaneous event in the passive voice

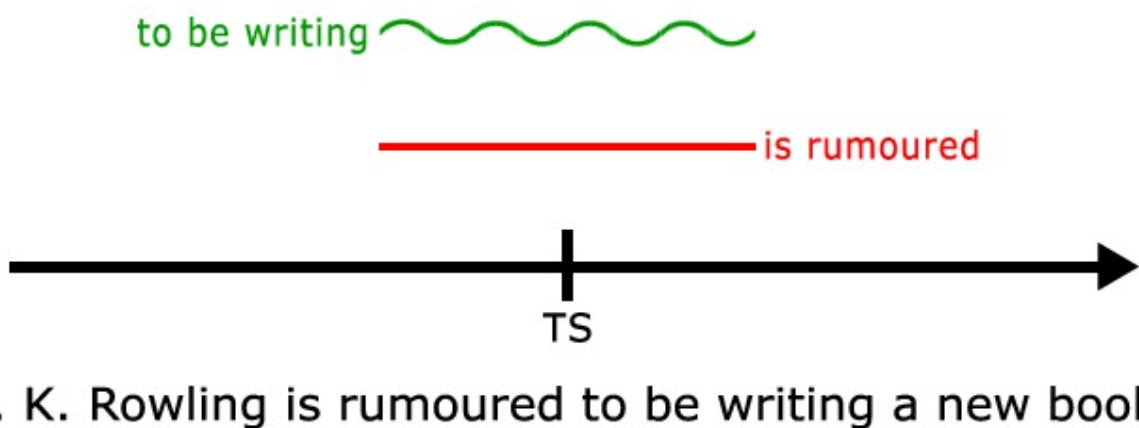
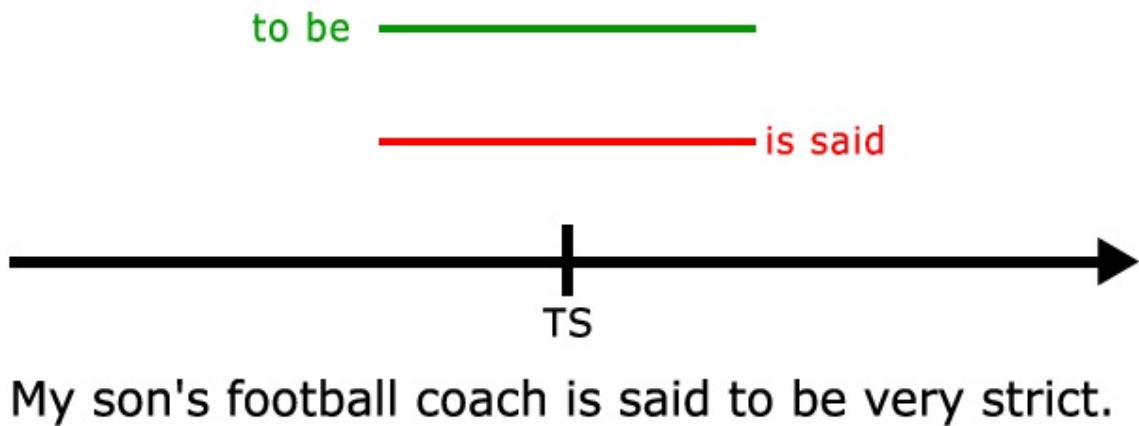
SUBJECT + PASSIVE REPORTING VERB + TO-INFINITIVE (SIMPLE OR CONTINUOUS)

If the reporting and the reported event happen simultaneously, in the same time frame, we use simple or continuous infinitives, depending on whether the verb in the reported clause was simple or continuous.

If the time frame is the present:

*My son's football coach **is said to be** very strict.* (They **say** my son's football coach **is** very strict.)

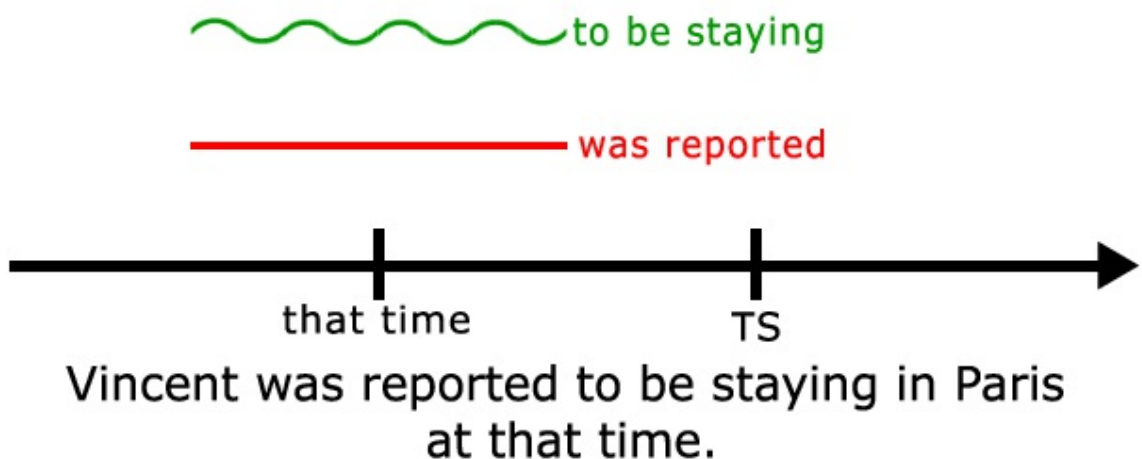
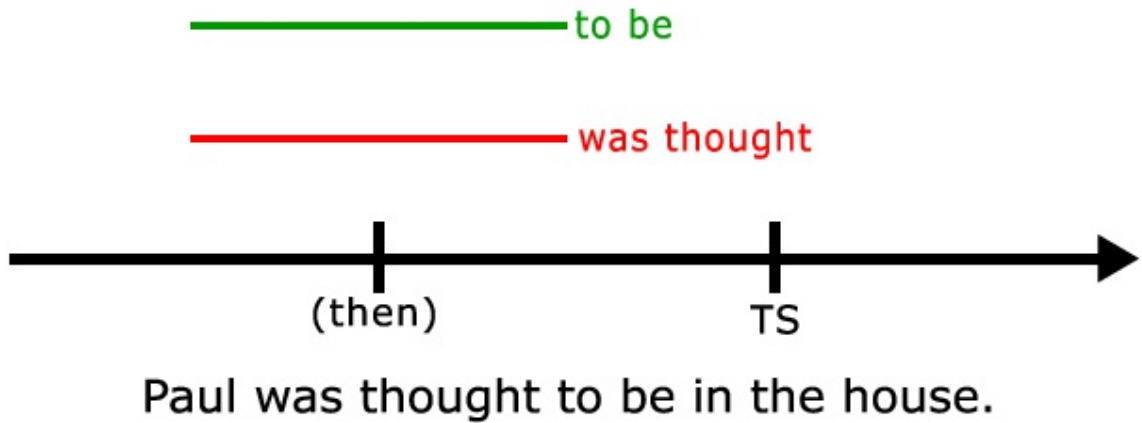
*J. K. Rowling **is rumoured to be writing** a new book.* (Rumour **has** it that J. K. Rowling **is writing** a new book.)



If the time frame is the past:

*Paul **was thought to be** in the house.* (Everybody **thought** Paul **was** in the house.)

*Vincent was reported to be staying in Paris at that time.* (They **reported** Vincent **was staying** in Paris at that time.)



In the following examples, the verb in the reported clause of the original sentence was passive, so we use passive infinitives in the new sentence.

If the time frame is the present:

*The manuscript is believed to be owned by Mr Wilkins.* (They **believe** the manuscript **is owned** by Mr Wilkins. / They **believe** Mr Wilkins **owns** the manuscript.)

*The painting is said to be being restored.* (rarely used) (They **say** the painting **is being restored**. / They **say** that some experts **are restoring** the painting.)

If the time frame is the past:

*The money was **thought to be provided** by a private foundation. (They **thought** the money was **provided** by a private foundation. / They **thought** a private foundation **provided** the money.)*

*The spy's phone was **believed to be being tapped**. (rarely used) (The CIA **believed** that the spy's phone was **being tapped**. / The CIA **believed** that someone was **tapping** the spy's phone.)*

## Reporting an earlier event in the passive voice

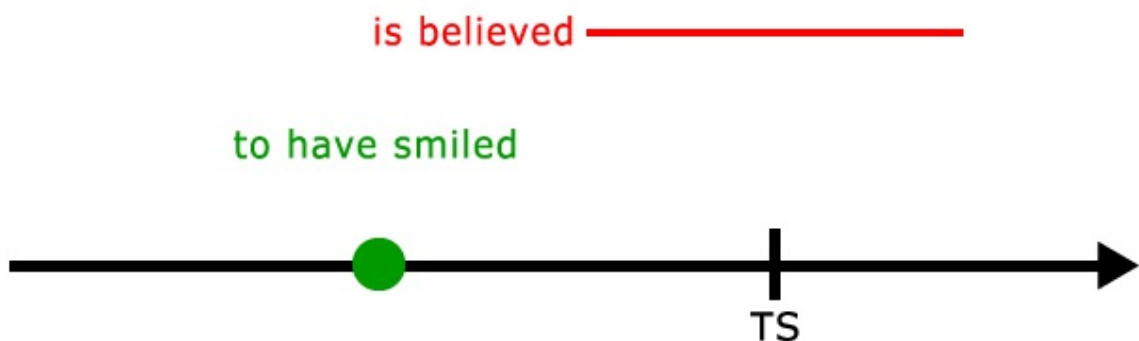
SUBJECT + PASSIVE REPORTING VERB + TO-INFINITIVE (PERFECT OR PERFECT CONTINUOUS)

If the reported event happens before the reporting, we use perfect or perfect continuous infinitives, depending on whether the verb in the reported clause was simple or continuous.

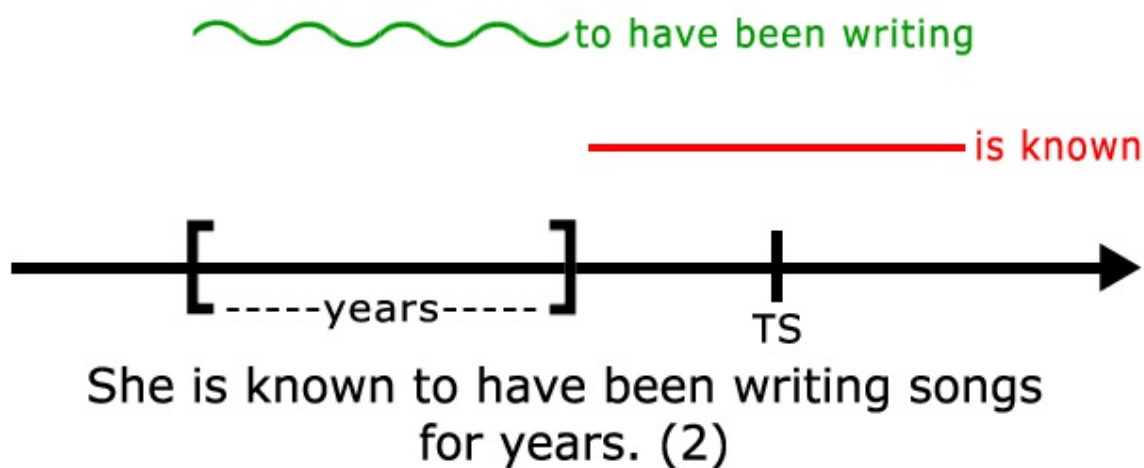
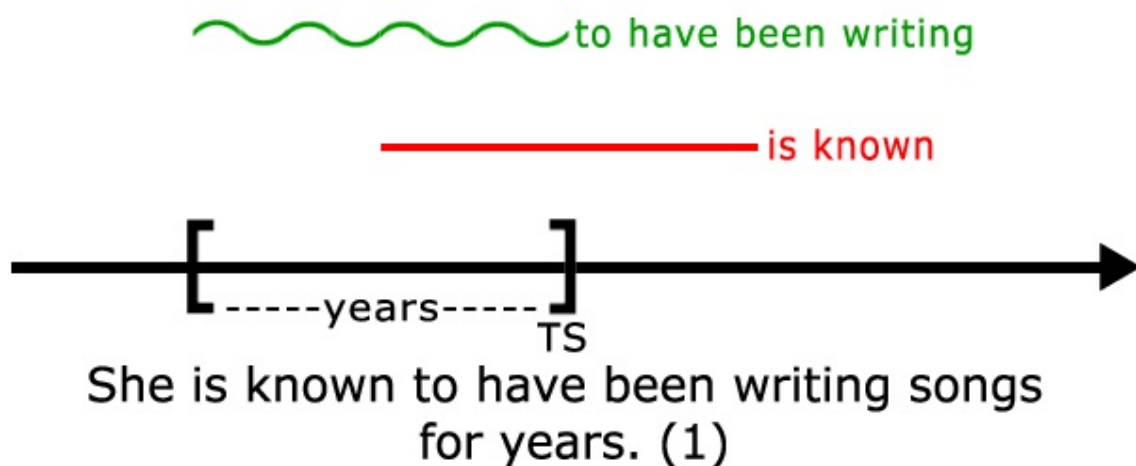
If the reporting happens in the present and the reported event in the past:

*He **is believed never to have smiled** at anyone. (They **believe** he **never smiled** / **has never smiled** at anyone.)*

*She **is known to have been writing** songs for years. (They **know** she **has been writing** / **was writing** songs for years.)*



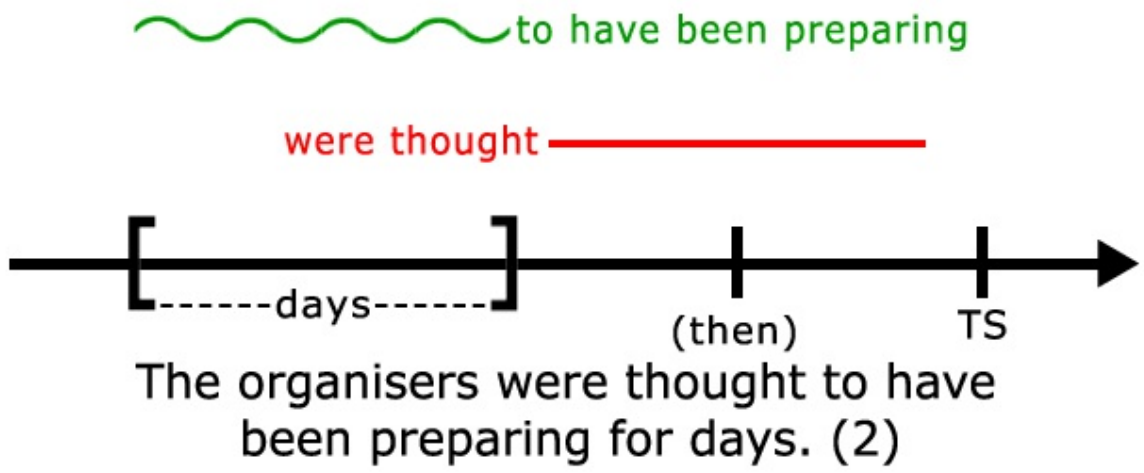
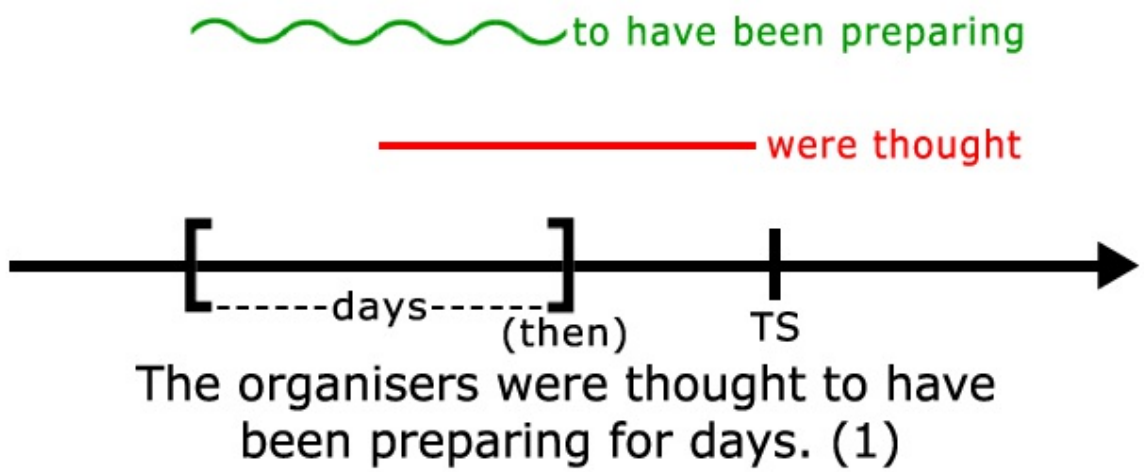
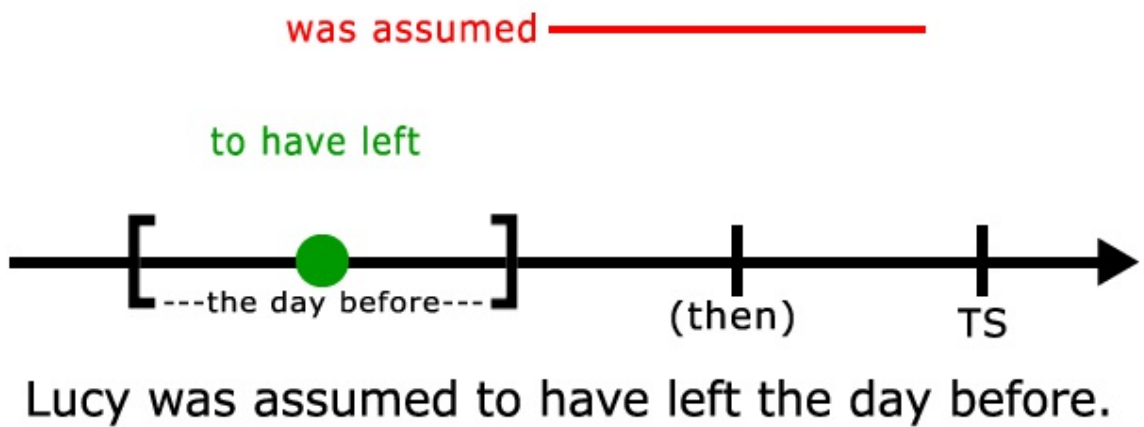
He is believed never to have smiled at anyone.



If the reporting happens in the past and the reported event in an earlier past:

*Lucy **was assumed to have left** the day before.* (They **assumed** Lucy **had left** the day before.)

*The organisers **were thought to have been preparing** for days.* (Everybody **thought** the organisers **had been preparing** for days.)



In the following examples, the verb in the reported clause of the original sentence was passive, so we use passive infinitives in the new sentence.



If the reporting happens in the present and the reported event in the past:

*The picture **is known to have been painted** by Caspar David Friedrich.*  
(They **know** that the picture **was painted / has been painted** by Caspar David Friedrich. / They **know** that Caspar David Friedrich **painted / has painted** the picture.)

*The picture **is believed to have been being painted** for years.* (rarely used)  
(They **believe** that the picture **was being painted / has been being painted** for years. / They **believe** that the artist **was painting / has been painting** the picture for years.)

If the reporting happens in the past and the reported event in an earlier past:

*The documents **were claimed to have been signed** by the CEO.* (They **claimed** that the documents **had been signed** by the CEO. / They **claimed** that the CEO **had signed** the documents.)

*The tree **was reported to have been being chopped** when the accident happened.* (rarely used) (The investigators **reported** that the tree **had been being chopped** when the accident happened. / The investigators **reported** that the woodcutters **had been chopping** the tree when the accident happened.)

### **Related topics:**

- [Indirect speech](#)
- [The forms of the infinitive](#)

# Causative structures

Causative sentences are similar to passive sentences in that the agent (the doer of the action) is not the grammatical subject of the sentence. Depending on whether the agent is mentioned or not, causative structures can be of two main types.

- [Causative structures without an agent](#)
- [Causative structures with an agent](#)

## Causative structures without an agent

In these causative structures, the agent is usually not mentioned.

### HAVE + object + past participle

This structure is generally used when we talk about professional services provided for a customer. It means that we are not doing something ourselves but arranging for someone to do it for us:

*I had my hair cut this morning.* (A hairdresser cut my hair.)

*I'm going to have my apartment painted.* (I'm going to ask someone to paint my apartment.)

Compare:

*I cut my hair this morning.* (I did it myself.)

*I'm going to paint my apartment.* (I'm going to do it myself.)

*Have* + object + past participle is different from *have/has* + past participle (present perfect tense) and *had* + past participle (past perfect tense):

*I had my hair cut.* (causative: *have* + object + past participle)

*I had cut my hair.* (past perfect tense: *had* + past participle)

In this structure, *have* is not an auxiliary but a main verb and can be used in the same way as ordinary verbs:

*I'd like to have my photo taken.*

*Could you have this jacket cleaned?*

*When are you having the heater installed?*

*Have you ever had your ears pierced?*

*Have* + object + past participle can also have the non-causative meaning "experience something unpleasant". In this case, the subject of the sentence did not initiate the action:

*I had my bike stolen.* (My bike was stolen.)

*He had his leg broken in a car crash.* (His leg was broken in a car crash.)

### GET + object + past participle

This structure has the same meaning as *have* + object + past participle, but *get* is more informal:

*I got my hair cut this morning.*

*Could you get this jacket cleaned?*

*They finally got the car serviced.*

It can also be used to express accidents or misfortunes happening to someone in the same way as *have* + object + past participle can:

*I got my bike stolen.* (My bike was stolen.)

*He got his leg broken in a car crash.* (His leg was broken in a car crash.)

## Causative structures with an agent

In the following causative structures, the agent is the object of the main clause.

### MAKE + object + bare infinitive

This structure means "force someone to do something they do not want to do":

*The teacher **made Jack rewrite** the composition.*

*His mom **made him clean** his room again.*

*Make* + object + bare infinitive can also mean "cause someone to do something":

*Don't **make me laugh**.*

*The film **made me cry**.*

In the passive voice, *make* takes a *to*-infinitive:

*Jack **was made to rewrite** the composition.*

### Quotes:

- *No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.* - [Eleanor Roosevelt](#)
- *Children make you want to start life over.* - [Muhammad Ali](#)

### HAVE + object + bare infinitive

This structure has a meaning similar to "make someone do something":

*I'll **have her copy** the document right away. (I'll ask/tell her to copy the document right away.)*

*The teacher **had me stay** after class to discuss my essay. (The teacher made me stay after class to discuss my essay.)*

### GET + object + TO-infinitive

This structure means "persuade someone to do something". It is similar in meaning to *have* + object + bare infinitive but is more informal:

*Finally, we **got a mechanic to repair** the elevator.*

*I couldn't get her to understand the problem.*

## **HAVE, GET + object + present participle**

*Have/get* + object + present participle can mean "persuade someone to do something":

*The teacher **had the whole class singing** Mary Had a Little Lamb.*

*The boss **got the staff working** overtime.*

It can also mean "experience something happening to you as a result of something":

*We'll **have my brother staying** with us for a little while until he finds a new apartment.*

*His problems **got him going** to hospital for years.*

Here, the present participle expresses repeated action, or something happening over a period of time.

# Revision questions: passive voice and causative structures

- What is the theme of the message in a passive sentence: the agent or the recipient of the action?
- Can we form the passive voice in any tense?
- Do infinitives and gerunds have passive forms?
- Can you think of verbs which are always passive?
- What is a ditransitive verb? How do we use ditransitive verbs in the passive?
- What is the difference between an agent and an instrument?
- In which of the following sentences can the agent phrase be omitted?

*Ulysses was written **by James Joyce**.*

*My car was stolen **by someone** yesterday.*

*Brown was elected president twice **by the people of his country**.*

*The bomb was found **by children playing football**.*

*At the trial, Jones was found guilty **by the jury**.*

- When is *get* used instead of *be* in the passive voice?
- Which reporting verbs are often used in the passive voice?
- In which causative structure(s) can we use *get* instead of *have*?
- Which causative structure(s) can express accidents or misfortunes?
- How do we form the passive of *make* + object + bare infinitive?

# Exercises: passive voice and causative structures

## Passive voice and causative structures - Exercise 1

Fill in the corresponding active or passive verb phrases in the table below using third person singular forms. There is an example at the beginning.

|    | Active voice          | Passive voice               |
|----|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
|    | <i>destroys</i>       | <i>is destroyed</i>         |
| 1  | will open             | ...                         |
| 2  | had decided           | ...                         |
| 3  | ...                   | has been being discussed    |
| 4  | ...                   | ought to be protected       |
| 5  | ...                   | was called                  |
| 6  | is examining          | ...                         |
| 7  | is going to make      | ...                         |
| 8  | had been taking       | ...                         |
| 9  | ...                   | has been seen               |
| 10 | ...                   | will be being investigated  |
| 11 | ...                   | should have been promoted   |
| 12 | ...                   | was being trained           |
| 13 | needn't have answered | ...                         |
| 14 | might be following    | ...                         |
| 15 | ...                   | would have been being taken |
| 16 | breaking              | ...                         |
| 17 | to tell               | ...                         |

## Passive voice and causative structures - Exercise 2

Put each verb in brackets into a suitable active or passive form.

1. ... her hair ... yet? (CUT)
2. Your answers must ... in ink. (WRITE)
3. Who ... this letter? (SEND)
4. By the time I got to the fair, all the good things ... . (SELL)
5. ... the suspect ... at the moment? (QUESTION)



6. Somebody ... my bike last week. (STEAL)
7. I hate ... seriously because I look young. (NOT TAKE)
8. If he ... to hospital earlier, they could have saved his life. (TAKE)
9. As he ... by the forest, he noticed a fire among the trees. (WALK)
10. When ... my refund ... to my account? (SEND)

## Passive voice and causative structures - Exercise 3

**Rewrite each sentence, beginning as shown, so that the meaning stays the same.**

1. Vitamin C is assumed to cure the common cold.  
Most people ...
2. Everybody says that Dan was the first who arrived.  
Dan ...
3. Did anybody know he had lived in Norway before?  
Was ...
4. She was believed to be renting a flat with her cousin.  
It ...
5. Why did everybody think that he was the smartest kid in the class?  
Why was he ...?
6. We expect Sophie to pass with flying colours.  
Sophie ...
7. It is known that Portuguese grammar is very complicated.  
Portuguese grammar ...
8. Was Gary thought to have cheated?  
Did they ...
9. American football is said to have been much tougher twenty years ago.  
Fans ...
10. It is rumoured that they are building a new shopping centre there.  
A new shopping centre ...

## Passive voice and causative structures - Exercise 4

**Rewrite the sentences using causative structures (*have/get* + object + past participle, *make* + object + bare infinitive, *get* + object + *to*-infinitive).**

1. When is the dentist checking Bill's teeth?
2. Our house needs redecorating.
3. Someone scratched my car in the car park yesterday.
4. Did you have to pay extra for the air conditioning?
5. It is recommended that you take your motorcycle to a garage for an oil

change every 10,000 kilometres.

6. Can you give me your lecture notes so that I can photocopy them?
7. I tried everything, but the printer still didn't work.
8. Was his leg broken in the accident?
9. I must get some prints of these photos.
10. She smiled because of what I said.

## Passive voice and causative structures - Exercise 5

**Rewrite each sentence so that it contains the word(s) in capital letters and the meaning stays the same. Do not change the words given.**

1. Unfortunately, we couldn't go inside the museum because it was being restored. (RESTORING)
2. The doctor gave me a painkiller, and, after a while, I felt better. (GIVEN)
3. How many times has the river flooded the village before? (BEEN)
4. The new clinic is treating more patients now than a year ago. (TREATED)
5. They must have delivered the package to the wrong address. (BEEN)
6. What do most people use computers for? (USED)
7. When I wanted to ring my mom, I realised that somebody had stolen my phone. (GOT)
8. I don't like being tickled. (WHEN)
9. If you would like to be informed about future events, sign up for our newsletter. (INFORM)
10. Who directed this movie? (BY)

## Passive voice and causative structures - Exercise 6

**Complete the questions with the passive (*be* + past participle) or causative (*have* + object + past participle, *make* + object + bare infinitive) form of the verbs in brackets and then discuss them with your partner. Ask for more information.**

1. Who ... your favourite book ... by? What is it about? (WRITE)
2. What was the last film that ... you ... a lot? (LAUGH)
3. Have you ever ... to do something that you thought was wrong? (ASK)
4. What was the last thing you ... on? (COMPLIMENT)
5. What kind of music ... you ... to dance? (WANT)
6. Have you ever ... any of your belongings ... ? (STEAL)
7. When was the last time you ... to a party? (INVITE)
8. How often do you ... your hair ... ? (CUT)
9. Have you ever ... by a dog? (CHASE)

10. Is there anything that should ... in your home? (DO)
11. Have you ever ... the wrong change in a shop? If yes, what did you do? (GIVE)
12. Did you take your last ID photo, or did you ... it ... ? (TAKE)
13. What was the last present you ... that you really liked? (GIVE)
14. Have you ever ... by an insect? (STING)
15. Were you ... housework when you were young? (DO)

## Answer key: passive voice and causative structures

### Answer key - Passive voice and causative structures - Exercise 1

|    | Active voice                  | Passive voice                     |
|----|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1  | will open                     | <b>will be opened</b>             |
| 2  | had decided                   | <b>had been decided</b>           |
| 3  | <b>has been discussing</b>    | has been being discussed          |
| 4  | <b>ought to protect</b>       | ought to be protected             |
| 5  | <b>called</b>                 | was called                        |
| 6  | is examining                  | <b>is being examined</b>          |
| 7  | is going to make              | <b>is going to be made</b>        |
| 8  | had been taking               | <b>had been being taken</b>       |
| 9  | <b>has seen</b>               | has been seen                     |
| 10 | <b>will be investigating</b>  | will be being investigated        |
| 11 | <b>should have promoted</b>   | should have been promoted         |
| 12 | <b>was training</b>           | was being trained                 |
| 13 | needn't have answered         | <b>needn't have been answered</b> |
| 14 | might be following            | <b>might be being followed</b>    |
| 15 | <b>would have been taking</b> | would have been being taken       |
| 16 | breaking                      | <b>being broken</b>               |
| 17 | to tell                       | <b>to be told</b>                 |

### Answer key - Passive voice and causative structures - Exercise 2

1. **Has her hair been cut yet?**

2. Your answers must **be written** in ink.
3. Who **sent** this letter?
4. By the time I got to the fair, all the good things **had been sold**.
5. **Is** the suspect **being questioned** at the moment?
6. Somebody **stole** my bike last week.
7. I hate **not being taken** seriously because I look young.
8. If he **had been taken** to hospital earlier, they could have saved his life.
9. As he **walked** by the forest, he noticed a fire among the trees.
10. When **will** my refund **be sent** to my account?

### Answer key - Passive voice and causative structures - Exercise 3

1. Most people assume that vitamin C cures the common cold.
2. Dan is said to have been the first who arrived.
3. Was he known to have lived in Norway before?
4. It was believed that she was renting a flat with her cousin.
5. Why was he thought to be the smartest kid in the class?
6. Sophie is expected to pass with flying colours.
7. Portuguese grammar is known to be very complicated.
8. Did they think that Gary had cheated?
9. Fans say that American football was much tougher twenty years ago.
10. A new shopping centre is rumoured to be being built there.

### Answer key - Passive voice and causative structures - Exercise 4

1. When is Bill having/getting his teeth checked?
2. We need to have/get our house redecorated.
3. I had/got my car scratched in the car park yesterday.
4. Did they make you pay extra for the air conditioning? / Were you made to pay extra for the air conditioning?
5. It is recommended that you have/get the oil in your motorcycle changed every 10,000 kilometres.
6. Can I have/get your lecture notes photocopied?
7. I couldn't get the printer to work.
8. Did he have/get his leg broken in the accident?
9. I must have/get these photos printed.
10. What I said made her smile.

### Answer key - Passive voice and causative structures -

## Exercise 5

1. Unfortunately, we couldn't go inside the museum because they were restoring it.
2. I was given a painkiller, and, after a while, I felt better.
3. How many times has the village been flooded (by the river) before?
4. More patients are being treated by the new clinic now than a year ago.
5. The package must have been delivered to the wrong address.
6. What are computers used for?
7. When I wanted to ring my mom, I realised that my phone had got stolen.
8. I don't like it when someone tickles me.
9. If you would like us to inform you about future events, sign up for our newsletter.
10. Who was this movie directed by?

## Answer key - Passive voice and causative structures -

### Exercise 6

1. Who **was** your favourite book **written** by? What is it about?
2. What was the last film that **made** you **laugh** a lot?
3. Have you ever **been asked** to do something that you thought was wrong?
4. What was the last thing you **were complimented** on?
5. What kind of music **makes** you **want** to dance?
6. Have you ever **had** any of your belongings **stolen**?
7. When was the last time you **were invited** to a party?
8. How often do you **have** your hair **cut**?
9. Have you ever **been chased** by a dog?
10. Is there anything that should **be done** in your home?
11. Have you ever **been given** the wrong change in a shop? If yes, what did you do?
12. Did you take your last ID photo, or did you **have it taken**?
13. What was the last present you **were given** that you really liked?
14. Have you ever **been stung** by an insect?
15. Were you **made to do** housework when you were young?

# Chapter 6: Non-finite verb forms

- [Guiding questions: non-finite verb forms](#)
- [The difference between finite and non-finite verb forms](#)
- [The infinitive](#)
- [The gerund](#)
- [Verbs followed by the TO-infinitive or gerund](#)
- [The participle](#)
- [The difference between the gerund and the present participle](#)
- [Revision questions: non-finite verb forms](#)
- [Exercises: non-finite verb forms](#)

# Guiding questions: non-finite verb forms

- What is the difference between finite and non-finite verb forms?
- What do we mean when we say that the infinitive, gerund or participle does not indicate tense?
- Is the doer of the action expressed by a non-finite verb form always the subject of the sentence?
- What are some verbs that take a *to*-infinitive?
- What are some verbs that take a gerund?
- What are some verbs that can take a *to*-infinitive or a gerund?
- Which tenses are formed with the present participle?
- Which tenses are formed with the past participle?
- What is the connection between participles and relative clauses?
- What is the difference between a gerund and a present participle?

# The difference between finite and non-finite verb forms

## Finite verb forms

Finite verb forms are marked by inflection and indicate person, number and tense. A finite verb can be the single main verb in a sentence.

For example, the finite forms of the verb *go* are:

- *go* (present tense in all persons except the third person singular)

*I go to school in the afternoon.*

- *goes* (present tense in the third person singular)

*Mia goes to school by bus every day.*

- *went* (past tense)

*Yesterday, we went to school at 9 am.*

## Non-finite verb forms

Non-finite verb forms do not indicate person, number or tense.

The non-finite forms of the verb *go* are:

- *go* (infinitive)

*I can't go with you.*

*Unfortunately, she had to go.*

*Do you really go out with her?*

*I didn't go to work today.*

*I want to go home.*

- *going* (gerund)

*I like going to the cinema.*

*Carol suggested going for a walk.*

*Going faster would have been really dangerous.*



- *gone* (past participle)

*Jack has **gone** away on holiday.*

*By the time Sue returned, the others had **gone** back to their cars.*

*I wish I had **gone** to university.*

- *going* (present participle)

*I'm **going** to a concert tonight.*

*I heard my dad **going** up the stairs.*

***Going** across the bridge last night, I saw someone swimming in the river.*

The infinitive, the gerund and the participle have other forms, which are discussed in detail in the following chapters.

# The infinitive

- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [The "subject" of the infinitive](#)
- [The use of the infinitive](#)

## The forms of the infinitive

An infinitive can be a *to*-infinitive or a bare infinitive (without *to*). There is no difference in meaning between them; some structures require a *to*-infinitive, while others call for a bare infinitive:

*I ought **to call** them. (to-infinitive)*  
*I had better **call** them. (bare infinitive)*

In the negative, *not* usually comes before the infinitive:

*I ought **not to call** them.*  
*I had better **not call** them.*

In some cases, the verb in the main clause is negative, not the infinitive:

*I **want** to call them.*  
*I **don't want** to call them.*

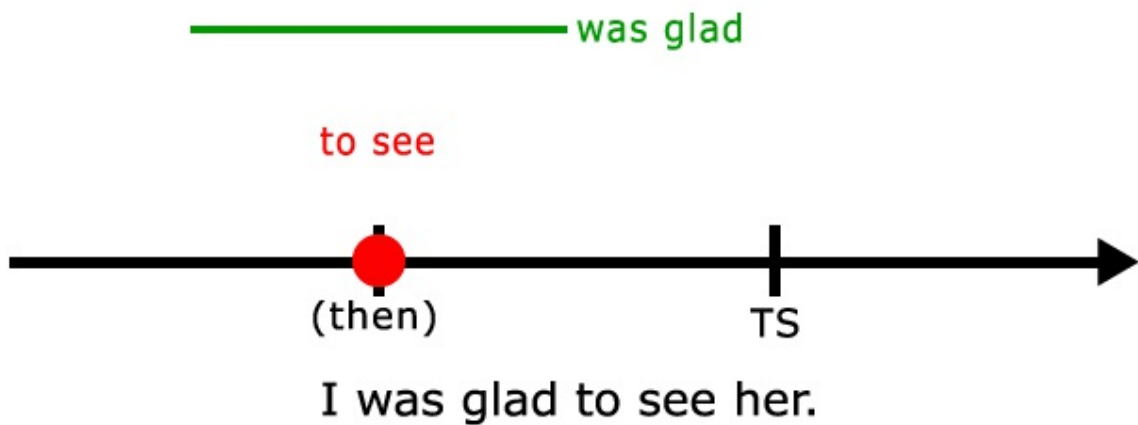
As the infinitive has no tense, it does not in itself indicate the time of the action that it refers to. However, it can have aspect, which shows the temporal relationship between the action expressed by the infinitive and the time of the preceding verb. There are four types of infinitive, each of which has an active and passive form:

|                                      | Active                        | Passive                             |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Simple infinitive</b>             | <i>(to) write</i>             | <i>(to) be written</i>              |
| <b>Continuous infinitive</b>         | <i>(to) be writing</i>        | <i>(to) be being written</i>        |
| <b>Perfect infinitive</b>            | <i>(to) have written</i>      | <i>(to) have been written</i>       |
| <b>Perfect continuous infinitive</b> | <i>(to) have been writing</i> | <i>(to) have been being written</i> |

### Simple infinitive

The **simple infinitive** refers to the same time as that of the preceding verb:

*I was glad **to see** her.*  
*He must be very happy.*  
*I'll arrange a meeting with the manager.*  
*My son's football coach is said to be very strict.*



## Continuous infinitive

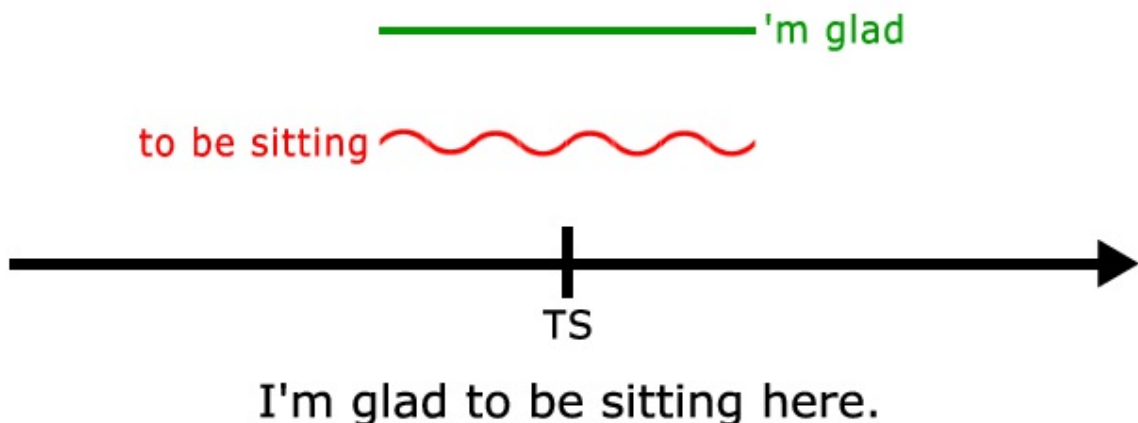
The **continuous infinitive** refers to the same time as that of the preceding verb and expresses an action in progress or happening over a period of time:

*I'm glad **to be sitting** here.*

*You **must be joking**.*

*This time next week, I'll **be lying** on the beach in Croatia.*

*Vincent was reported **to be staying** in Paris at that time.*



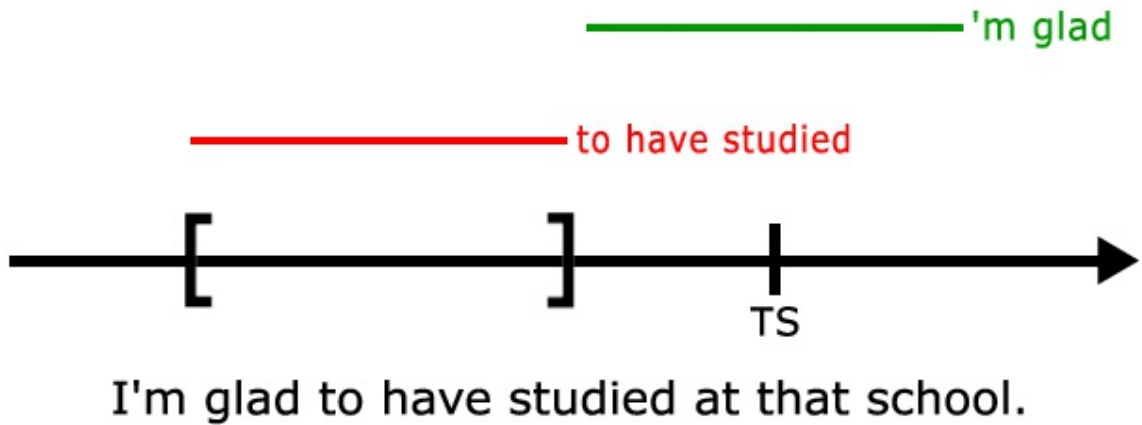
## Perfect infinitive

The **perfect infinitive** refers to a time before that of the preceding verb:

*I'm glad **to have studied** at that school.*

*They **must have forgotten** about the deadline.*

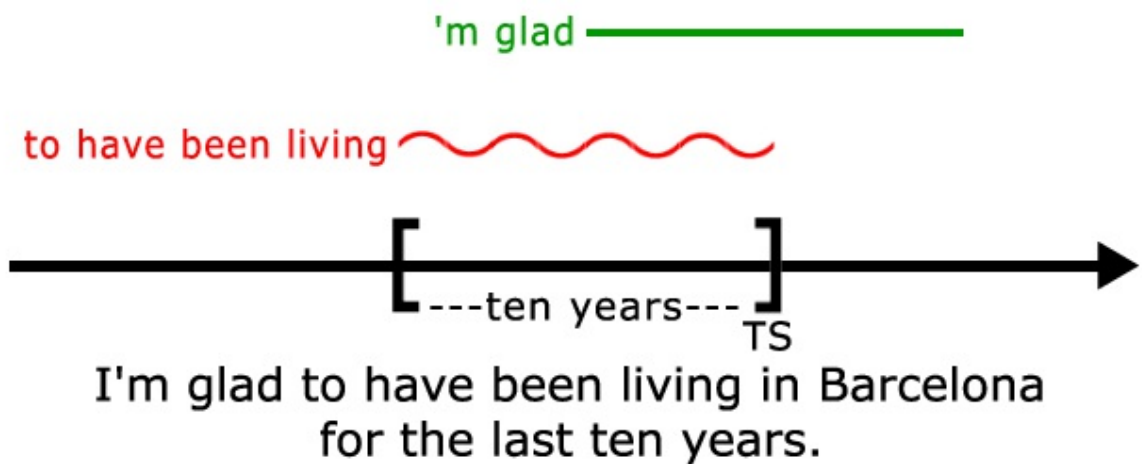
By next week, they'll **have finished** painting the rooms.  
Lucy was assumed to have left the day before.



### Perfect continuous infinitive

The **perfect continuous infinitive** refers to a time before that of the preceding verb and expresses an action in progress or happening over a period of time:

*I'm glad to have been living in Barcelona for the last ten years.*  
*He must have been waiting for ages.*  
*Soon, he'll have been running for four hours.*  
*The organisers were thought to have been preparing for days.*



### Passive infinitives

Passive forms are also possible:

*Your composition **has to be typed**.* (passive simple infinitive)

*The spy's phone **was believed to be being tapped**.* (passive continuous infinitive, rarely used)

*This sonnet **must have been written** by Shakespeare.* (passive perfect infinitive)

*The picture **is believed to have been being painted** for years.* (passive perfect continuous infinitive, rarely used)

### Quotes:

- *Live as you will wish to have lived when you are dying.* - [Christian Furchtegott Gellert](#)
- *To be wronged is nothing unless you continue to remember it.* - [Confucius](#)
- *Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it.* - [Henry David Thoreau](#)
- *Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood.* - [Marie Curie](#)
- *Some things have to be believed to be seen.* - [Ralph Hodgson](#)

### Related topics:

- [The continuous aspect](#)
- [The perfect aspect](#)
- [The perfect continuous aspect](#)
- [Types of modals](#)
- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [Appendix: irregular verb forms](#)

## The "subject" of the infinitive

The doer of the action expressed by the infinitive can be:

- the subject of the sentence:

*I was glad **to see** her.*

*You must **be joking**.*

*Lucy was assumed **to have left** the day before.*

*I want **to go**.*

*I've come here **to help** you.*

- the direct object of the verb in the main clause:

*I want **you to go**.*

*They told **us to fill** in a registration form.*

*The teacher made **Jack rewrite** the composition.*

*I'll have **her copy** the document right away.*

*I couldn't get **her to understand** the problem.*

*I saw **him cross** the street.*

- the object of the prepositions *of* or *for*:

*It's very kind of **you to come** with me to the embassy.*

*We were waiting for **the rain to stop**.*

*It's easy for **an outsider to say** what should be done in such a situation.*

- an indefinite or generalised subject (*you, one, we, people* etc.):

*It is sometimes difficult **to accept** the truth.*

*The rules didn't specify who **to talk to** in case of an emergency.*

- unexpressed and understood only from the context:

*It must have been funny **to see** her in a tuxedo.*

*Nice **to meet** you.*

*It would be a mistake **to hire** him.*

### Related topics:

- [The infinitive of purpose](#)
- [The "subject" of the gerund](#)
- [The "subject" of the participle](#)

# The use of the infinitive

The infinitive can be used on its own or with an object or adverbial:

*We decided **to leave**.*

*They told us **to fill in a registration form**.*

*I'm glad **to have studied at that school**.*

- [The TO-infinitive as subject](#)
- [The TO-infinitive as a subject complement](#)
- [The TO-infinitive to replace a relative clause](#)
- [The TO-infinitive after passive reporting verbs](#)
- [The infinitive after modals](#)
- [DO, DOES, DID + bare infinitive](#)
- [SEE, WATCH, HEAR, LISTEN, FEEL, SMELL, NOTICE, OBSERVE + object + bare infinitive](#)
- [APPEAR, HAPPEN, PROVE, SEEM, TEND, TURN OUT + TO-infinitive](#)
- [HAVE, GET, LET, MAKE + object + infinitive](#)
- [Verb + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Verb + object + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Noun phrase + TO-infinitive](#)
- [The infinitive of purpose](#)
- [The infinitive of result](#)
- [Question word + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Introductory infinitive clauses](#)

## The TO-infinitive as subject

A *to*-infinitive clause can be the subject of a sentence:

***To tell the truth** is always right.*

***To complain** would seem ungrateful.*

But it is more common to start with the introductory *it* and place the *to*-infinitive clause at the end of the sentence:

***It is always right to tell the truth.***

***It would seem ungrateful to complain.***

Quotes:



- *To read a book for the first time is to make an acquaintance with a new friend; to read it for a second time is to meet an old one.* - [Chinese proverb](#)
- *To be wronged is nothing unless you continue to remember it.* - [Confucius](#)
- *To be interested in the changing seasons is a happier state of mind than to be hopelessly in love with spring.* - [George Santayana](#)
- *To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up.* - [Oscar Wilde](#)

### Related topics:

- [The gerund as subject](#)

## The TO-infinitive as a subject complement

A *to*-infinitive clause can be a subject complement after *be*:

*My advice is **to file a complaint at once.***

*What is essential is **to maintain a healthy diet.***

*The decision was **to extend the deadline by three months.***

### Quotes:

- *To read a book for the first time is to make an acquaintance with a new friend; to read it for a second time is to meet an old one.* - [Chinese proverb](#)
- *To be wronged is nothing unless you continue to remember it.* - [Confucius](#)
- *To be interested in the changing seasons is a happier state of mind than to be hopelessly in love with spring.* - [George Santayana](#)
- *To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up.* - [Oscar Wilde](#)

### Related topics:

- [The gerund as a subject complement](#)

## The TO-infinitive to replace a relative clause

A *to*-infinitive clause can replace a defining relative clause after ordinal numbers (*the first, the second* etc.), after superlatives (*the best, the most beautiful* etc.) and after *next, last* and *only*:

*Ethan is usually the last person **to understand the joke.*** (Ethan is usually the last person who understands the joke.)

*His office was the next room **to clean.*** (His office was the next room that

they had to clean.)

Passive infinitives are also possible:

*His was the last composition **to be marked**.* (His was the last composition which was marked.)

**Related topics:**

- [Relative clauses](#)

## **The TO-infinitive after passive reporting verbs**

If we want to avoid mentioning the generalised agents *we, they, people, everybody, one* etc. with reporting verbs, we can use a passive reporting verb and the *to*-infinitive form of the verb in the reported clause. Depending on the temporal relationship between the action of reporting and the reported event, we use different types of *to*-infinitive (simple, continuous, perfect and perfect continuous):

*My son's football coach **is said to be** very strict.* (They **say** my son's football coach **is** very strict.)

*Vincent **was reported to be staying** in Paris at that time.* (They **reported** Vincent **was staying** in Paris at that time.)

*He **is believed never to have smiled** at anyone.* (They **believe** he **never smiled / has never smiled** at anyone.)

*The organisers **were thought to have been preparing** for days.* (Everybody **thought** the organisers **had been preparing** for days.)

This topic is discussed in detail under [Passive voice and causative structures » Passive voice » Passive voice with reporting verbs](#).

## **The infinitive after modals**

The infinitive is used after modal verbs, semi-modal verbs (also called marginal modals) and other modal expressions.

### **Modal verbs**

Modal verbs (*can, could, may, might, will, shall, would, should* and *must*) are followed by a bare infinitive:

*I **could** hear the dog barking outside.  
You **must be** joking.  
He **may have caught** the train.  
You **should have told** me earlier.*

## **Semi-modal verbs (marginal modals)**

*Used* is followed by a *to*-infinitive:

*They **used to live** by the sea.*

*Ought* is followed by a *to*-infinitive:

*You **ought to know** that by now.  
They **ought to have insisted** on some compensation.*

When used as modal verbs, *dare* and *need* are followed by a bare infinitive:

***Need** you **make** so much noise?  
You **needn't have been** so rude.  
How **dare** she **criticise** us?*

When used as a main verb, *need* is followed by a *to*-infinitive:

*Do you **need to use** the hairdryer?*

*Dare* as a main verb can take a bare infinitive or a *to*-infinitive:

*He didn't **dare (to) look** back.*

But in the expression *Don't you dare...*, it always takes a bare infinitive:

*Don't you **dare interrupt** me!*

## **Other modal expressions**

Other modal expressions are usually followed by a *to*-infinitive, with the exception of *had better* and *would rather*, which are followed by a bare infinitive:

*Although the current was strong, I **was able to swim** to the other bank.  
Will journalists **be allowed to ask** questions?  
Hurry up! The ceremony **is about to begin**!  
Kevin is stuck in a traffic jam, so he **is bound to be** late.  
Negotiations **were due to take** place later that week.*

Smokers **are more likely to develop** lung cancer compared to non-smokers.  
You **are not to do** that again.

We **had better leave** soon.  
I'd **rather go** by bike than walk.

### Related topics:

- [Types of modals](#)

## DO, DOES, DID + bare infinitive

The auxiliary verbs *do*, *does* and *did* are followed by the bare infinitive to form negative and interrogative sentences in the past simple and present simple tenses:

**Do** you **take** any vitamins?  
He **doesn't live** here any more.  
**Did** you **ask** the shop assistant?

*Do*, *does* and *did* can also be used in affirmative sentences to express emphasis:

I **do know** what you mean.  
He **does travel** a lot.  
I **did want** to write, but I forgot.

### Quotes:

- *Flowers really do intoxicate me.* - [Vita Sackville-West](#)

### Related topics:

- [The auxiliary DID for emphasis](#)
- [The auxiliaries DO and DOES for emphasis](#)

## SEE, WATCH, HEAR, LISTEN, FEEL, SMELL, NOTICE, OBSERVE + object + bare infinitive

After verbs of perception (*see*, *watch*, *hear*, *listen*, *feel*, *smell*, *notice*, *observe* etc.), the infinitive expresses a completed action:

I felt the ground **shake** once. (I felt it as the ground shook once.)  
I saw the burglar **climb** over the fence and **break into** the house. (I saw that

the burglar climbed over the fence and broke into the house.)

*I have never heard them **play** that song before.* (I have never heard that song played by them before.)

In the passive voice, we use a *to*-infinitive:

*The burglar was seen **to climb** over the fence.*

A present participle after these verbs refers to an action continuing over a period of time:

*I felt the ground **shaking** for about half a minute.* (I felt that the ground was shaking.)

**Quotes:**

- *Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton asked why.* - [Bernard Baruch](#)

**Related topics:**

- [SEE, WATCH, HEAR, LISTEN, FEEL, SMELL, NOTICE, OBSERVE + object + present participle](#)

## **APPEAR, HAPPEN, PROVE, SEEM, TEND, TURN OUT + TO-infinitive**

These verbs are followed by a *to*-infinitive:

*I appear **to have lost** my keys.*

*I happened **to be passing** your house, and I saw that the door was open.*

*Our predictions proved **to be** accurate.*

*She seems **to understand** most of what we say.*

*The library tends **to be crowded** during the exam period.*

*The concert turned out **to be** much better than we had expected.*

## **HAVE, GET, LET, MAKE + object + infinitive**

*Have, let* and *make* are followed by an object + bare infinitive:

*I'll **have her copy** the document right away.* (I'll ask/tell her to copy the document right away.)

*In the end, the terrorists **let the hostages go**.* (The terrorists allowed the

hostages to go.)

The teacher **made Jack rewrite** the composition. (The teacher forced Jack to rewrite the composition.)

Get is followed by a *to*-infinitive:

Finally, we **got a mechanic to repair** the elevator.

In the passive, *make* takes a *to*-infinitive:

Jack **was made to rewrite** the composition.

But *let* takes a bare infinitive:

In the end, the hostages **were let go**.

**Quotes:**

- *No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.* - [Eleanor Roosevelt](#)
- *Let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food.* - [Hippocrates](#)
- *Children make you want to start life over.* - [Muhammad Ali](#)

**Related topics:**

- [HAVE + object + bare infinitive](#)
- [MAKE + object + bare infinitive](#)
- [GET + object + TO-infinitive](#)

## **Verb + TO-infinitive**

Examples of verbs followed by the *to*-infinitive:

***afford, agree, aim, appear, arrange, ask, attempt, be, be dying, beg, begin, can't bear, can't stand, can't wait, care, cease, choose, claim, come, continue, dare, decide, demand, deserve, dread, expect, fail, forget, grow, guarantee, happen, hate, have, hesitate, hope, intend, learn, like, long, love, manage, need, neglect, offer, omit, plan, prefer, prepare, pretend, promise, propose, refuse, regret, remember, seek, seem, start, swear, tend, threaten, train, try, turn, out, used, vow, wait, want, wish, would like, yearn***

*I can't afford to own a car.*

*We all agreed to cancel next week's meeting.*

He will **attempt to break** the national record for the 1,500 metres.  
Why did you **choose to study** arts?  
In a recent poll, 31% of the female workers **claimed to have been harassed** at work.  
She **decided to set** out at once.  
I **demand to know** the truth.  
Tony **has failed to show up** at work on time again.  
I **hope to see** you soon.  
We **managed to cross** the valley.  
Ben **offered to take** me home.  
**Preparing to die** is present in most spiritual paths and traditions.  
He **promised to change** his behaviour, but I knew he wouldn't.  
Jack **refused to fight** in such an immoral war.  
The owner **threatened to sue** us for trespassing.  
I can't **wait to be** with you again.

### Quotes:

- *Live as you will wish to have lived when you are dying.* - [Christian Furchtegott Gellert](#)
- *Children make you want to start life over.* - [Muhammad Ali](#)
- *The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.* - [Nelson Henderson](#)
- *Every English poet should master the rules of grammar before he attempts to bend or break them.* - [Robert Graves](#)
- *Those who wish to sing always find a song.* - [Swedish proverb](#)

### Related topics:

- [Reporting verb + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Verb + gerund](#)
- [Verbs followed by the TO-infinitive or gerund](#)

## Verb + object + TO-infinitive

Examples of verbs followed by an object and the *to*-infinitive:

**advise, allow, ask, beg, cause, choose, command, convince, enable, encourage, expect, force, hire, instruct, invite, need, order, permit, persuade, prepare, promise, remind, require, tell, threaten, urge, want, warn, wish, would like**

*My GP **advised me to see** a specialist.*  
*Could you **ask her to copy** this letter for me?*  
*She **begged him not to leave** her.*  
*The colonel **commanded his men to charge**.*  
*How can we **encourage a baby to use** the toilet rather than his potty?*  
*Do you **expect me to believe** you?*  
*The teacher **instructed the students to line up** in pairs.*  
*I've **invited Jill to come** to dinner on Saturday.*  
*After days of pointless fighting, the general **ordered the marines to withdraw**.*  
*I tried to **persuade them to stay**, but they said they were too tired.*  
*I **reminded Andy to bring** a bottle of wine and some snacks.*  
*The doctor **told me to give up** smoking.*  
*The opposition **urged the government to take** action immediately.*  
*The professor **warned us to be** diligent with our weekly assignments.*

Verbs followed by an object and a *to*-infinitive can also be passive:

*The students **were instructed to line up** in pairs.*  
*After days of pointless fighting, the marines **were ordered to withdraw**.*  
*I **was told to give up** smoking.*

**Related topics:**

- [Reporting verb + object + TO-infinitive](#)

## **Adjective + TO-infinitive**

There are various structures with adjectives and the *to*-infinitive:

### **IT + linking verb + adjective + TO-infinitive**

*It was **difficult to answer** the question.*  
*It would seem **awkward to call** her again.*

### **Noun + linking verb + adjective + TO-infinitive**

Here the noun is the object of the infinitive:

*The question was **difficult to answer**.*  
*A good translator is **hard to find**.*



## **IT + linking verb + adjective + noun + TO-infinitive**

*It was a difficult question to answer.*

*It's a big house to clean.*

## **IT + linking verb + adjective + FOR something/somebody + TO-infinitive**

*It looked impossible for me to finish on time.*

*It is necessary for this door to be locked.*

## **IT + linking verb + adjective + OF somebody + TO-infinitive**

*It is very kind of you to come with me to the embassy.*

*It was stupid of him to press the emergency button.*

## **TOO, ENOUGH + TO-infinitive**

*Too* comes before an adjective or adverb. *Enough* follows an adjective or adverb but comes before a noun:

*It was too difficult (for me) to answer the question.*

*The question was too difficult to answer.*

*It was too difficult a question to answer.*

*It was a difficult enough question to answer even for a native speaker.*

*Manuela got to the station too late to catch the train.*

*Manuela did not get to the station early enough to catch the train.*

*I didn't have enough money to buy that beautiful sweater.*

## **Noun + linking verb + adjective + TO-infinitive**

Here the noun is the doer of the action expressed by the infinitive:

*The little boy was afraid to jump.*

*He was ashamed to speak to her again.*

*We were happy to see you.*

*I am glad to have helped you.*

*Our company is pleased to offer you a job as a financial risk manager.*

*I am proud to announce this year's winner.*

*Aren't you sad to hear that?*

*I'm sorry to disturb you.*

Examples of adjectives that can be used with this pattern:

*afraid, amazed, anxious, ashamed, bound, careful, certain, content, delighted, determined, eager, eligible, fortunate, glad, happy, hesitant, liable, likely, lucky, pleased, proud, ready, reluctant, sad, shocked, sorry, surprised*

Quotes:

- *It is easy to be brave from a safe distance.* - [Aesop](#)
- *If one cannot invent a really convincing lie, it is often better to stick to the truth.* - [Angela Thirkell](#)
- *The best way to gain self-confidence is to do what you are afraid to do.* - [Author unknown](#)
- *It is impossible to keep a straight face in the presence of one or more kittens.* - [Cynthia E. Varnado](#)
- *No city should be too large for a man to walk out of in a morning.* - [Cyril Connolly](#)
- *Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared.* - [Edward Vernon Rickenbacker](#)
- *It is never too late to be who you might have been.* - [George Eliot](#)
- *Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it.* - [Henry David Thoreau](#)
- *To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up.* - [Oscar Wilde](#)
- *You must learn from the mistakes of others. You can't possibly live long enough to make them all yourself.* - [Samuel Levenson](#)
- *It is terrible to speak well and be wrong.* - [Sophocles](#)

## Noun phrase + TO-infinitive

There are various structures with noun phrases and the *to*-infinitive:

### Noun phrase + TO-infinitive

Some nouns can be followed by a *to*-infinitive. Many of these nouns have been formed from adjectives or verbs normally followed by a *to*-infinitive:

The **ability to cooperate** with others is as important as managing on our own.

Our **decision to close** the firm was a difficult one to make.

We were surprised at his **offer to take** us home.

As a result of his **failure to pay the mortgage**, his house was foreclosed.  
She showed no **willingness to help**.

Examples of nouns followed by the *to*-infinitive:

**ability, advice, agreement, ambition, anxiety, appeal, arrangement, attempt, chance, choice, decision, demand, desire, determination, dream, eagerness, failure, goal, intention, motivation, need, offer, opportunity, order, permission, plan, preparation, promise, proposal, recommendation, refusal, reluctance, reminder, request, requirement, suggestion, tendency, way, willingness, wish**

**IT + linking verb + noun phrase (+ FOR + somebody) + TO-infinitive**

*It's a pity (for them) to lose such a good player.*  
*It's a privilege (for me) to be invited to this conference.*  
*It would be a mistake (for you) to hire him.*  
*It's a pleasure (for us) to have you here.*

**Noun phrase + TO-infinitive to express necessity or possibility**

*There is a lot of **work to do** around the farm.* (There is a lot of work that we need to do around the farm.)  
*I have some **e-mails to write**.* (I have some e-mails that I have to write.)  
*She had two more **clients to call** that afternoon.* (She had two more clients that she had to call that afternoon.)  
*Let's get **something to eat**.* (Let's get something that we can eat.)

**Quotes:**

- *It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.* - [Aristotle](#)
- *The hardest thing to learn in life is which bridge to cross and which to burn.* - [David Russell](#)
- *Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.* - [Plato](#)
- *Each day is an opportunity to travel back into tomorrow's past and change it.* - [Robert Brault](#)

**The infinitive of purpose**

A *to*-infinitive can be used to express purpose:

*I'm calling **to place** an order for delivery.*

*Diya went to the door **to open** it.*

***To pass** this test, you need to achieve a score of 60% or more.*

*In order* and *so as* can be used before a *to*-infinitive for emphasis in more formal styles:

*He took a book with him **in order to have** something to read on the train.*

*The parties started negotiations **so as to reach** an agreement as soon as possible.*

***In order to attract** a wider audience, we need to rethink our marketing strategy.*

The negative is always *in order not* + *to*-infinitive or *so as not* + *to*-infinitive:

*He tiptoed through the hall **so as not to be heard**.*

***In order not to lose** time, we must act at once.*

The infinitive of purpose can only be used if the doer of the action expressed by the infinitive is the same as the subject of the main clause. If the subjects are different, we can use *so* + *that*-clause with the present simple tense or with the modal verbs *may*, *can*, *will*, *might*, *could* or *would*:

*Jerry works hard **so that** his family has everything they need.*

*I'll leave the door open **so that** you can come in.*

*Tina gave me a shopping list **so that** I wouldn't forget anything.*

*In order* + *that*-clause is also possible in this case; however, it is more formal and less common. In the *that*-clause, we can use the modal verbs *may*, *shall*, *might* or *should*:

*Our company does everything **in order that** all complaints may be dealt with fairly and effectively.*

With *come* and *go*, we can use the infinitive of purpose with the verb in any present or past tense or with the gerund form of the verb:

*I'm just **coming to help**.*

*We **went to talk** to a lawyer.*

*Have you thought of **going to see** a doctor?*

But if *come* and *go* are used as infinitives or as imperatives, we use *and* instead of *to*:

*I must go and check the heater.  
He will come and dance with you.  
Go and fetch a glass.*

### Quotes:

- *Life is like riding a bicycle - in order to keep your balance, you must keep moving.* - [Albert Einstein](#)
- *To avoid mistakes and regrets, always consult your wife before engaging in a flirtation.* - [E. W. Howe](#)
- *Gossip needn't be false to be evil - there's a lot of truth that shouldn't be passed around.* - [Frank A. Clark](#)
- *We should read to give our souls a chance to luxuriate.* - [Henry Miller](#)
- *What you have become is the price you paid to get what you used to want.* - [Mignon McLaughlin](#)
- *You must learn from the mistakes of others. You can't possibly live long enough to make them all yourself.* - [Samuel Levenson](#)
- *To be successful, you have to have your heart in your business, and your business in your heart.* - [Thomas Watson, Sr.](#)

### Related topics:

- [The "subject" of the infinitive](#)

## The infinitive of result

A *to*-infinitive can be used to express result, however, this use is more common in literary styles:

*Do you want to **live to be** a hundred?  
She **arrived home to receive** a letter from her bank.*

*Only + to*-infinitive can express a disappointing result of an action:

*I went back to the shop **only to find** that it had closed for good.  
He got his car fixed **only to damage** it again.*

## Question word + TO-infinitive

A question word can be used before a *to*-infinitive to express an indirect question about what should be done:

*We don't know **where to put** the sofa. (where we should put the sofa)*  
*No one could tell me **how to start** the engine. (how I should start the engine)*  
*The rules didn't specify **who to speak to** in case of an emergency. (who you should speak to)*  
*I had no idea **what to write** my home paper **about**. (what I should write my home paper about)*

Why cannot be used in this way.

If the original question was a yes/no question, we use *whether* (but not *if*):

*I didn't know **whether to laugh or cry**. (whether I should laugh or cry)*  
*He couldn't decide **whether to accept the job or not**. (whether he should accept the job or not)*

### Quotes:

- *The hardest thing to learn in life is which bridge to cross and which to burn.*  
- [David Russell](#)
- *Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.* - [Pablo Picasso](#)

### Related topics:

- [Reporting questions](#)

## Introductory infinitive clauses

An infinitive clause placed at the beginning of a sentence can express a comment on the speaker's own words:

***To be perfectly honest**, I've never really liked him.*

***To tell you the truth**, I'm quite exhausted.*

***To make a long story short**, we ended up sleeping on a park bench.*

# The gerund

- [The forms of the gerund](#)
- [The "subject" of the gerund](#)
- [The use of the gerund](#)

# The forms of the gerund

The gerund is an *-ing* form. It can be simple or perfect, active or passive:

|                | Active                | Passive                    |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Simple gerund  | <i>writing</i>        | <i>being written</i>       |
| Perfect gerund | <i>having written</i> | <i>having been written</i> |

Note the changes in spelling when forming the simple gerund:

*read* » *reading*

*study* » *studying*

*grow* » *growing*

*relax* » *relaxing*

*answer* » *answering*

*write* » *writing*; *argue* » *arguing* (a final *-e* is omitted)

*agree* » *agreeing* (a final *-ee* does not change)

*lie* » *lying* (a final *-ie* changes to *-y-*)

*put* » *putting*; *regret* » *regretting*; *readmit* » *readmitting* (we double the final consonant if the verb ends in consonant-vowel-consonant, with the exception of *w*, *x* and *y*, and only has one syllable or has the stress on the last syllable)

In the negative, *not* usually comes before the gerund:

*There is no point in **applying** for the grant.*

*There is no point in **not applying** for the grant.*

In some cases, the verb in the main clause is negative, not the gerund:

*I **like** getting up early.*

*I **don't like** getting up early.*

As the gerund has no tense, it does not in itself indicate the time of the action that it refers to. However, it can show whether this time is the same as or earlier than the time of the verb in the main clause.

## Simple gerund

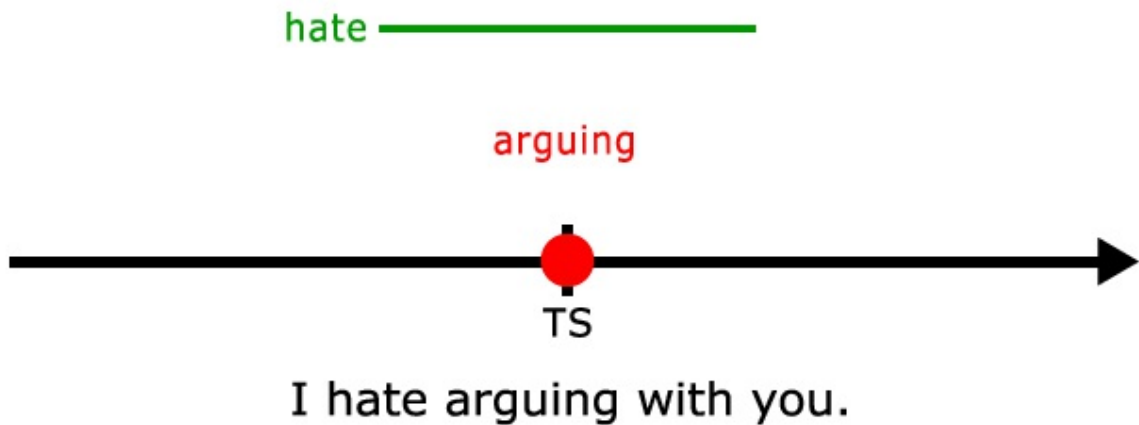
The **simple gerund** can refer to the same time as that of the verb in the main clause:

*I hate **arguing** with you. (*arguing* refers to the same time as *hate*: I hate*



when we argue.)

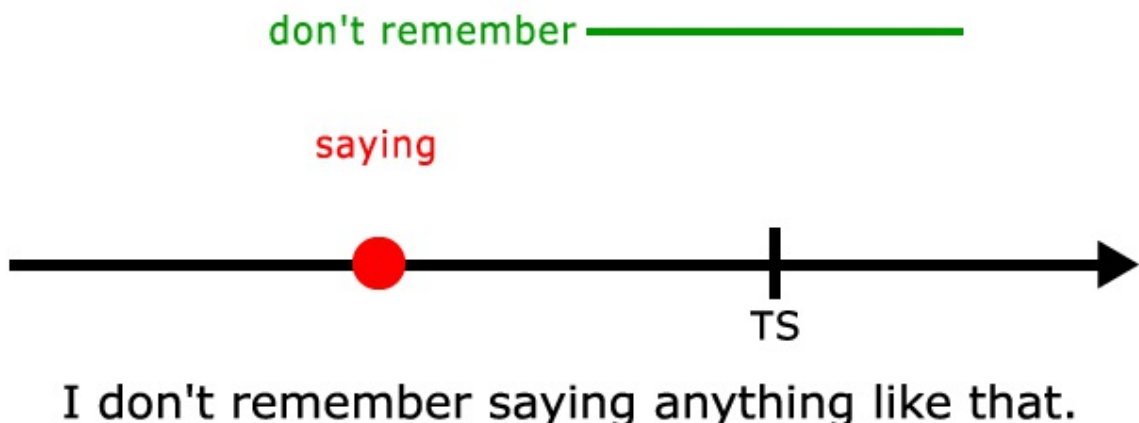
Tom suggested **going back** to our tents. (*going* refers to the same time as *suggested*: Tom suggested that we should go back to our tents.)



The **simple gerund** can also refer to a time before that of the verb in the main clause:

I don't remember **saying** anything like that. (*saying* refers to a time before *don't remember*: I don't remember that I said anything like that.)

She regretted **not studying** harder when she was at school. (*not studying* refers to a time before *regretted*: She regretted that she hadn't studied harder when he was at school.)



## Perfect gerund

The **perfect gerund** refers to a time before that of the verb in the main clause.

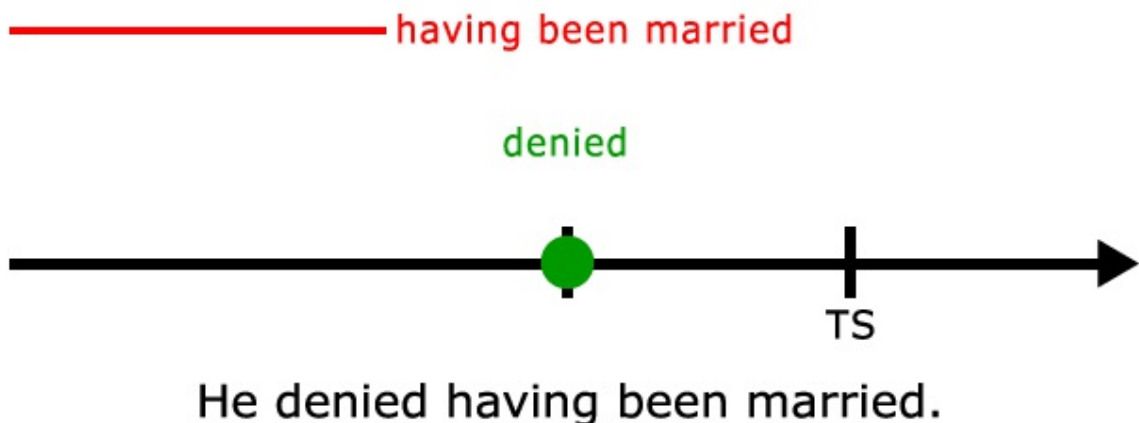
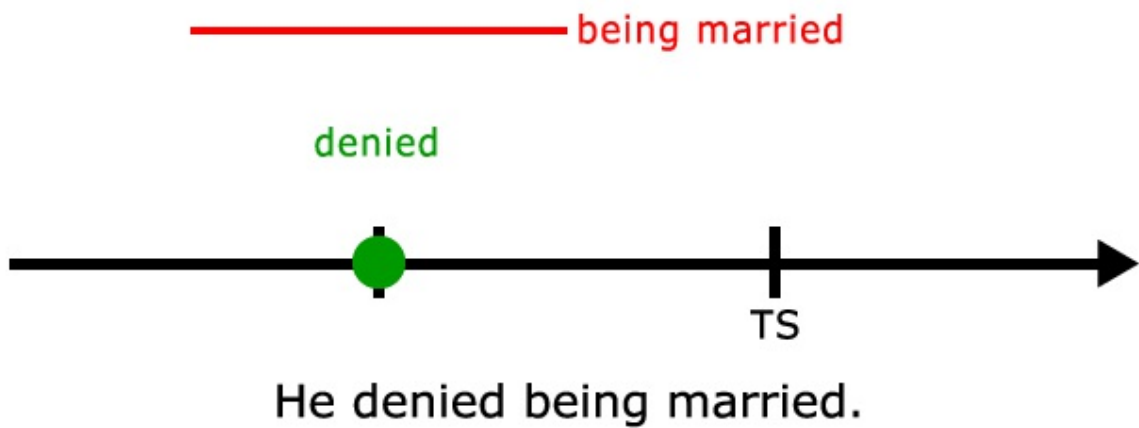
However, it is only used if the time of the action expressed by the gerund is not obvious from the context:

*He denied **being** married.* (the simple gerund *being* refers to the same time as *denied*: He denied that he was married.)

*He denied **having been** married.* (the perfect gerund *having been* refers to a time before *denied*: He denied that he had been married.)

If it is clear that an earlier time is meant, we use the simple gerund:

*He denied **stealing** the car.* (He denied that he had stolen the car.)



## Passive gerunds

Passive forms are also possible:

*I hate **being lied to**.* (passive simple gerund: I hate it when people lie to me.)  
*He complained of **having been unjustly accused**.* (passive perfect gerund: He complained that they had unjustly accused him.)

**Related topics:**

- [The perfect aspect](#)
- [Form: passive voice](#)

## The "subject" of the gerund

The doer of the action expressed by the gerund can be:

- the subject of the sentence:

*I like **getting up** early in summer.*

***He** apologised for **not writing** for so long.*

*I am looking forward to **hearing** from you.*

***My mom** insisted on **tidying** my room.*

*Would **you** mind **opening** the window?*

- the noun/pronoun or possessive preceding the gerund:

*Irina doesn't like **people** **telling** her what to do.*

***Sally's** constant **arguing** is getting on my nerves.*

*I objected to **him/his** **calling** me a liar.*

*My mom insisted on **me/my** **tidying** my room.*

*Would you mind **me/my** **opening** the window?*

(The possessive is more formal, and it is less common in everyday conversation.)

- an indefinite or generalised subject (*you, one, we, people* etc.):

*In those days, **being** a student meant **spending** long hours in the library.*

- unexpressed and understood only from the context:

***Going** home seemed to be the best idea.*

### Related topics:

- [The "subject" of the infinitive](#)
- [The "subject" of the participle](#)

# The use of the gerund

The gerund always serves as a noun. It can be used on its own or with an object or adverbial:

*Dancing is fun.*  
*He denied stealing the car.*  
*I like getting up early.*

- [The gerund as subject](#)
- [The gerund as a subject complement](#)
- [The gerund as the object of a verb](#)
- [Verb + gerund](#)
- [Preposition + gerund](#)
- [Verb + preposition + gerund](#)
- [The gerund used in compound nouns](#)
- [Other expressions followed by the gerund](#)

## The gerund as subject

A gerund clause can be the subject of a sentence:

*Hiking can be a relaxing and rewarding activity.*  
*Swimming in the winter can boost your immune system.*  
*Learning a foreign language is easier at a young age.*

The use of the gerund as subject is more common than that of the *to*-infinitive.

### Quotes:

- *The fishing was good; it was the catching that was bad.* - [A. K. Best](#)
- *Growing old is mandatory; growing up is optional.* - [Chili Davis](#)
- *Saying nothing sometimes says the most.* - [Emily Dickinson](#)

### Related topics:

- [The TO-infinitive as subject](#)

## The gerund as a subject complement

A gerund clause can be a subject complement after *be*:

What I really like is **travelling to other countries**.  
Seeing is **believing**.

### Quotes:

- I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody. - [Bill Cosby](#)
- Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared. - [Edward Vernon Rickenbacker](#)
- Knowledge is learning something every day. Wisdom is letting go of something every day. - [Zen saying](#)

### Related topics:

- [The TO-infinitive as a subject complement](#)

## The gerund as the object of a verb

A gerund clause can be the object of a verb:

*I really enjoy **swimming in the sea**.*

*Jill suggested **going for a drink**.*

*The car managed to avoid **hitting any other vehicles**.*

## Verb + gerund

Examples of verbs followed by a gerund:

**admit, advise, allow, anticipate, appreciate, avoid, begin, can't bear, can't help, can't stand, cease, consider, continue, defend, delay, deny, despise, discuss, dislike, don't mind, dread, encourage, enjoy, escape, excuse, fancy, finish, forget, forgive, hate, imagine, involve, justify, keep, like, love, mean, mention, mind, miss, need, neglect, permit, postpone, practice, prefer, prevent, propose, quit, recall, recollect, recommend, regret, remember, report, require, resent, resist, risk, save, start, stop, suggest, tolerate, try, understand, urge**

*After being stopped by the police, George **admitted having drunk** two pints of beer.*

*We **anticipated having** difficulty in finding candidates with the right qualifications.*

We do **appreciate** your **taking** time from your busy schedule to come to Berlin.

He tried to **avoid meeting** her eyes.

How **can** you **stand living** so far away from your home country?

The next morning I was really tired, so I **delayed getting up** as long as possible.

The man **denied stealing** the camera.

We have already **discussed moving** to the countryside.

I **dislike being treated** like a child.

The two sons left the country to **escape being conscripted** into the army.

What do you **fancy eating**?

**Finish washing up** and then you can use the computer.

**Forgive** my **saying** so, but your attitude to work has changed for the worse.

Leadership **involves setting** an example that others want to follow.

Why do you **keep teasing** me?

You **mentioned going** to Italy last summer. How was it?

Take your time, I don't **mind waiting**.

I really **miss taking** photos with an analogue camera.

We had to **postpone flying** to Thailand.

In this course, we will **practise writing** formal letters, among other things.

I wanted to **prevent ending up** in the same situation again.

Why did she **quit working** as a nurse?

The witness said he couldn't **recall seeing** that car before.

Do you **recollect borrowing** money from her?

One in five workers in the country **reported being** very or extremely **stressed** by their work.

Tim **resented having been taken advantage of**.

I couldn't **resist eating** another cinnamon bun.

So as not to **risk being fired**, the workers ended the strike.

Register your profile in our customer database to **save filling out** your shipping information each time you order.

The guide **suggested visiting** the Royal Palace.

Could you **tolerate being** alone for an entire week?

I can't **understand** people **behaving** like that.

### Related topics:

- [Reporting verb + gerund](#)
- [Verb + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Verbs followed by the TO-infinitive or gerund](#)

### Preposition + gerund

As a gerund clause serves as a noun, it can be used after prepositions:

*After watching the movie, I wanted to read the book.*  
*Andrey's parents were **against his joining** the water polo team.*  
*He stayed at home **instead of going** to school.*  
*What **about going out** tonight?*  
*He rushed out of the room **without saying** a word.*

A gerund clause can also be the object of a preposition after a verb, adjective or noun:

*Would you **prefer eating out to staying in**?*  
*They **charged him with exceeding the speed limit**.*

*I am **sorry for being late**.*  
*Sarah is very **talented at playing the piano**.*

*Is there any other **way of solving this problem**?*  
*I had difficulty **in understanding her accent**.*

When *to* is a preposition, it can be followed by a noun or a gerund:

*I'm looking forward **to our trip**.*  
*I'm looking forward **to hearing from you**.*

*I'm used **to cold showers**.*  
*I'm used **to walking long distances**.*

But when *to* is part of a *to*-infinitive, it is followed by an infinitive:

*I wish **to make** a complaint.*  
*He used **to smoke**.*

### Quotes:

- *Life is like riding a bicycle - in order to keep your balance, you must keep moving. - [Albert Einstein](#)*
- *It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it. - [Aristotle](#)*
- *To avoid mistakes and regrets, always consult your wife before engaging in a flirtation. - [E. W. Howe](#)*
- *Men for the sake of getting a living forget to live. - [Margaret Fuller](#)*
- *The secret of getting ahead is getting started. - [Mark Twain](#)*
- *Freedom lies in being bold. - [Robert Frost](#)*



## Verb + preposition + gerund

Examples of verbs followed by a preposition and a gerund:

*(dis)agree with, (dis)approve of, admit to, agree with, aim at, apologise for, believe in, benefit from, boast about, care for, complain about, concentrate on, confess to, cope with, count on, decide against, depend on, dream about/of, feel like, get on with, get used to, give up, insist on, laugh about, look forward to, object to, pay for, put off, put up with, rely on, resort to, specialize in, succeed in, talk about/of, think about/of, vote for, worry about*

*After being stopped by the police, George **admitted to having drunk** two pints of beer.*

*She **apologised for not introducing** herself sooner.*

*He is always **boasting about having met** the president.*

*The students **complained about being made** to wear a uniform to school.*

*The suspect never **confessed to killing** his wife.*

*Could you **give up smoking**?*

*Nick **insisted on calling** an ambulance.*

*We **laughed about having** to do such silly things.*

*I **objected to him calling** me a liar.*

*Do you **put off going** to the dentist?*

*My sister is always **talking about having** her hair dyed.*

*Do you ever **think about getting** married and **having** children?*

### Related topics:

- [Reporting verb + gerund](#)

## The gerund used in compound nouns

In compound structures, a gerund is often used before a noun to modify it:

***drinking** water (water for drinking)*

*a **reading** lamp (a lamp for reading)*

*a **swimming** cap (a cap for swimming)*

## Other expressions followed by the gerund

*It's no use **crying** over spilt milk.*

*It would be worth giving it a try.  
There's no point in arguing.*

*I had problems starting the car this morning.*

*You will have no problem finding a job.*

*We all had a good time dancing last night.*

*She is having a hard/difficult time adapting to her new circumstances.*

*Mike was so tired that he had difficulty staying awake.*

*I had no difficulty passing the exam.*

*The children have a lot of fun playing together.*

### **Quotes:**

- *Attitudes are contagious. Are yours worth catching?* - [Dennis and Wendy Mannerling](#)
- *I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else.* - [Winston Churchill](#)

# Verbs followed by the TO-infinitive or gerund

Some verbs are followed by a *to*-infinitive, and others are followed by a gerund:

*I wanted to ask you a question.*

*I insisted on leaving at once.*

There are verbs that can be followed by either form with no difference in meaning. With some other verbs, the *to*-infinitive and the gerund have different meanings.

- [Verbs followed by the TO-infinitive or gerund with no difference in meaning](#)
- [Verbs followed by the TO-infinitive or gerund with a difference in meaning](#)

## Related topics:

- [Verb + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Verb + gerund](#)

## Verbs followed by the TO-infinitive or gerund with no difference in meaning

### TO-infinitive or gerund: BEGIN, START, CONTINUE, CEASE, DREAD, INTEND, LOVE

These verbs can be followed by either a to-infinitive or a gerund with almost no difference in meaning:

*I **began to learn** languages when I was ten.  
He **began using** this software three years ago.*

*I **started wondering** what would happen if I lost my job.  
After a while, I **started to wonder** why she'd said that.*

*Kate **continued wearing** her wedding ring after her husband's death.  
You **continue to surprise** me!*

*Two days later, the screen **ceased to function**.  
They **ceased fighting** when the commander was killed.*

*I **dread to think** what could have happened. (used exclusively in the expression *I dread to think/imagine* when we don't want to think about something distressing or unpleasant)*

*I **dread asking** you this question, but... (I'm afraid to ask you this question, but...)*

*The list of things he **intended to do** was getting longer and longer.  
We **intend contacting** the company before taking any action.*

*I **love dancing**.  
I **love to dance**.*

#### Quotes:

- *To be wronged is nothing unless you continue to remember it. - [Confucius](#)*

### TO-infinitive or gerund: ADVISE, RECOMMEND, ALLOW, PERMIT, FORBID, REQUIRE

These verbs can be followed by either (a) a gerund or (b) a noun phrase or pronoun + *to*-infinitive, with almost no difference in meaning. Passive infinitives are also common:

*The help desk **advised checking** the "Advanced Settings" option.*

*The help desk **advised me to check** the "Advanced Settings" option. (I was advised to check the "Advanced Settings" option.)*

*The plumber **recommended buying** a new water heater.*

*The plumber **recommended me to buy** a new water heater. (I was recommended to buy a new water heater.) (the *to*-infinitive after *recommend* is less common in everyday contexts)*

*In many countries, they don't **allow smoking** in public places. (In many countries smoking is not allowed in public places.)*

*In many countries, they don't **allow people to smoke** in public places. (In many countries people aren't allowed to smoke in public places.)*

*The rules do not **permit keeping** pets on the premises. (Keeping pets is not permitted on the premises.)*

*The rules do not **permit tenants to keep** pets on the premises. (Tenants are not permitted to keep pets on the premises.)*

*The authorities **forbade entering** the park because of a bush fire.*

*The authorities **forbade everyone to enter** the park because of a bush fire. (It was forbidden to enter the park because of a bush fire.)*

*The project **required working** closely with other schools.*

*The project **required us to work** closely with other schools. (We were required to work closely with other schools.)*

## Verbs followed by the TO-infinitive or gerund with a difference in meaning

- [TO-infinitive or gerund: FORGET, REMEMBER, REGRET, GO ON, STOP, TRY](#)
- [TO-infinitive or gerund: LIKE, HATE, PREFER, CAN'T BEAR](#)
- [TO-infinitive or gerund: CONSIDER, IMAGINE](#)
- [TO-infinitive or gerund: MEAN, HELP](#)
- [TO-infinitive or gerund: NEED, REQUIRE, WANT](#)

### TO-infinitive or gerund: FORGET, REMEMBER, REGRET, GO ON, STOP, TRY

After these verbs, a *to*-infinitive refers to the future, while a gerund expresses an earlier action, relative to the time of the verb in the main clause:

*Don't **forget to meet** Mr Moriarty at 10 o'clock this morning.* (You should meet Mr Moriarty at 10 o'clock this morning.)

*I'll never **forget meeting** her for the first time.* (I'll never forget when I met her for the first time.)

*Did you **remember to buy** tea?* (Did you remember that you should buy tea?)

*I don't **remember ever visiting** this museum.* (I don't remember that I have ever visited this museum.)

*We **regret to inform** you that your application has been rejected.* (We are sorry we have to inform you that your application has been rejected.)

*I **regret spending** so much money last night.* (I am sorry that I spent so much money last night.)

*Whichever page you're on, **go on to read** the next chapter.* (Continue with the next chapter.)

***Go on reading** the article.* (Continue reading the article.)

*We **stopped to drink** a cup of coffee.* (We stopped in order to drink a cup of coffee.)

*I **stopped smoking** years ago.* (I gave up smoking years ago.)

*I **tried to reach** her at work, but the line was busy.* (I made an attempt to reach her at work.)

Why didn't you **try calling** her on her mobile? (Why didn't you call her on her mobile to see if you could reach her?)

### Quotes:

- *I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.* - [Bill Cosby](#)
- *If you don't think every day is a good day, just try missing one.* - [Cavett Robert](#)
- *Men for the sake of getting a living forget to live.* - [Margaret Fuller](#)
- *Life is a shipwreck but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats.* - [Voltaire](#)

## TO-infinitive or gerund: LIKE, HATE, PREFER, CAN'T BEAR

The verbs *like* and *hate* express (dis)liking if they are followed by a gerund:

*I like **getting up** early in summer.* (I enjoy getting up early in summer.)  
*I hate **dancing**, so don't ask me to.* (I don't like dancing.)

But if these verbs are followed by a *to*-infinitive, they express habitual preference, something that we do not necessarily like or enjoy but consider as useful, right or wise:

*I like **to be** punctual.* (It's important to be punctual and I am.)  
*I hate **to lie**, but sometimes I do.* (It's not right to lie but sometimes I do.)

If *like* is in the negative, a gerund refers to an action that we do but don't enjoy doing, while a *to*-infinitive means that we don't do something because we don't think it right to do:

*I could tell that Sandra **didn't like being photographed** though she didn't say a word.* (Sandra was photographed, which she didn't like.)  
*Sandra **didn't like to be photographed**, so she turned her back to the camera.* (Sandra didn't want to be photographed, and she wasn't.)

*Prefer* and *can't bear* can also take a gerund or a *to*-infinitive:

*I prefer **walking** to taking the bus.* (I like walking better than taking the bus.)  
*If you prefer **to walk**, it will take you 30 minutes to school.* (If you want to walk, it will take you 30 minutes to school.)

*I can't bear **seeing** people being humiliated.* (I don't like it when I see people

being humiliated.)

*I couldn't bear to see those animals suffer, so I looked away.* (I didn't want to see them suffer, so I looked away.)

## **TO-infinitive or gerund: CONSIDER, IMAGINE**

*Consider* and *imagine* can be followed by either (a) a gerund or (b) a noun phrase or pronoun + *to*-infinitive but with different meanings:

*I am considering working abroad.* (I am thinking of working abroad.)

*Everybody considers him to be the best person for the job.* (Everybody thinks that he is the best person for the job.)

*Imagine living at 2,000 metres above sea level!* (Imagine what it would be like to live at 2,000 metres above sea level.)

*I imagined him to be much taller.* (I expected that he would be much taller.)

## **TO-infinitive or gerund: MEAN, HELP**

*Mean* and *help* can be followed by either a gerund or a *to*-infinitive but with different meanings:

*In those days, being a student meant spending long hours in the library.* (In those days if you were a student, it meant that you spent long hours in the library.)

*I didn't mean to hurt your feelings.* (I didn't intend to hurt your feelings.)

*I can't help thinking that you are hiding something.* (only in the negative: I have to think that you are hiding something.)

*Could you help me (to) undo my shoelaces? My fingers are frozen.* (Could you undo my shoelaces?)

*Help* can be followed by a bare infinitive or a *to*-infinitive.

## **TO-infinitive or gerund: NEED, REQUIRE, WANT**

*Need*, *require* and *want* can be followed by the active or passive *to*-infinitives to express active or passive meanings, respectively:

*I need to make a phone call.*



Sometimes, people **need to be told** the truth.

My job **requires me to handle** many letters from abroad.

They **required the information to be** sent as soon as possible.

I **wanted to stay** for a few more days.

It was obvious that he **wanted to be invited**.

But active gerunds after these verbs express passive meanings:

Your hair **needs cutting**. (It should be cut.)

These photos **require careful handling**. (They should be handled carefully.)

The windows **want cleaning**. (They should be cleaned.)

# The participle

- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [The "subject" of the participle](#)
- [The use of the participle](#)

# The forms of the participle

|                           | Active                | Passive                    |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Present participle</b> | <i>writing</i>        | <i>being written</i>       |
| <b>Perfect participle</b> | <i>having written</i> | <i>having been written</i> |
| <b>Past participle</b>    | <i>written</i>        | <i>written</i>             |

## Present participle

The present participle is formed by adding *-ing* to the base form of the verb. Note the changes in spelling:

*read* » *reading*

*study* » *studying*

*grow* » *growing*

*relax* » *relaxing*

*answer* » *answering*

*write* » *writing*; *argue* » *arguing* (a final *-e* is omitted)

*agree* » *agreeing* (a final *-ee* does not change)

*lie* » *lying* (a final *-ie* changes to *-y-*)

*put* » *putting*; *regret* » *regretting*; *readmit* » *readmitting* (we double the final consonant if the verb ends in consonant-vowel-consonant, with the exception of *w*, *x* and *y*, and only has one syllable or has the stress on the last syllable)

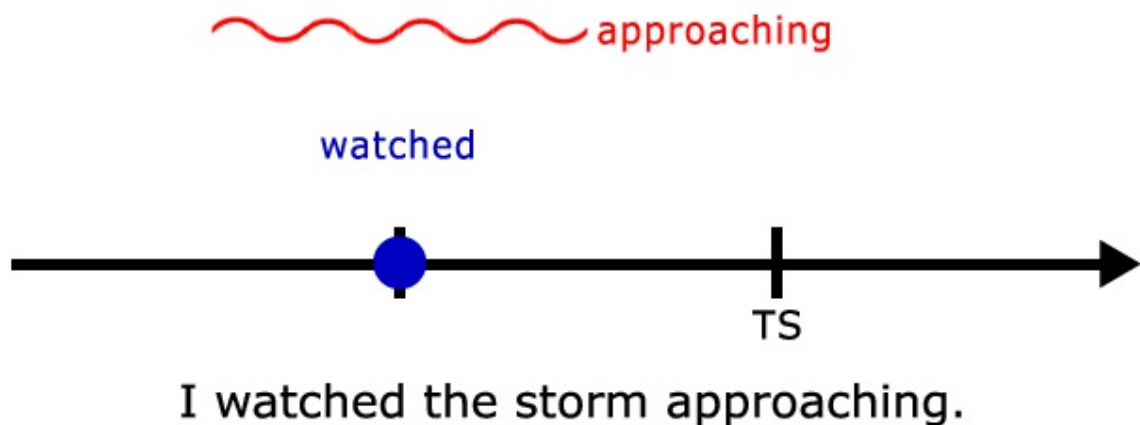
The **present participle** does not in itself indicate the time of the action that it refers to. However, it does show that this time is the same as the time of the preceding verb or the verb in the main clause:

*I watched the storm **approaching**.* (*approaching* refers to the same time as *watched*: I watched as the storm was approaching.)

***Having** nowhere to sit, she stood in the back of the lecture hall.* (*having* refers to the same time as *stood*: As she had nowhere to sit, she stood in the back of the lecture hall.)

*Are you **waiting** for the bus?* (*waiting* refers to the same time as *are*: present)

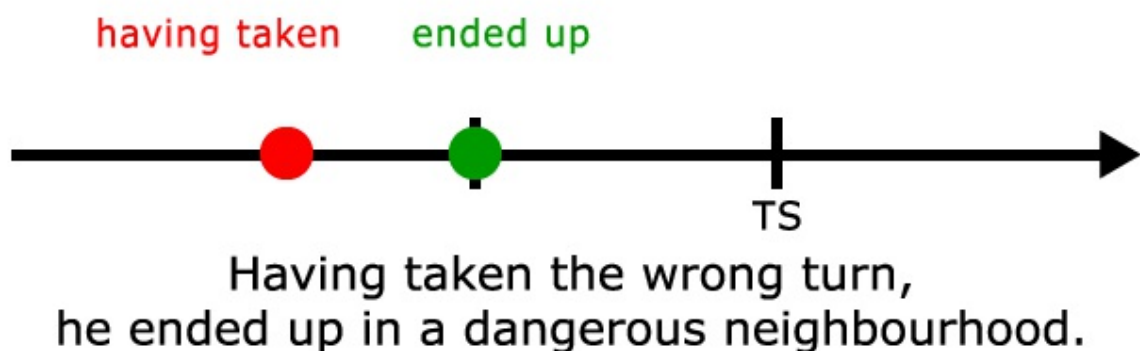
*We will be **arriving** in Prague soon.* (*arriving* refers to the same time as *will be*: future)



## Perfect participle

The **perfect participle** indicates that the time of the action that it refers to is before that of the verb in the main clause:

*Having taken the wrong turn, he ended up in a dangerous neighbourhood.*  
 (*having taken* refers to a time before *ended up*: After he had taken the wrong turn, he ended up in a dangerous neighbourhood.)



## Past participle

The past participle is also called the third form of the verb. With regular verbs, the past participle is formed by adding *-ed* to the base form. Note the changes in spelling:

- *look* » *looked*

- *stay* » ***stayed***
- *arrive* » ***arrived*** (we only add *-d* if the verb ends in *-e*)
- *try* » ***tried*** (a final *-y* changes to *-i-* after a consonant)
- *stop* » ***stopped*** (we double the final consonant if the verb ends in consonant-vowel-consonant)

A number of verbs have irregular past participle forms. A few examples are:

- *bite* » ***bitten***
- *fly* » ***flown***
- *hit* » ***hit***
- *leave* » ***left***
- *swim* » ***swum***

See the [Appendix](#) for a list of the most common irregular verbs in English.

The **past participle** can refer to the same time as the verb in the main clause or to a time before that:

*Sue has all the qualifications **required** for the job.* (*required* refers to the same time as *has*: Sue has all the qualifications that are required for the job.)

***Damaged*** badly by the flood, the school had to be rebuilt. (*damaged* refers to a time before *had to*: As the school had been badly damaged by the flood, it had to be rebuilt.)

If we want to emphasise an earlier time, we use the **passive perfect participle**:

***Having been nominated*** three times for an Oscar, he is one of today's most acclaimed film directors. (He has been nominated three times for an Oscar, and he is one of today's most acclaimed film directors.)

is \_\_\_\_\_

having been nominated



Having been nominated three times for an Oscar, he is one of today's most acclaimed film directors.

The past participle can have an active or a passive meaning. When used with a passive meaning, it is sometimes called the passive participle:

*The **fallen** leaves covered the garden path.* (the leaves that had fallen, active meaning)

*This is the first time I've **been** here.* (present perfect tense in active voice, active meaning)

*There was a **handwritten** note on the table.* (a note that had been written by hand, passive meaning)

*When was the last time the lawn was **mowed**?* (past simple tense in passive voice, passive meaning)

### Related topics:

- [The perfect aspect](#)
- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [Appendix: irregular verb forms](#)

## The "subject" of the participle

The doer of the action expressed by the participle is usually the subject of the sentence or the main clause:

*A **dog** was **barking** in the distance.*  
*How often do **you** go **swimming**?*  
***Grumbling** to himself, **Ted** left the room.*  
***Having seen** the film before, **I** didn't feel like going to the cinema.*  
***The car** was **parked** outside the building.*  
***Taken** daily, **these pills** can be highly effective.*  
*Have **you** ever **tried** skiing?*

In participle clauses, it can lead to confusion if the understood subject of the participle is not the subject of the main clause. This is called a misrelated participle:

*?While **going** home, **a bus** almost ran over me.*

This suggests that the bus was going home. If we mean that I was going home, we have to make the first person singular pronoun *I* the subject of the main clause:

*While **going** home, **I** got almost run over by a bus.*

In some cases, however, the subjects can be different without the chance of misunderstanding:

***Considering** what she has been through, **she** is doing well. (If **we consider** what she has been through...)*  
***Judging** from his accent, **he** is from New York. (As **I judge** from his accent...)*

The doer of the action expressed by the participle can also be the noun or pronoun preceding it:

*I heard **him singing** in the bathroom.*  
*Who is **the girl sitting** next to you in class?*  
***Our car having broken down**, we had to take a taxi home.*

### Related topics:

- [The "subject" of the infinitive](#)
- [The "subject" of the gerund](#)

## The use of the participle

- [The present participle used to form the continuous aspect](#)
- [The past participle used to form the perfect aspect](#)
- [The past participle used to form the passive voice](#)
- [The present and past participles used as adjectives](#)
- [SEE, WATCH, HEAR, LISTEN, FEEL, SMELL, NOTICE, OBSERVE + object + present participle](#)
- [CATCH, FIND, LEAVE, HAVE, GET + object + present participle](#)
- [COME, GO + present participle](#)
- [SPEND, WASTE + object + present participle](#)
- [HAVE, GET + object + past participle](#)
- [Participle clauses](#)

## The present participle used to form the continuous aspect

The present participle is used to form the continuous aspect (*be* + present participle) in continuous and perfect continuous tenses and infinitives:

*Sorry, can you repeat that? I **wasn't listening**.* (past continuous tense)

*Your clothes are filthy! What **have you been doing**?* (present perfect continuous tense)

*You **must be joking**.* (modal continuous)

*If the kids **weren't shouting** all the time, perhaps I wouldn't feel so stressed.* (past continuous subjunctive)

*I happened **to be passing** your house, and I saw that the door was open.* (continuous infinitive)

*She **is known to have been writing** songs for years.* (perfect continuous infinitive)

### Related topics:

- [The continuous aspect](#)
- [The perfect continuous aspect](#)

## The past participle used to form the perfect aspect

The past participle is used to form the perfect aspect (*have* + past participle) in perfect tenses, infinitives, gerunds and the perfect participle:



*He didn't leave until he **had talked** with the boss.* (past perfect tense)  
*I **haven't smoked** today.* (present perfect tense)  
*He **may have caught** the train.* (modal perfect)  
*You **needn't have been** so rude.* (modal perfect)  
*If we **had booked** our flight earlier, it **would have been** cheaper.* (past perfect subjunctive, modal perfect)  
*Lucy was assumed **to have left** the day before.* (perfect infinitive)  
*I am glad **to have helped** you.* (perfect infinitive)  
*After being stopped by the police, George admitted **having drunk** two pints of beer.* (perfect gerund)  
***Having taken** the wrong turn, he ended up in a dangerous neighbourhood.* (perfect participle)

### Related topics:

- [The perfect aspect](#)

## The past participle used to form the passive voice

The past participle is used to form the passive voice (*be* + past participle) as well as the passive forms of infinitives, gerunds and the present and perfect participles. When used in this way, it is sometimes called the passive participle:

*Penicillin **was discovered** by Alexander Fleming in 1928.* (past simple passive)  
*I have the feeling I've **been misunderstood**.* (present perfect passive)  
*Josh always needs **to be told** what to do.* (passive simple infinitive)  
*I hate **being lied to**.* (passive simple gerund)  
*Authorities refused to reveal any information about the case **being investigated**.* (passive present participle)  
***Having been nominated** three times for an Oscar, he is one of today's most acclaimed film directors.* (passive perfect participle)

The past participle can in itself have a passive meaning:

*There was a **handwritten** note on the table.*  
***Damaged** badly by the flood, the school had to be rebuilt.*

### Related topics:

- [Form: passive voice](#)

## The present and past participles used as adjectives

The present and past participles can be used as adjectives. When used in this way, they are sometimes called participial adjectives and the present participle has an active meaning, while the past participle usually has a passive meaning. They can occur:

- in an attributive position before nouns:

*The survey revealed some **worrying** results.* (present participle)

*The wind was blowing through the **broken** living room window.* (past participle)

- in a predicative position after a linking verb:

*The results of the survey were/seemed **worrying**.*

*The living room window was/looked **broken**.*

In the second case above the present and past participles function as adjectives that express states and describe the subject of the sentence. But if they come after *be* and are followed by an object or an adjunct, they function as part of a verb phrase and express actions:

*The results of the survey **were worrying** the authorities.* (past continuous active)

*The living room window **was broken** by the burglar.* (past simple passive)

When used as adjectives, some past participles have an active meaning:

*The **fallen** leaves covered the path.* (The leaves that had fallen covered the path.)

*My parents are **retired** now.* (My parents have retired.)

### Quotes:

- *Lost time is never found again.* - [Benjamin Franklin](#)
- *Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared.* - [Edward Vernon Rickenbacker](#)
- *Friendship is a sheltering tree.* - [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#)
- *A barking dog is often more useful than a sleeping lion.* - [Washington Irving](#)

**SEE, WATCH, HEAR, LISTEN, FEEL, SMELL, NOTICE,**

## OBSERVE + object + present participle

After verbs of perception (*see, watch, hear, listen, feel, smell, notice, observe* etc.), the present participle expresses an action that continues over a period of time, regardless of whether we perceive the whole action or only part of it:

*I felt the ground **shaking** for about half a minute.* (I felt that the ground was shaking.)

*I saw the burglar **climbing** over the fence.* (I saw it as the burglar was climbing over the fence.)

*I heard my brother **singing** in the bathroom.* (I heard my brother as he was singing in the bathroom.)

If we want to emphasise that the action is completed, we use the bare infinitive:

*I felt the ground **shake** once.* (I felt it as the ground shook once.)

### Related topics:

- [SEE, WATCH, HEAR, LISTEN, FEEL, SMELL, NOTICE, OBSERVE + object + bare infinitive](#)

## CATCH, FIND, LEAVE, HAVE, GET + object + present participle

After these verbs, the present participle refers to an action that happens over a period of time:

*He **caught some students playing** truant at the mall.* (He caught some students who were playing truant at the mall.)

*I **found him sitting** on a park bench reading a book.* (When I arrived, he was sitting on a park bench reading a book.)

*We **left the others smoking** outside the bar.* (When we left, the others were smoking outside the bar.)

*The teacher **had the whole class singing** Mary Had a Little Lamb.* (The teacher persuaded the whole class to sing Mary Had a Little Lamb.)

*His problems **got him going** to hospital for years.* (As a result of his problems, he had to go to hospital for years.)

### Related topics:

- [HAVE, GET + object + present participle](#)

## COME, GO + present participle

The verbs *come* and *go* are often used with the present participle to talk about sports or other physical activities:

*How often do you **go fishing**?*  
*Do you want to **come dancing** with us?*  
*I **went swimming** this morning.*  
*We like to **go walking** a lot.*  
*Let's **go shopping**.*

## SPEND, WASTE + object + present participle

The verbs *spend* and *waste* can be followed by an expression of time or money and the present participle:

*I've **spent the whole weekend revising** for my exam.*  
*Did you **spend a lot of money redecorating** your apartment?*  
*We **wasted two hours waiting** for the pizza, which never arrived.*  
*Carol shouldn't have **wasted all that money trying** to keep her business alive.*

### Quotes:

- *You live longer once you realize that any time spent being unhappy is wasted.* - [Ruth E. Renkl](#)

## HAVE, GET + object + past participle

*Have/get* + object + past participle means "cause something to be done". We use this structure when we arrange for a professional to do something for us. *Get* is more informal:

*Did you **have your computer fixed**?*  
*I need to **get my suit cleaned**.*

This structure can also mean "experience something unpleasant":

*They **had their house destroyed** by a hurricane.*  
*He **got his arm bruised** in the accident.*

## Related topics:

- [HAVE + object + past participle](#)
- [GET + object + past participle](#)

## Participle clauses

### Present participle clauses

A present participle clause can express:

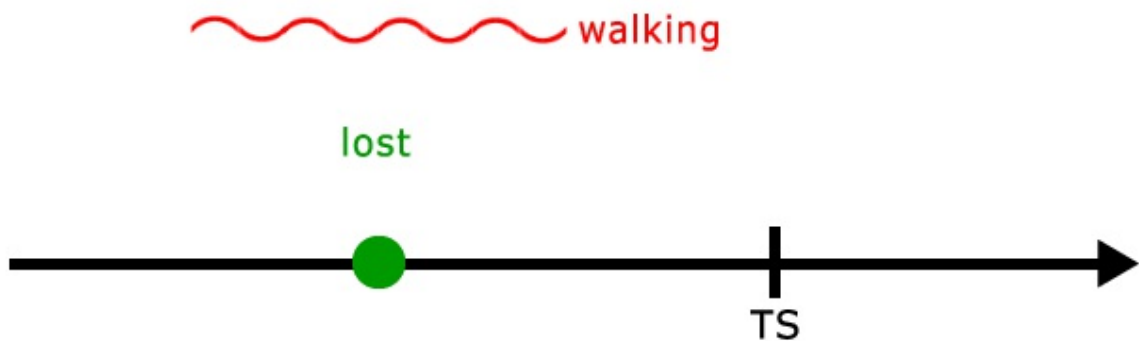
- an action that happens at the same time as the action in the main clause:

*Tom lost his keys **(while) walking through the park.*** (Tom lost his keys while he was walking through the park.)

*She left the room **singing happily.*** (She left the room as she was singing happily.)

The participle clause can come first in literary styles:

***(While) walking through the park,** Tom lost his keys.*



***(While) walking through the park,** Tom lost his keys.*

- an action that happens just before another action:

***Opening** the envelope, I found two concert tickets.* (I opened the envelope and I found two concert tickets.)

- an action that is the result of another action:

*Moments later a bomb exploded, leaving three people dead and twelve others injured.*

*When I entered they all looked at me, making me feel uncomfortable.*

- a reason for the action in the main clause:

*Having nothing left to do, Paula went home.* (Since Paula had nothing left to do, she went home.)

*Knowing a little Russian, I had no difficulty making myself understood.* (As I knew a little Russian, I had no difficulty making myself understood.)

*Working as a sales rep, I get to travel a lot.* (I travel a lot because I work as a sales rep.)

Here the subjects of the two actions can be different:

*The weather being nice, we decided to go for a picnic.* (As the weather was nice, we decided to go for a picnic.)

## Perfect participle clauses

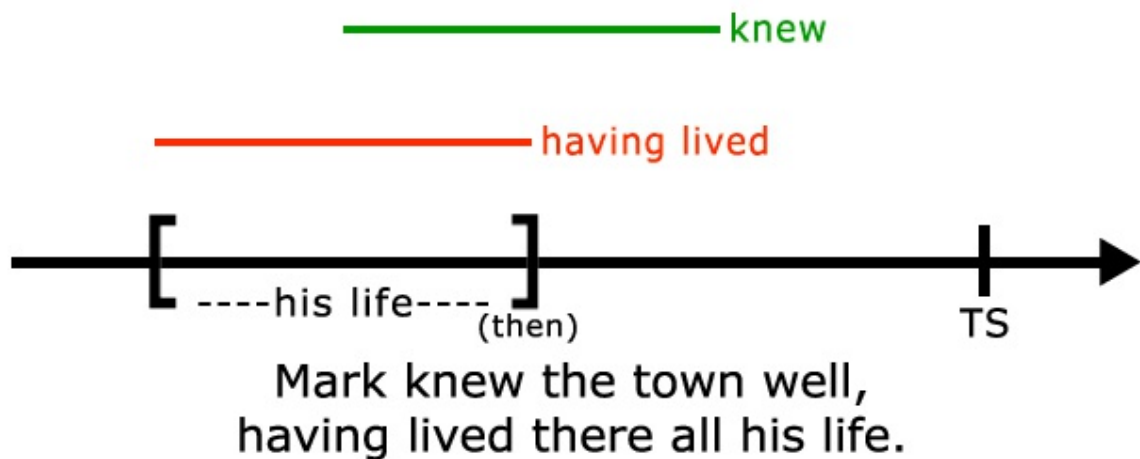
If we want to make it clear that an action happens before another one, we use a perfect participle for the earlier action:

*Having washed the car, I noticed a small scratch on the front right fender.* (After I washed the car, I noticed a small scratch on the front right fender.)

Here the present participle (*washing the car*) would mean "while I was washing the car".

If the two actions do not follow each other immediately or if the first action happens over a period of time, we use a perfect participle instead of a present participle for the earlier action:

*Having seen the film before, I didn't want to go to the cinema.*  
*Mark knew the town well, having lived there all his life.*

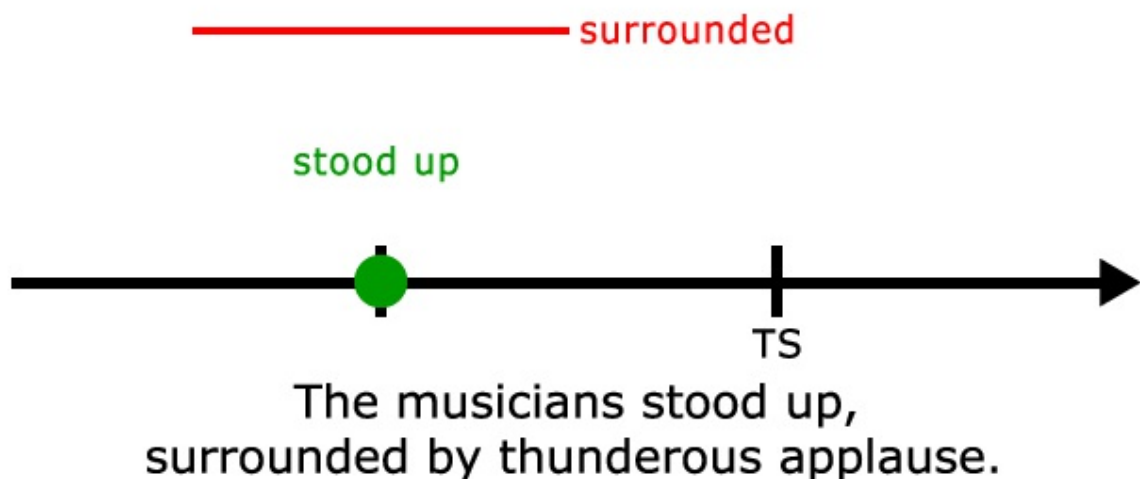


## Past participle clauses

Past participle clauses replace passive voice finite clauses:

*Shocked by the explosion, the people ran for shelter.* (The people were shocked by the explosion and ran for shelter.)

*The musicians stood up, surrounded by thunderous applause.* (The musicians stood up while they were surrounded by thunderous applause.)



If we want to emphasise that an action happens before another one, we use a passive perfect participle:

*Having been nominated three times for an Oscar, he is one of today's most acclaimed film directors.*

## Participle clauses replacing a relative clause

A present participle clause can replace an active voice finite relative clause. The noun before the participle is the doer of the action:

*The man **driving the car** was not injured.* (The man **who was driving the car** was not injured.)

Present participle clauses are possible even with verbs which are not normally used in the continuous form (state verbs):

*If you think you have received an e-mail **containing** a virus, you should delete it immediately.* (If you think you have received an e-mail **which contains** a virus, delete it immediately.)

A past participle clause can replace a passive voice finite relative clause. The noun before the participle is its object:

*This is the last photograph **taken of my grandmother**.* (This is the last photograph **that was taken of my grandmother**.)

### Quotes:

- *A book is like a garden carried in the pocket.* - [Chinese proverb](#)
- *The greatest weariness comes from work not done.* - [Eric Hoffer](#)
- *There is no man living that cannot do more than he thinks he can.* - [Henry Ford](#)
- *Small deeds done are better than great deeds planned.* - [Peter Marshall](#)
- *You live longer once you realize that any time spent being unhappy is wasted.* - [Ruth E. Renkl](#)

### Related topics:

- [Relative clauses](#)



# The difference between the gerund and the present participle

Since the simple gerund and the present participle have the same form (verb-*ing*), sometimes it can be difficult to decide whether an *-ing* form is a gerund or a present participle.

It may be worth remembering that a gerund always functions as a noun:

| Function                       | Example sentence                                            |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Subject                        | <i>Hiking</i> can be a relaxing and rewarding activity.     |
| Complement                     | What I really like is <i>travelling</i> to other countries. |
| Object of a verb               | Jill suggested <i>going</i> for a drink.                    |
| Object of a preposition        | He rushed out of the room without <i>saying</i> a word.     |
| Object of a prepositional verb | Could you give up <i>smoking</i> ?                          |
| Part of a compound noun        | We had no <i>drinking</i> water left.                       |

The present participle has the following functions:

| Function           | Example sentence                                           |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Continuous aspect  | <i>I wasn't listening.</i>                                 |
|                    | <i>What have you been doing?</i>                           |
|                    | <i>You must be joking.</i>                                 |
|                    | <i>I happened to be passing your house.</i>                |
| Adjective          | <i>The survey revealed some worrying results.</i>          |
|                    | <i>The results of the survey were/seemed worrying.</i>     |
| Participle clauses | <i>The man driving the car was not injured.</i>            |
|                    | <i>Tom lost his keys (while) walking through the park.</i> |
|                    | <i>Opening the envelope, I found two concert tickets.</i>  |
|                    | <i>Having nothing left to do, Paula went home.</i>         |

Sometimes it is a matter of interpretation whether an *-ing* form is a gerund or a present participle:

*Hunting* lions can be dangerous.

*Hunting* as a present participle functions as an adjective and describes *lions*. The

sentence means:

*Lions that hunt can be dangerous.*

If *hunting* is a gerund, *lions* is its object and the sentence means:

*It can be dangerous to hunt lions.*

# Revision questions: non-finite verb forms

- Which of the following verb forms are finite: *stolen, is, to have eaten, flew, smiling, having arrived, put*?
- What are the four basic types of infinitive?
- What does a continuous infinitive express?
- What are the four basic types of gerund?
- Why can a possessive adjective (*my, your* etc.) be used before a gerund?
- What does a perfect gerund express?
- What are the types of participle?
- Does the perfect participle have a passive form?
- What is a misrelated participle?
- Can the present participle be the subject of a sentence?
- What is the difference in meaning between the sentences in each of the following groups?

*He heard someone shout at him.*

*He heard someone shouting at him.*

*I got my hair cut.*

*I had Carol cut my hair.*

*I made Carol cut my hair.*

*The little girl started to cry.*

*The little girl started crying.*

*I didn't remember to call Mike.*

*I don't remember calling Mike.*

*He went on to talk about his summer plans.*

*He went on talking about his summer plans.*

- What is the difference between a gerund and a present participle?

# Exercises: non-finite verb forms

## Non-finite verb forms - Exercise 1

Decide if the following words and expressions (1-20) are followed by a *to*-infinitive, bare infinitive, *-ing* form or past participle.

1. *to*-infinitive
2. bare infinitive
3. *-ing* form
4. past participle

1. should
2. look forward to
3. suggest
4. where
5. be worth
6. be
7. let somebody
8. apologise for
9. can't help
10. too + adjective
11. afford
12. needn't
13. used
14. be used to
15. be believed
16. make somebody
17. be made
18. would rather
19. in order
20. what about

## Non-finite verb forms - Exercise 2

Choose the best answer for each of the following sentences.

1. Why don't you try ... honey instead of sugar?
  1. using
  2. to use
2. Remember ... your name on the paper before you submit it.

1. putting
2. to put
3. It could be dangerous ... after you eat.
  1. swimming
  2. to swim
4. Your shoes are dirty. They need ... .
  1. cleaning
  2. to clean
5. It's no use ... for this book if you are not going to read it.
  1. paying
  2. to pay
6. I watched her ... on the tram, and then I went home.
  1. getting
  2. get
7. I can't help ... when I look at him. He's so funny!
  1. laughing
  2. to laugh
8. I'm really looking forward to ... to New York next week.
  1. going
  2. go
9. The fireman warned us not ... any closer.
  1. coming
  2. to come
10. When you finish vacuuming, go on ... the floor.
  1. scrubbing
  2. to scrub
11. I'll never forget ... her for the first time. It was love at first sight!
  1. meeting
  2. to meet
12. We regret ... you that your application has been rejected.
  1. informing
  2. to inform
13. He went on ... without noticing the teacher behind him.
  1. talking
  2. to talk
14. After ... for an hour, I got quite hungry.
  1. jogging
  2. jog
15. A photographer may sometimes spend hours ... for the right moment.
  1. waiting
  2. to wait

## Non-finite verb forms - Exercise 3

**Fill in each gap in the following sentences with the appropriate form of the verbs in brackets.**

1. Allen is trying ... .. (GIVE UP) (SMOKE)
2. They had their dog ... . (VACCINATE)
3. Some students are said ... the test more than once. (FAIL)
4. Dominik had problems ... the complaint letter. (COMPOSE)
5. I have got used to ... tea without sugar. (DRINK)
6. My sister hates ... Pam. (CALL)
7. We are thinking about ... the flat ... . (HAVE) (REDECORATE)
8. Markus goes ... every winter. (SKI)
9. I must ... back. I forgot ... the electricity. (GO) (TURN OFF)
10. She finds it difficult ... new friends. (MAKE)

## Non-finite verb forms - Exercise 4

**Rewrite each sentence, beginning as shown, so that the meaning stays the same.**

1. I wish I hadn't taken this job.  
I regret ...
2. It seems that he is working on something very interesting.  
He seems ...
3. It was difficult to understand what he was saying.  
I had difficulty ...
4. I couldn't finish the book in one week because it was very long.  
The book was too ...
5. Gina doesn't often speak in front of crowds.  
Gina is not used ...
6. Could you please wait outside for a minute?  
Would you mind ...
7. I prefer cycling to walking.  
I prefer to ...
8. Our coach made us run in the snow.  
We ...
9. The police let him go home.  
He was ...
10. Keeping your pet healthy and happy is important.  
It is important ...

## Non-finite verb forms - Exercise 5

Fill in each gap in the following questions with the appropriate form of the verbs in brackets (bare infinitive, *to*-infinitive, *-ing* form or past participle) and then discuss them with your partner.

1. What do you think is the best way ... weight? (LOSE)
2. Do you mind ... told what ... in your free time? (BE) (DO)
3. Is there an English word you find very difficult ... ? (REMEMBER)
4. What are you thinking of ... after the lesson? (DO)
5. How often do you have your teeth ... ? (CHECK)
6. Is it possible ... a foreign language without ... to the country where it is spoken? (LEARN) (GO)
7. Have you ever ... a whole weekend ... ? (SPEND) (STUDY)
8. Would you rather ... abroad alone or with company? (TRAVEL)
9. What do you regret the most not ... in secondary school? (DO)
10. Have you ever ... made ... very fast? (BE) (RUN)

## Answer key: non-finite verb forms

### Answer key - Non-finite verb forms - Exercise 1

1. *to*-infinitive
  2. bare infinitive
  3. *-ing* form
  4. past participle
- 
1. should (2) **bare infinitive**
  2. look forward to (3) ***-ing* form**
  3. suggest (3) ***-ing* form**
  4. where (1) ***to*-infinitive**
  5. be worth (3) ***-ing* form**
  6. be (1) ***to*-infinitive** / (3) ***-ing* form** / (4) **past participle**
  7. let somebody (2) **bare infinitive**
  8. apologise for (3) ***-ing* form**
  9. can't help (3) ***-ing* form**
  10. too + adjective (1) ***to*-infinitive**
  11. afford (1) ***to*-infinitive**
  12. needn't (2) **bare infinitive**
  13. used (1) ***to*-infinitive**
  14. be used to (3) ***-ing* form**
  15. be believed (1) ***to*-infinitive**

16. make somebody (2) **bare infinitive**
17. be made (1) **to-infinitive**
18. would rather (2) **bare infinitive**
19. in order (1) **to-infinitive**
20. what about (3) **-ing form**

## Answer key - Non-finite verb forms - Exercise 2

1. Why don't you try ... honey instead of sugar? (1) **using**
2. Remember ... your name on the paper before you submit it. (2) **to put**
3. It could be dangerous ... after you eat. (2) **to swim**
4. Your shoes are dirty. They need ... . (1) **cleaning**
5. It's no use ... for this book if you are not going to read it. (1) **paying**
6. I watched her ... on the tram, and then I went home. (2) **get**
7. I can't help ... when I look at him. He's so funny! (1) **laughing**
8. I'm really looking forward to ... to New York next week. (1) **going**
9. The fireman warned us not ... any closer. (2) **to come**
10. When you finish vacuuming, go on ... the floor. (2) **to scrub**
11. I'll never forget ... her for the first time. It was love at first sight! (1) **meeting**
12. We regret ... you that your application has been rejected. (2) **to inform**
13. He went on ... without noticing the teacher behind him. (1) **talking**
14. After ... for an hour, I got quite hungry. (1) **jogging**
15. A photographer may sometimes spend hours ... for the right moment. (1) **waiting**

## Answer key - Non-finite verb forms - Exercise 3

1. Allen is trying **to give up smoking**.
2. They had their dog **vaccinated**.
3. Some students are said **to have failed** the test more than once.
4. Dominik had problems **composing** the complaint letter.
5. I have got used to **drinking** tea without sugar.
6. My sister hates **being called** Pam.
7. We are thinking about **having** the flat **redecorated**.
8. Markus goes **skiing** every winter.
9. I must **go** back. I forgot **to turn off** the electricity.
10. She finds it difficult **to make** new friends.

## Answer key - Non-finite verb forms - Exercise 4

1. I regret taking / having taken this job.
2. He seems to be working on something very interesting.



3. I had difficulty understanding what he was saying.
4. The book was too long to finish in one week.
5. Gina is not used to speaking in front of crowds.
6. Would you mind waiting outside for a minute?
7. I prefer to cycle rather than walk.
8. We were made to run in the snow (by our coach).
9. He was allowed to go home.
10. It is important to keep your pet healthy and happy.

## Answer key - Non-finite verb forms - Exercise 5

1. What do you think is the best way **to lose** weight?
2. Do you mind **being** told what **to do** in your free time?
3. Is there an English word you find very difficult **to remember**?
4. What are you thinking of **doing** after the lesson?
5. How often do you have your teeth **checked**?
6. Is it possible **to learn** a foreign language without **going** to the country where it is spoken?
7. Have you ever **spent** a whole weekend **studying**?
8. Would you rather **travel** abroad alone or with company?
9. What do you regret the most not **doing** in secondary school?
10. Have you ever **been** made **to run** very fast?

# Chapter 7: Relative clauses

- [Guiding questions: relative clauses](#)
- [What is a relative clause?](#)
- [Types of relative clauses](#)
- [Relative pronouns: WHO, WHOM, WHOSE, WHICH, THAT](#)
- [Relative adverbs: WHERE, WHEN, WHY](#)
- [Prepositions in relative clauses](#)
- [Non-finite relative clauses](#)
- [WHAT and WHATEVER](#)
- [Emphasis and relative clauses](#)
- [Revision questions: relative clauses](#)
- [Exercises: relative clauses](#)

# Guiding questions: relative clauses

- What is a relative clause?
- What are the types of relative clause?
- When do we use commas with a relative clause?
- Can we use *what* instead of *that* or *which* in a relative clause?
- When can a preposition appear at the end of a relative clause?

# What is a relative clause?

Defining and non-defining relative clauses refer to preceding nouns and are introduced by the pronouns *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which* or *that*. Relative clauses usually come after the nouns that they describe:

*The woman **who answered the door** was about forty years old.*  
*Warsaw, **which is the capital of Poland**, lies on the Vistula River.*

Sentential relative clauses do not refer to preceding nouns but comment on what has been said before:

*I didn't take any waterproof clothing with me, **which was a mistake**.*

In relative clauses, we do not use personal pronouns to refer to the nouns described:

*\*The woman **who she** answered the door was about forty years old.*  
*The woman **who** answered the door was about forty years old.*

*\*Warsaw, **which it** is the capital of Poland, lies on the Vistula River.*  
*Warsaw, **which** is the capital of Poland, lies on the Vistula River.*

# Types of relative clauses

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Non-defining relative clause](#)
- [The difference between defining and non-defining relative clauses](#)
- [Sentential relative clause](#)

## Defining relative clause

A noun can be modified in different ways: by an adjective, a noun or a phrase:

*the **best-selling** book, a **beautiful** photo* (adjective)

*the **history** book, an **art** photo* (noun)

*the book **with the most votes**, a photo **by Robert Capa*** (phrase)

Another way of modifying a noun is with a defining (also called a restrictive) relative clause:

*the book **I told you about last week***

*a photo **which was taken by Robert Capa***

This type of relative clause identifies or classifies the noun that it refers to.

An identifying clause defines who or what we are talking about and refers to a noun which is preceded by the definite article *the*:

*This is **the book I told you about last week**. Remember?*

*Do you know **the guy who is talking to Will over there**?*

A classifying clause describes what kind of person(s) or thing(s) we are talking about. It refers to a singular uncountable or plural countable noun without an article or a singular countable noun preceded by the indefinite article *a* or *an*:

*I wrote my essay on **a photo which was taken by Robert Capa**.*

*Sometimes, I like listening to music **that makes me sad**.*

*I don't know any people **who speak Esperanto**.*

### Quotes:

- *The fishing was good; it was the catching that was bad.* - [A. K. Best](#)
- *Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.* - [Albert Einstein](#)
- *Christmas is a time when you get homesick - even when you're home.* - [Carol Nelson](#)
- *The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary.* - [Donald Kendall](#)
- *People are not disturbed by things, but by the view they take of them.* - [Epictetus](#)
- *Gossip needn't be false to be evil - there's a lot of truth that shouldn't be passed around.* - [Frank A. Clark](#)

- *April is a promise that May is bound to keep.* - [Hal Borland](#)
- *It's not who you are that holds you back, it's who you think you're not.* - [Hanoch McCarty](#)
- *Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it.* - [Henry David Thoreau](#)
- *There is no man living that cannot do more than he thinks he can.* - [Henry Ford](#)
- *A city is a large community where people are lonesome together.* - [Herbert Prochnow](#)
- *A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment.* - [John Wooden](#)
- *It is the friends you can call up at 4 a.m. that matter.* - [Marlene Dietrich](#)
- *What you have become is the price you paid to get what you used to want.* - [Mignon McLaughlin](#)
- *Those who wish to sing always find a song.* - [Swedish proverb](#)
- *Action will remove the doubts that theory cannot solve.* - [Tehyi Hsieh](#)
- *It is the familiar that usually eludes us in life. What is before our nose is what we see last.* - [William Barret](#)

### **Related topics:**

- [Cleft sentences](#)

## Non-defining relative clause

A non-defining relative clause describes a preceding noun by adding extra information about it. The noun has a clear reference (it is clear who or what we are talking about) even without the clause:

*The Mona Lisa was painted by Leonardo da Vinci, **who was also a prolific engineer and inventor.***

*The human heart, **which has a mass of about 300 grams,** pumps blood throughout the body.*

A non-defining relative clause can also continue a story by saying what happened next:

*I called my mother, **who became very upset.** (I called my mother, and she became very upset.)*

The non-defining relative clause is separated from the rest of the sentence by commas (,). In speech, we make a short pause before and after the clause.

### Quotes:

- *The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.* - [Nelson Henderson](#)



# The difference between defining and non-defining relative clauses

A defining relative clause identifies or classifies a noun:

*Do you know the guy **who is talking to Will over there?***  
*I wrote my essay on a photo **which was taken by Robert Capa.***

If we omit this type of clause, the sentence does not make sense or has a different meaning:

*Do you know the guy? (**which guy?**)*  
*I wrote my essay on a photo. (**what kind of photo?**)*

A non-defining relative clause adds extra information about a noun which already has a clear reference:

*The Mona Lisa was painted by Leonardo da Vinci, **who was also a prolific engineer and inventor.***

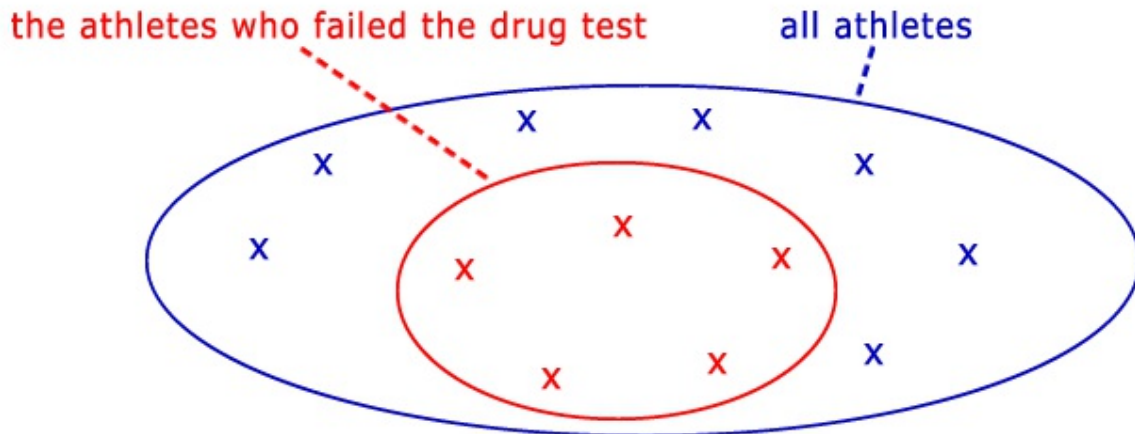
If we leave out this type of clause, the sentence still makes sense:

*The Mona Lisa was painted by Leonardo da Vinci. (**we know who Leonardo da Vinci was**)*

Sometimes, the use of commas marks a difference in meaning:

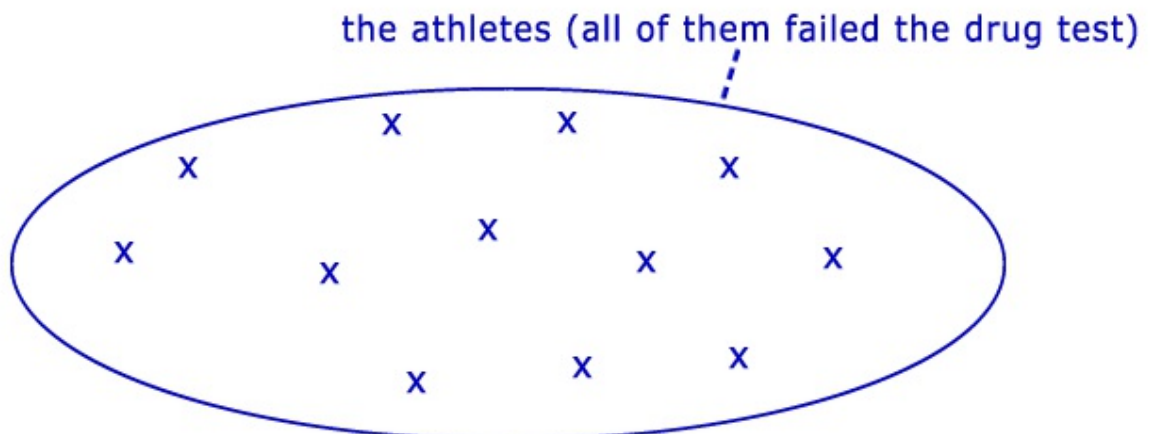
*The athletes **who failed the drug test** were disqualified. (defining)*  
*The athletes, **who failed the drug test**, were disqualified. (non-defining)*

The defining relative clause tells us that only those athletes who failed the drug test were disqualified. The sentence implies that there were other athletes who did not fail the drug test and that they were not disqualified:



The athletes who failed the drug test were disqualified.

The non-defining relative clause tells us that all the athletes (mentioned earlier in the context) failed the drug test and that all of them were disqualified:



The athletes, who failed the drug test, were disqualified.

## Sentential relative clause

A sentential (also called connective) relative clause does not refer to a preceding noun; it rather comments on the whole preceding clause or sentence:

*The streets were empty, **which was unusual for this time of day.*** (The fact that the streets were empty was unusual.)

In conversation, a sentential relative clause may also be interjected by another speaker:

*"Then he goes on to say how much he appreciates all the effort we've put into it." "**Which is strange** because he never seemed to care much about what we do."*

# Relative pronouns: WHO, WHOM, WHOSE, WHICH, THAT

The relative pronouns are *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which* and *that*. The choice of which pronoun we use in a relative clause depends on:

- the type of clause (defining or non-defining),
- the function of the pronoun in the clause (subject, object, possessive determiner or object of a preposition),
- the style (formal or informal).

## Pronouns used in defining relative clauses

The columns in the following table show the function of the relative pronoun, while the rows indicate whether the pronoun refers to a person or non-person in the defining relative clause. The pronouns that refer to persons are sometimes also used for animals, especially pets.

The pronoun *that* is used in informal styles and in spoken language.

In the defining relative clause, the pronoun can be omitted if it stands for the object of the clause. We use the phrase zero pronoun (-) to indicate such a case.

*Whom* is used instead of *who* as the object of the relative clause in formal styles, especially in writing.

|                   | Subject      | Object       | Possessive          |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|
| <b>Person</b>     |              | <i>whom</i>  | <i>whose ...</i>    |
|                   | <i>who</i>   | <i>who</i>   |                     |
|                   | <i>that</i>  | <i>that</i>  |                     |
|                   |              | (-)          |                     |
| <b>Non-person</b> | <i>which</i> | <i>which</i> | <i>... of which</i> |
|                   | <i>that</i>  | <i>that</i>  |                     |
|                   |              | (-)          |                     |

The woman **who/that** answered the door was about forty years old.

He's the reporter **whom/who/that/(-)** I saw on TV last night.

The engineer **whose design** is selected will be offered a contract.

Do you know a shop **which/that** sells antique furniture?

What was the last film **which/that/(-)** you saw?

Police have found the car **the owner of which** was reported missing 3 weeks ago.

### Quotes:

- *The fishing was good; it was the catching that was bad.* - [A. K. Best](#)
- *People are not disturbed by things, but by the view they take of them.* - [Epictetus](#)
- *Gossip needn't be false to be evil - there's a lot of truth that shouldn't be passed around.* - [Frank A. Clark](#)
- *April is a promise that May is bound to keep.* - [Hal Borland](#)
- *It's not who you are that holds you back, it's who you think you're not.* - [Hanoch McCarty](#)
- *Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it.* - [Henry David Thoreau](#)
- *There is no man living that cannot do more than he thinks he can.* - [Henry Ford](#)
- *A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment.* - [John Wooden](#)
- *It is the friends you can call up at 4 a.m. that matter.* - [Marlene Dietrich](#)
- *What you have become is the price you paid to get what you used to want.* - [Mignon McLaughlin](#)
- *Those who wish to sing always find a song.* - [Swedish proverb](#)
- *Action will remove the doubts that theory cannot solve.* - [Tehyi Hsieh](#)
- *It is the familiar that usually eludes us in life. What is before our nose is what we see last.* - [William Barret](#)

### Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)

## Pronouns used in non-defining relative clauses

The columns in the following table show the function of the relative pronoun, while the rows indicate whether the pronoun refers to a person or non-person in the non-defining relative clause. The pronouns that refer to persons are sometimes also used for animals, especially pets.

*Whom* is used instead of *who* as the object of the relative clause in formal styles, especially in writing.

In non-defining relative clauses, we can't omit the relative pronoun and we can't use *that*.

|            | Subject      | Object       | Possessive          |
|------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Person     |              | <i>whom</i>  | <i>whose ...</i>    |
|            | <i>who</i>   | <i>who</i>   |                     |
| Non-person | <i>which</i> | <i>which</i> | <i>... of which</i> |

*Epictetus, **who** is one of the most well-known Stoic philosophers, was born a slave.*

*Mr Kowalski, **whom/who** you all know, will take over the Marketing Department from next month.*

*Van Gogh, **whose paintings** are popular today, was not appreciated during his life.*

*Warsaw, **which** is the capital of Poland, lies on the Vistula River.*

*Then they played "My Favourite Things", **which** I recognised immediately from "The Sound of Music".*

*The cupboard was full of glasses and cups, **many of which** were broken.*

### Quotes:

- *The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit. - [Nelson Henderson](#)*

### Related topics:

- [Non-defining relative clause](#)

# Relative adverbs: WHERE, WHEN, WHY

The relative adverb *where* is used after nouns that refer to places:

*The house **where** Mozart was born is now a museum.* (defining relative clause)

*I flew to Munich, **where** I had to catch another plane to Oslo.* (non-defining relative clause)

The relative adverb *when* is used after nouns that refer to times and dates:

*I can't remember a time **when** I was so happy.* (defining relative clause)

*The most stressful day of the week is Monday, **when** people go back to work.* (non-defining relative clause)

The relative adverb *why* is used after *reason*:

*The reason **why** I didn't call you is that I've lost your phone number.* (only in defining relative clauses)

## Quotes:

- *Christmas is a time when you get homesick - even when you're home.* - [Carol Nelson](#)
- *The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary.* - [Donald Kendall](#)
- *A city is a large community where people are lonesome together.* - [Herbert Prochnow](#)

## Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Non-defining relative clause](#)

# Prepositions in relative clauses

The relative pronoun can also refer to the object of a preposition. In informal styles, the preposition comes after the verb:

*The house **which** Mozart was born **in** is now a museum.* (defining relative clause)

*The house **that** Mozart was born **in** is now a museum.* (defining relative clause)

*The house Mozart was born **in** is now a museum.* (defining relative clause)

*Mr Pierce, **who** I talked **to** just now, sends you his regards.* (non-defining relative clause)

In formal styles, the preposition is placed before the pronouns *whom* or *which*:

*The house **in which** Mozart was born is now a museum.* (defining relative clause)

*Mr Pierce, **to whom** I talked just now, sends you his regards.* (non-defining relative clause)

## Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Non-defining relative clause](#)



# Non-finite relative clauses

Defining and non-defining relative clauses have their non-finite equivalents. In non-finite relative clauses, we use non-finite verb forms (the present participle, past participle or *to*-infinitive) but no relative pronouns.

- [Participles in non-finite relative clauses](#)
- [The TO-infinitive in non-finite relative clauses](#)

## Participles in non-finite relative clauses

The present participle in a non-finite relative clause can occur if the preceding noun is the subject of the participle. Present participle clauses correspond to finite relative clauses in the active voice:

*Who is the girl **sitting** next to you in class?* (Who is the girl **that sits** next to you in class?) (defining relative clause)

*Bill, **waiting outside in the rain**, was getting more and more annoyed.* (Bill, **who was waiting outside in the rain**, was getting more and more annoyed.) (non-defining relative clause)

The past participle in a non-finite relative clause can occur if the preceding noun is the object of the participle. Past participle clauses correspond to finite relative clauses in the passive voice:

*Martina was the only one **not informed** about the room change.* (Martina was the only one **who was not informed / who had not been informed** about the room change.) (defining relative clause)

*Romeo and Juliet, first **published** in 1597, has become one of Shakespeare's most popular plays.* (Romeo and Juliet, **which was first published** in 1597, has become one of Shakespeare's most popular plays.) (non-defining relative clause)

### Quotes:

- *A book is like a garden carried in the pocket.* - [Chinese proverb](#)
- *The greatest weariness comes from work not done.* - [Eric Hoffer](#)
- *There is no man living that cannot do more than he thinks he can.* - [Henry Ford](#)
- *Small deeds done are better than great deeds planned.* - [Peter Marshall](#)
- *You live longer once you realize that any time spent being unhappy is wasted.* - [Ruth E. Renkl](#)

### Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Non-defining relative clause](#)
- [Participle clauses](#)

## The TO-infinitive in non-finite relative clauses

The *to*-infinitive is often used in non-finite defining relative clauses after ordinal numbers (*the first, the second* etc.), superlatives (*the best, the most beautiful* etc.) and after *next, last* and *only*:

*Neil Armstrong was **the first person to land** on the moon.* (Neil Armstrong was the first person **who landed** on the moon.)

***The last person to leave** should turn off the lights.* (The last person **who leaves** should turn off the lights.)

*Mike was **the only one to help** me.* (Mike was the only one **who helped** me.)

Passive infinitives are also possible:

*His was the last composition **to be marked**.* (His was the last composition which was marked.)

### Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Cleft sentences](#)

# WHAT and WHATEVER

## WHAT (the thing(s) that/which)

What stands for the thing(s) that/which:

*I didn't understand **what** he was saying. (the things that he was saying)*

*Is this **what** you want? (the thing that you want)*

What is different from the other relative pronouns in that it does not refer back to a noun:

*I wrote my essay on **a photo which** was taken by Robert Capa. (which refers to a photo)*

*That's not **what** we agreed on. (what does not refer to a noun)*

For this reason, *what* can't be used instead of *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which* or *that* in relative clauses:

*I wrote my essay on **a photo \*what / which** was taken by Robert Capa.*

When in doubt, replace *what* with *the thing(s) that/which* and see if the sentence is still grammatically correct.

### Quotes:

- *Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school. - [Albert Einstein](#)*
- *The best way to gain self-confidence is to do what you are afraid to do. - [Author unknown](#)*
- *Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared. - [Edward Vernon Rickenbacker](#)*
- *Advice is what we ask for when we already know the answer but wish we didn't. - [Erica Jong](#)*
- *Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going. - [Jim Rohn](#)*
- *What is not good for the swarm is not good for the bee. - [Marcus Aurelius](#)*
- *What you have become is the price you paid to get what you used to want. - [Mignon McLaughlin](#)*
- *What we call results are beginnings. - [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)*
- *It is the familiar that usually eludes us in life. What is before our nose is what we see last. - [William Barret](#)*

## Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Pseudo-cleft sentences](#)

# WHATEVER, WHOEVER, WHICHEVER, WHEREVER, WHENEVER

*whatever* » anything that

*whoever* » anyone who

*whichever* » any ... which

*wherever* » at any place

*whenever* » at any time

You can do **whatever** you want to.

**Whoever** leaves last should turn off the lights.

Choose **whichever pencil** you like.

**Wherever** I looked there was something interesting to see.

**Whenever** I go abroad, I take as many pictures as possible.

It is possible to use *what* instead of *whatever* in the first sentence above, but it is not possible to use *who* instead of *whoever* in the second sentence:

You can do **what** you want to.

\***Who** leaves last should turn off the lights.

## Quotes:

- *Whoever gossips to you will gossip about you.* - [Spanish proverb](#)

## Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)

# Emphasis and relative clauses

- [Cleft sentences](#)
- [Pseudo-cleft sentences](#)

# Cleft sentences

IT + BE + PHRASE + DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSE

Cleft sentences (also called *it*-clefts) result from changing the normal sentence pattern to emphasise a particular piece of information. The emphasis in the resulting cleft sentence is on the phrase after *it + be*.

Look at the following example:

*János Irinyi invented the non-explosive match in 1836.*

We can transform this sentence in different ways depending on which part of it we want to bring into focus:

***It was János Irinyi who/that*** invented the non-explosive match in 1836.

***It was the non-explosive match which/that/(-)*** János Irinyi invented in 1836.

***It was 1836 when*** János Irinyi invented the non-explosive match.

In the clauses that follow *it + be + phrase*, we can use the same relative pronouns (*who, whom, whose, which, that*) and relative adverbs (*where, when, why*) that we normally use in defining relative clauses.

However, if we bring a whole adverbial phrase into focus, we use *that*:

***It was in 1836 that*** János Irinyi invented the non-explosive match.

If we use a personal pronoun after *it + be*, it will be in the object form:

***It was him who*** invented the non-explosive match in 1836.

It is also possible to expand the phrase in focus with a non-defining relative clause:

*It was János Irinyi, **who was a Hungarian chemist**, that invented the non-explosive match in 1836.*

## Quotes:

- *The fishing was good; it was the catching that was bad.* - [A. K. Best](#)
- *It's not who you are that holds you back, it's who you think you're not.* - [Hanoch McCarty](#)
- *It is the friends you can call up at 4 a.m. that matter.* - [Marlene Dietrich](#)
- *It is the familiar that usually eludes us in life. What is before our nose is*

*what we see last.* - [William Barret](#)

**Related topics:**

- [Defining relative clause](#)



# Pseudo-cleft sentences

WHAT-CLAUSE + BE + PHRASE

Pseudo-cleft sentences (also called *wh*-clefts) are similar in function to cleft sentences, but they are formed with the pronoun *what* (= *the thing(s) that/which*). The emphasis in a pseudo-cleft sentence is on the phrase after the *what*-clause + *be*:

*What you need is **a good sleep**.*

*What I didn't like was **the end of the movie**.*

*What changed his mind was **a book he'd read**.*

If we want to refer to a person, we say *The person/people who/that*:

*The people who/that I met were **members of the delegation**.*

If we want to emphasise an action, the verb after *be* usually takes the form that corresponds to the form used in the *what*-clause:

*What you **should do** is **write** a letter to the manager.*

*What I **need to do** is **get** some rest.*

*What they **were doing** was **arguing** about which train to take.*

*What I **can do** is **call** for a taxi.*

In the following examples, the verb after *be* takes the form that the verb in the *what*-clause is normally followed by:

*What I **want** is **to sleep**.*

*What he **can't stand** is **getting up** early.*

In the past simple and present perfect, we can use the following patterns:

*What I **did** in the end was **(to) go** home.*

*What I **have done** is **(to) write** a letter to the editor.*

## Quotes:

- *It is the familiar that usually eludes us in life. What is before our nose is what we see last.* - [William Barret](#)

## Related topics:

- [WHAT \(the thing\(s\) that/which\)](#)

# Revision questions: relative clauses

- What is the difference between defining and non-defining relative clauses?
- What is a sentential relative clause?
- Do we use a comma before the relative pronoun *that*?
- Which one is the most formal: *whom*, *who* or *that*?
- When can we not use *that* instead of *which* in a relative clause?
- When do we use a past participle (the third form of the verb) in a non-finite relative clause?
- When do we use a present participle (the *-ing* form of the verb) in a non-finite relative clause?
- What does *what* stand for in *I don't understand what you mean*?
- Do we use a comma in a cleft sentence?

# Exercises: relative clauses

## Relative clauses - Exercise 1

**Decide whether the relative clauses in the following sentences are defining or non-defining and whether the relative pronoun can be omitted or not. The commas are missing in some of the sentences. In which ones and where?**

1. An advocate is a person who can help you get information about your rights.
2. That is the kind of house that everyone would love to live in.
3. Beijing which is one of the world's most populated cities is the capital of China.
4. Do you know anyone who can lend me a bike?
5. The food that they served at the reception was delicious.
6. This poem which was written by Robert Frost is one of my favourites.
7. The blue whale which is the largest existing mammal is an endangered species.
8. The man whose seat I had accidentally taken offered to sit somewhere else.
9. Was it you who called the ambulance?
10. Alex who had never flown before was terribly nervous.

## Relative clauses - Exercise 2

**Decide if the following sentences are correct or incorrect.**

1. The beer what I drank last night was the best I had ever had.
2. She should apologise for which she said.
3. Robert, who had promised to help paint the kitchen, didn't come.
4. Who is the woman I saw you with?
5. On Monday which was wet and windy we stayed in the hotel.
6. I didn't tell him anything, which made him furious.
7. I was very upset about that I heard.
8. Do you know a shop where it sells good wine?
9. Look! That's the guy, whose son has won the Best Student award.
10. Do you remember the day when we met?

## Relative clauses - Exercise 3

**Fill in the relative pronouns or relative adverbs.**

1. Everyone ... heard about the murder was shocked.

2. That is the boy with ... Cindy used to go out.
3. It was the kind of day ... everything goes wrong.
4. Nothing happened for a long time, ... made me feel worried.
5. He will be punished for ... he has done.
6. Ryan, ... car had been towed away, had to take a bus.
7. This is the place ... the accident happened.
8. His last movie, in ... he plays the main character, was great.
9. It was his tie ... made him stand out.
10. Kathy called her mother, ... was very upset.

## **Relative clauses - Exercise 4**

**Combine the sentences so that the new sentence begins as shown. Use relative clauses, cleft or pseudo-cleft sentences.**

1. This morning I tried a new pancake recipe. It was really delicious.  
The ...
2. She wrote an angry e-mail to her boss. He was very upset about it.  
She ...
3. First they told us to go to room 105. We had to wait for two hours there.  
First ...
4. Gabriel is a very helpful person. He agreed to do the washing up.  
Gabriel, ...
5. It's a few days off that I need. I don't need anything else.  
What ...
6. They were very silent. It was unusual.  
They ...
7. The story is about Hans. He works for an international music company.  
The ...
8. The story is about a man. He works for an international music company.  
The ...
9. The person who broke the window was George. It wasn't someone else.  
It ...
10. There is a new street food restaurant down the street. Have you been there?  
Have ...

## **Relative clauses - Exercise 5**

**Tell your partner about ...**

- a friend who you have known for a long time.
- a sport you would like to try.

- an object that is very important to you.
- a dish you can cook.
- an actor whose films you like.
- a time when you were proud of yourself.
- a place where you would like to go.
- a person that you look up to.
- a decision which was hard to make.
- a day when you were very happy.

## Relative clauses - Exercise 6

**Student A, look at role card 1. Student B, look at role card 2. Make sure you understand the words. Take turns defining the words to your partner using relative clauses. Example:**

*A: It's a place where you can borrow books.*

*B: A library.*

### Role card 1 - Student A

1. Define the following words to your partner using relative clauses: *waiter, dictionary, helmet, umbrella, kidnapper, telephone, rush hour, professor, desert, butterfly.*
2. Listen to your partner's definitions and guess the words.

### Role card 2 - Student B

1. Listen to your partner's definitions and guess the words.
2. Define the following words to your partner using relative clauses: *burglar, camera, memory stick, bicycle, skyscraper, robot, basketball, winter, supermarket, wolf.*

## Answer key: relative clauses

### [Answer key - Relative clauses - Exercise 1](#)

1. An advocate is a person who can help you get information about your rights. **defining, who cannot be omitted**
2. That is the kind of house that everyone would love to live in. **defining, that can be omitted**

3. Beijing, which is one of the world's most populated cities, is the capital of China. **non-defining, which cannot be omitted**
4. Do you know anyone who can lend me a bike? **defining, who cannot be omitted**
5. The food that they served at the reception was delicious. **defining, that can be omitted**
6. This poem, which was written by Robert Frost, is one of my favourites. **non-defining, which cannot be omitted**
7. The blue whale, which is the largest existing mammal, is an endangered species. **non-defining, which cannot be omitted**
8. The man whose seat I had accidentally taken offered to sit somewhere else. **defining, whose cannot be omitted**
9. Was it you who called the ambulance? **defining, who cannot be omitted**
10. Alex, who had never flown before, was terribly nervous. **non-defining, who cannot be omitted**

The commas were missing in the following sentences: **3, 6, 7, 10**.

## [Answer key - Relative clauses - Exercise 2](#)

1. The beer **which/that**- I drank last night was the best I had ever had.
2. She should apologise for **what** she said.
3. Correct
4. Correct
5. On Monday, which was wet and windy, we stayed in the hotel.
6. Correct
7. I was very upset about **what** I heard.
8. Do you know a shop **which/that sells** good wine?  
Do you know a shop **where they sell** good wine?
9. Look! That's the guy whose son has won the Best Student award. (**no comma**)
10. Correct

## [Answer key - Relative clauses - Exercise 3](#)

1. Everyone **who/that** heard about the murder was shocked.
2. That is the boy with **whom** Cindy used to go out.
3. It was the kind of day **when** everything goes wrong.
4. Nothing happened for a long time, **which** made me feel worried.
5. He will be punished for **what** he has done.
6. Ryan, **whose** car had been towed away, had to take a bus.
7. This is the place **where** the accident happened.

8. His last movie, in **which** he plays the main character, was great.
9. It was his tie **which/that** made him stand out.
10. Kathy called her mother, **who** was very upset.

### **Answer key - Relative clauses - Exercise 4**

1. The new pancake recipe which/that/- I tried this morning was really delicious.
2. She wrote an angry e-mail to her boss, who was very upset about it.
3. First they told us to go to room 105, where we had to wait for two hours.
4. Gabriel, who is a very helpful person, agreed to do the washing up.
5. What I need is a few days off.
6. They were very silent, which was unusual.
7. The story is about Hans, who works for an international music company.
8. The story is about a man who works for an international music company.
9. It was George who broke the window.
10. Have you been to the new street food restaurant which/that is down the street?

# Chapter 8: Inversion

- [Guiding questions: inversion](#)
- [What is inversion?](#)
- [Subject-verb inversion](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion](#)
- [Revision questions: inversion](#)
- [Exercises: inversion](#)



# Guiding questions: inversion

- What is inversion?
- Which parts of the sentence can be inverted?
- What is the main function of inversion?
- What are the two types of inversion?
- What do questions and inversion have in common?
- When do we use inversion with negative adverbials?
- When do we use inversion in conditionals?

# What is inversion?

Inversion is the reversal of the normal word order in a sentence or phrase. There are two types of inversion:

1. Subject-verb inversion, where the subject and the main verb switch positions and the word order becomes verb + subject:

*On the top of the hill **stood an old oak tree.***

2. Subject-auxiliary inversion, where the subject and the auxiliary switch positions and the word order becomes auxiliary + subject (+ verb):

*Hardly **had I** arrived home when my phone rang.*

*When **does the bus** leave?*

*You're hungry, **aren't you?***

# Subject-verb inversion

In this type of inversion, the subject and the main verb switch positions, so the verb comes before the subject.

- [Subject-verb inversion after place adverbials](#)
- [Subject-verb inversion in direct speech](#)
- [Subject-verb inversion in news headlines](#)

## Subject-verb inversion after place adverbials

When an adverb or an adverbial expression of place comes in the initial position (at the beginning of the sentence), the subject and verb are inverted:

*Down the hill **rolled the children.***  
*Round the corner **was a nice café.***

This is a rhetorical device used mainly in formal and literary styles; however, it may also occur in everyday conversation:

*Here **comes the bus.***  
*There **goes Sally.***  
*Here's **my number.***

But if the subject is a personal pronoun, there is no inversion:

*Here **it comes.***  
*There **she goes.***  
*Here **it is.***

## Subject-verb inversion in direct speech

In direct speech, if the quotation precedes the reporting verb, the subject and the reporting verb can be inverted:

*"I'm so sorry," Maria said / said Maria.*

If the subject is long, usually there is inversion:

*"Good morning," said the stranger in the black jacket.*

But if the subject is a personal pronoun, there is no inversion:

*"Good morning," he said.*

### Related topics:

- [Punctuation in direct speech](#)

## Subject-verb inversion in news headlines

In news headlines, if the reporting verb is in the final position, the subject and the reporting verb may be inverted:

*AROMATHERAPY HAS NO THERAPEUTIC EFFECT, SAY BRITISH SCIENTISTS*

# Subject-auxiliary inversion

In this type of inversion, the subject and the auxiliary switch positions. In the present and past simple, the auxiliaries *do/does* and *did* come before the subject, which is followed by the bare infinitive. The word order is the same as in questions.

- [Subject-auxiliary inversion after negative adverbials](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion after SO + adverb / adjective and SUCH](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in question tags](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion in echo tags](#)
- [Subject-auxiliary inversion with SO and NEITHER / NOR to express agreement](#)

## Subject-auxiliary inversion after negative adverbials

In formal and literary styles, the subject and auxiliary are inverted when negative adverbials are placed at the beginning of the sentence for rhetorical effect.

- [HARDLY, SCARCELY, BARELY, NO SOONER](#)
- [NEVER, RARELY, LITTLE, IN / UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES, ON NO CONDITION, IN NO WAY, NOT ONLY ... BUT ALSO etc.](#)
- [ONLY AFTER, ONLY IF, ONLY IN THIS WAY etc., NOT UNTIL](#)

### HARDLY, SCARCELY, BARELY, NO SOONER

HARDLY/SCARCELY/BARELY . . . WHEN  
NO SOONER . . . THAN

When a story is told in the past tense, the adverbials *hardly*, *scarcely*, *barely* and *no sooner* are often used to emphasise that one event quickly followed another. The verb describing the earlier event is usually in the past perfect tense. If *hardly*, *scarcely*, *barely* and *no sooner* are in the initial position, the subject and auxiliary are inverted:

*Hardly **had I arrived** home when my phone rang.* (I had hardly arrived home when my phone rang.)

*Scarcely **had she finished** reading when she fell asleep.* (She had scarcely finished reading when she fell asleep.)

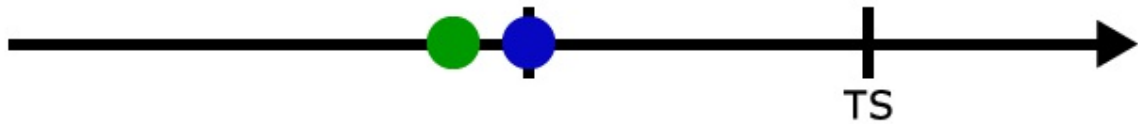
*Barely **had they won** the match when the coach had a heart attack.* (They had barely won the match when the coach had a heart attack.)

*No sooner **had the company launched** its new product than it went bankrupt.* (The company had no sooner launched its new product than it went bankrupt.)

Note that *hardly*, *scarcely* and *barely* are followed by *when*, while *no sooner* is followed by *than*. (*Sooner* is the comparative form of *soon*.)

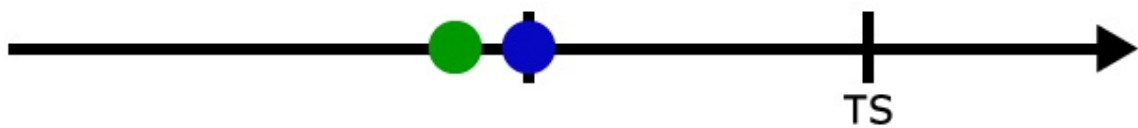


had...arrived rang



Hardly had I arrived home when the telephone rang.

had...launched went



No sooner had the company launched its new product than it went bankrupt.

### Related topics:

- [Past perfect for actions completed before a point in the past](#)

**NEVER, RARELY, LITTLE, IN / UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES, ON NO CONDITION, IN NO WAY, NOT ONLY ... BUT ALSO etc.**

When *never, rarely, little* etc. are placed at the beginning of the sentence for rhetorical effect, the subject and auxiliary are inverted:

*Never (before) **have we faced** such a challenge!* (We have never faced such a challenge!)

*Rarely **has there been** so much speculation about the future of the company.*

(There has rarely been so much speculation about the future of the company.)

*Little **did she understand** what the conversation was about.* (She didn't really understand what the conversation was about.)

*Under no circumstances **are you allowed** to disturb the pilots.* (You are not allowed to disturb the pilots under any circumstances.)

*On no condition **will the company bear** responsibility for lost property.* (The company will not bear responsibility for lost property on any condition.)

*In no way **am I related** to the suspect.* (I am in no way related to the suspect.)

*Not only **did he exceed** the speed limit, but he had also consumed alcohol.* (He not only exceeded the speed limit, but he had also consumed alcohol.)

*Not only **were you late**, but you didn't even have a good excuse.* (You were not only late, but you didn't have a good excuse either.)

## **ONLY AFTER, ONLY IF, ONLY IN THIS WAY etc., NOT UNTIL**

When *only after, only if, only in this way* etc. are placed at the beginning of the sentence for rhetorical effect, the subject and auxiliary are inverted:

*Only after lunch **can you play**.* (You can only play after lunch.)

*Only after finishing your homework **can you play**.* (You can only play after you finish your homework.)

*Only after you have finished your homework **can you play**.* (You can only play after you have finished your homework.)

*Only by guessing **can you solve** this puzzle.* (You can only solve this puzzle by guessing.)

*Only if everybody agreed **would I accept** this position.* (I would only accept this position if everybody agreed.)

*Only in this way **does this machine work**.* (This machine only works in this way.)

*Only then **did they discover** his secret.* (They only discovered his secret then.)

*Only when he needed some help **did he call** me.* (He only called me when he needed some help.)

*Only when I filled my glass **did I notice** that it was broken.* (I only noticed that my glass was broken when I filled it.)

The last sentence can be rephrased as:

*Not until I filled my glass **did I notice** that it was broken.* (I didn't notice that my glass was broken until I filled it.)

If *only* is followed by the subject at the beginning of the sentence, there is no inversion:

***Only you can** understand.* (No one else can understand.)

**Quotes:**

- *Only in grammar can you be more than perfect.* - [William Safire](#)

## Subject-auxiliary inversion after SO + adverb / adjective and SUCH

When adverbial or adjectival phrases starting with *so* are placed at the beginning of the sentence for emphatic effect, the subject and auxiliary are inverted:

*So quickly **did he run** that the others couldn't catch up with him.* (He ran so quickly that the others couldn't catch up with him.)

*So strong **was the wind** that we couldn't open the window.* (The wind was so strong that we couldn't open the window.)

*So* + adjective can be replaced with *such*:

*Such **was the wind** that we couldn't open the window.* (The wind was such that we couldn't open the window.)

## Subject-auxiliary inversion in questions

Questions are formed from statements by inverting the subject and auxiliary. In the present and past simple, the auxiliaries *do/does* and *did* come before the subject, which is followed by the bare infinitive. *Be* as a main verb can also come before the subject:

*You can help me.*  
*Can you help me?*

*You have lived here for some time.*  
*How long have you lived here?*

*You would have done the same.*  
*Would you have done the same?*

*You are staying at this hotel.*  
*Are you staying at this hotel?*

*She likes skating.*  
*Does she like skating?*

*They arrived yesterday.*  
*When did they arrive?*

*I am late.*  
*Am I late?*

### Related topics:

- [Form: past simple](#)
- [Form: past continuous](#)
- [Form: past perfect](#)
- [Form: past perfect continuous](#)
- [Form: present simple](#)
- [Form: present continuous](#)
- [Form: present perfect](#)
- [Form: present perfect continuous](#)
- [Form: future simple](#)
- [Form: future continuous](#)
- [Form: future perfect](#)
- [Form: future perfect continuous](#)
- [Types of modals](#)

- [Form: passive voice](#)

## Subject-auxiliary inversion in question tags

Question tags are placed after declarative sentences and are usually used in spoken language to keep up the flow of conversation. Affirmative sentences are usually followed by negative tags and expect the answer yes:

*"You are hungry, **aren't you?**" "Yes, I am."*

Negative sentences are usually followed by affirmative tags and expect the answer no:

*"You cannot stay longer, **can you?**" "No, I really can't."*

We use rising intonation in the tag to ask for information. But if we don't really expect an answer because the statement is obviously true, we use falling intonation:

*You are hungry, **aren't you?** (with rising intonation = Are you hungry?)*

*You are hungry, **aren't you?** (with falling intonation = I know you are hungry.)*

Sometimes we use affirmative tags after affirmative sentences to express interest or concern or to ask for confirmation:

*So you've inherited a mansion, **have you?** (interest)*

*I must get there by ten, **must I?** (asking for confirmation)*

A negative statement with an affirmative tag can also express disapproval:

*You don't really think I'll let you get away with it, **do you?** (I hope you don't think I'll let you get away with it.)*

In negative tags, *not* can come after the pronoun in formal styles or for emphasis:

*I am right, **am I not?***

*That's my pen, **is it not?***

*They placed an order, **did they not?***

## Imperatives

*Open the door, **will you?***

*Don't speak like that, **will you?***

## **Suggestions**

*Let's dance, **shall we?***

## **THIS, THAT, THESE, THOSE**

*This is great, **isn't it?***

*That's a nice dress, **isn't it?***

*These pancakes are delicious, **aren't they?***

*Those are quite fresh, **aren't they?***

## **EVERYBODY, SOMEBODY, NOBODY, ANYBODY**

*Everybody likes her, **don't they?***

*Nobody knew the answer, **did they?** (negative statement with affirmative tag)*

*Anybody could do that, **couldn't they?***

*Somebody should do something about this, **shouldn't they?***

## **EVERYTHING, SOMETHING, NOTHING, ANYTHING**

*Nothing could disturb her, **could it?***

## **AREN'T I?**

*I'm late, **aren't I?***

## **THERE IS / THERE ARE**

*There is something you want to say, **isn't there?***

*There weren't any policemen at the demonstration, **were there?***



## Subject-auxiliary inversion in echo tags

Echo tags are used in reaction to an affirmative or negative statement. They are formed in the same way as question tags (with the inversion of the subject and auxiliary), but an affirmative statement is followed by an affirmative tag and a negative statement is followed by a negative tag:

*"I'm so hungry!" "Oh, **are you?**"*

*"I'm sorry, I can't stay any longer." "**Can't you?**"*

*"They always have lunch at 12." "**Do they** really?"*

*"My sister has just passed her driving test." "**Has she?**"*

Rising intonation in the tag can express interest, while falling intonation can show indifference.

## Subject-auxiliary inversion with SO and NEITHER / NOR to express agreement

So + auxiliary + subject is added to a positive statement to express agreement, and *neither/nor* + auxiliary + subject is added to a negative statement for the same purpose:

*I suggested that he should take the job, and **so did all his friends.*** (his friends also suggested that he should take the job)

*Everybody knows that, and **so should you.*** (you should know that, too)

*"I love South Korean films." "Really? **So do I.**"* (I also love South Korean films)

*"I am not going to Andy's party tonight." "**Neither/nor is Susan.**"* (Susan isn't going either)

*"My family have never been on a holiday abroad." "**Neither/nor have mine.**"* (my family haven't been either)

If we want to express disagreement, there is no inversion:

*"I love South Korean films." "**I don't.**"*

*"I am not going to Andy's party tonight." "**Susan is.**"*

# Revision questions: inversion

- What is the difference between subject-verb and subject-auxiliary inversion?
- Why is the following sentence incorrect? \**There goes she.*
- Why do we use the past perfect tense with *hardly*, *barely*, *scarcely* and *no sooner*?
- Is *no sooner* followed by *when*, *then* or *than*? Why?
- When is there no inversion in a sentence starting with *only*?
- Which type of inversion is used in questions?

# Exercises: inversion

## Inversion - Exercise 1

Fill in the gaps with *so* or *neither/nor* + auxiliary + subject to express agreement. The subjects are given in brackets.

1. "We were laughing all throughout the movie." "... (we)
2. "My children don't like vegetables." "... (mine)
3. Everyone agreed that we should walk on, and ... (Andrei)
4. "I've never eaten sushi before." "... (I)
5. I can't drive, and ... (my husband)
6. "I'm really curious what he's going to do!" "... (I)
7. "I have flu." "... (my aunt)
8. "Helen wouldn't come even if we invited her." "... (Harry)
9. More city dwellers should collect waste selectively, and ... (you)
10. "Ted is still single." "... (most of his colleagues)

## Inversion - Exercise 2

Complete each sentence with a suitable question tag or echo tag.

1. Stop talking, ... ?
2. A: "I'm terribly hungry."  
B: " ... ?"
3. This is not very useful, ... ?
4. Nothing compares to a good bath after a hard day, ... ?
5. A: "You are funny."  
B: " ... ?"
6. Let's take a taxi, ... ?
7. Your camera has no internal autofocus motor, ... ?
8. It's been ages, ... ?
9. You won't be late, ... ?
10. This parrot has beautiful plumage, ... ?

## Inversion - Exercise 3

Match the two halves of each sentence.

1. Hardly had the lecture begun ...
2. Away into the distance ...

3. No sooner had I pressed Send ...
4. Not only did he write the lyrics, ...
5. Under no circumstances ...
6. Hardly had they walked a mile ...
7. In no way ...
8. No sooner had we dried off ...
9. Only if you work hard ...
10. Not only can she speak English and French fluently, ...

1. than it started raining again.
2. are we to be held responsible for any damages caused by improper use of the device.
3. but he composed the music too.
4. floated the balloon.
5. when they caught sight of the ruins of an old castle.
6. should a teacher use rude language in the classroom.
7. than I realized I had chosen Reply to all.
8. when someone's phone went off.
9. but she can also translate well.
10. will you be successful as a salesperson.

## **Inversion - Exercise 4**

**Decide if the following sentences are correct or incorrect.**

1. No sooner had I locked the door when I realised I didn't have my wallet with me.
2. "Can you tell me where you've been?" asked he.
3. So you have a new Maserati, haven't you?
4. Would you have done the same?
5. Only can you solve your problem.
6. Here we go.
7. She should be here by now, shouldn't she?
8. Little she understands how life works.
9. Stefan doesn't like horror films, and neither likes his girlfriend.
10. I am being stupid, aren't I?

## **Inversion - Exercise 5**

**Discuss the following topics in pairs or groups. Express your surprise or interest at whatever your partner says. Example:**

*A: I love watching horror movies.*

B: Do you?

A: Yes, they are very exciting.

B: Are they?

1. What are the best ways to get in shape before the summer?
2. What would be the ideal romantic evening for you?
3. What's the longest time you have ever spent without sleeping?
4. How often do you visit your doctor?
5. What kind of parties do you like?
6. What's the most frightening experience you have ever had?
7. Where do you think you will be living in ten years' time?
8. What kind of films do you like watching?
9. What advice would you give someone who is planning to learn English?
10. Have you ever had an accident? How did it happen?

## Answer key: inversion

### Answer key - Inversion - Exercise 1

1. "We were laughing all throughout the movie." "**So were we.**"
2. "My children don't like vegetables." "**Neither/Nor do mine.**"
3. Everyone agreed that we should walk on, and **so did Andrei.**
4. "I've never eaten sushi before." "**Neither/Nor have I.**"
5. I can't drive, and **neither/nor can my husband.**
6. "I'm really curious what he's going to do!" "**So am I.**"
7. "I have flu." "**So does my aunt.**"
8. "Helen wouldn't come even if we invited her." "**Neither/Nor would Harry.**"
9. More city dwellers should collect waste selectively, and **so should you.**
10. "Ted is still single." "**So are most of his colleagues.**"

### Answer key - Inversion - Exercise 2

1. Stop talking, **will you?**
2. A: "I'm terribly hungry."  
B: "**Are you?**"
3. This is not very useful, **is it?**
4. Nothing compares to a good bath after a hard day, **does it?**
5. A: "You are funny."  
B: "**Am I?**"
6. Let's take a taxi, **shall we?**
7. Your camera has no internal autofocus motor, **does it?**
8. It's been ages, **hasn't it?**

9. You won't be late, **will you?**
10. This parrot has beautiful plumage, **doesn't it?**

### Answer key - Inversion - Exercise 3

1. Hardly had the lecture begun ... **(8) when someone's phone went off.**
2. Away into the distance ... **(4) floated the balloon.**
3. No sooner had I pressed Send ... **(7) than I realized I had chosen Reply to all.**
4. Not only did he write the lyrics, ... **(3) but he composed the music too.**
5. Under no circumstances ... **(6) should a teacher use rude language in the classroom.**
6. Hardly had they walked a mile ... **(5) when they caught sight of the ruins of an old castle.**
7. In no way ... **(2) are we to be held responsible for any damages caused by improper use of the device.**
8. No sooner had we dried off ... **(1) than it started raining again.**
9. Only if you work hard ... **(10) will you be successful as a salesperson.**
10. Not only can she speak English and French fluently, ... **(9) but she can also translate well.**

### Answer key - Inversion - Exercise 4

1. No sooner had I locked the door **than** I realised I didn't have my wallet with me.
2. "Can you tell me where you've been?" **he asked.**
3. So you have a new Maserati, **don't you?**
4. Correct
5. Only **you can** solve your problem.
6. Correct
7. Correct
8. Little **does** she **understand** how life works.
9. Stefan doesn't like horror films, and neither **does** his girlfriend.
10. Correct

# Chapter 9: Articles

Articles precede nouns and modify them. There are three types of article: the indefinite article (*a, an*), the definite article (*the*) and the zero article (-).

- [The indefinite article \(A, AN\)](#)
- [The definite article \(THE\)](#)
- [The zero article \(-\)](#)
- [Exercises: articles](#)



# The indefinite article (A, AN)

The indefinite article is generally used before a singular countable noun when it has not been mentioned before and does not represent a unique thing or person:

*A man and a woman came in.*

When the noun is mentioned again, the definite article *the* is used:

*A man and a woman came in. **The man** was about 40 years old.*

A is used before a word beginning with a consonant sound, but if the following word starts with a vowel sound, we use *an*:

*Regina was wearing **a dark** skirt and **an orange** blouse.*

*My uncle is **a university** lecturer. (university starts with the vowel *u* but the consonant sound /j/)*

*He is **an honest** man. (honest starts with the consonant *h* but it is silent here)*

- [The indefinite article with a member of a class](#)
- [The indefinite article in expressions of quantity](#)
- [The indefinite article with certain numbers and fractions](#)
- [The indefinite article instead of PER](#)
- [The indefinite article to describe and classify something](#)
- [The indefinite article with certain illnesses](#)
- [The indefinite article with proper names](#)

## The indefinite article with a member of a class

The indefinite article is used before a noun when it refers to any member of a class of things:

*A real friend is always by your side.* (Real friends are always by your side.)

### Quotes:

- *A book is like a garden carried in the pocket.* - [Chinese proverb](#)
- *A city is a large community where people are lonesome together.* - [Herbert Prochnow](#)
- *A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment.* - [John Wooden](#)
- *A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.* - [Lao Tse](#)
- *A barking dog is often more useful than a sleeping lion.* - [Washington Irving](#)
- *A man must be master of his hours and days, not their servant.* - [William Frederick Book](#)
- *A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.* - [Winston Churchill](#)

### Related topics:

- [The definite article with a whole class](#)

## The indefinite article in expressions of quantity

The indefinite article is used in certain expressions of quantity:

*I'm having **a lot of problems** with Michael.*

*I think **a great many people** will agree with me on that.*

# The indefinite article with certain numbers and fractions

The indefinite article is used with certain numbers and fractions:

*a/one hundred, a/one thousand, a/one million*

*one and a half kilos / a kilo and a half*

*a/one third*

*a/one quarter*

*a dozen*

*a quarter of an hour*

*half a minute*

## The indefinite article instead of PER

In expressions of measurement, the indefinite article can replace the more formal *per*:

*He was driving at **80 miles an hour** when the car skidded.*

*"How much are those tomatoes?" "**Three euros a kilo.**"*

*I go to the sauna **twice a month.***

# The indefinite article to describe and classify something

The indefinite article is used before a noun which describes or classifies something:

*That was **a lovely dinner!***

*Mary is **a teacher.***

*The koala is **a marsupial.***

## Quotes:

- *Christmas is a time when you get homesick - even when you're home. - [Carol Nelson](#)*
- *April is a promise that May is bound to keep. - [Hal Borland](#)*
- *Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up. - [Pablo Picasso](#)*
- *I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else. - [Winston Churchill](#)*

## The indefinite article with certain illnesses

The indefinite article is used with names of certain illnesses:

*Is it **a cold** or just **an allergy**?*

*I have **a splitting headache**.*

But:

***The flu** is a virus that can make you sick for a week or longer.*

***(The) measles** is best known for its characteristic skin rash.*

## The indefinite article with proper names

The indefinite article can be used with a proper name to express uncertainty about the person's identity or that the speaker does not know the person:

*A **Mr Smith** was looking for you this morning.* (Someone called Mr Smith was looking for you this morning.)

The indefinite article can also be used before a proper name to refer to the characteristic features of the person:

*He was **an Einstein** of his time.*

A proper name with an indefinite article can refer to a work of art created by the person:

*He bought **a Picasso** at Sotheby's in 1970.* (He bought a painting by Picasso.)

### Related topics:

- [The definite article with proper names](#)
- [The zero article with proper names](#)



# The definite article (THE)

The definite article is generally used before a noun which has a clear reference. This means that it is clear who or what we are talking about because:

- the noun represents a unique thing or person in the context:

***The president*** has resigned. (there is only one president in the country)

***The earth*** is growing warmer and warmer. (there is only one planet Earth)

- the noun has been mentioned before:

*A man and a woman came in. **The man** was about 50 years old.*

- a phrase or a clause after the noun makes it clear:

*Do you know **the boy talking to Sally**?*

*This is **the book that I told you about last week**.*

***The photo on the left** was taken by my father.*

- [The definite article with a whole class](#)
- [The definite article with ordinal numbers, superlative adjectives, ONLY, NEXT, LAST, SAME, RIGHT and WRONG](#)
- [The definite article with adjectives](#)
- [The definite article with geographical names](#)
- [The definite article with historical references](#)
- [The definite article with musical instruments and dances](#)
- [The definite article with names of families](#)
- [The definite article with names of places and institutions](#)
- [The definite article with proper names](#)
- [The definite article with titles and positions](#)
- [The definite article with titles of books, newspapers etc.](#)
- [The definite article with unique objects](#)

## The definite article with a whole class

The definite article is used before a noun when it represents a whole class of things:

***The computer** has made text editing easier.*

***The polar bear** is threatened with extinction.*

In less formal styles, *the* + noun can be replaced by a plural form without an article:

***Computers** have made text editing easier.*

***Polar bears** are threatened with extinction.*

The indefinite article is not possible in this sense as it would refer to one or any member of the class but not the class as a whole:

*\***A polar bear** is threatened with extinction.*

*\***A computer** has made text editing easier.*

*Man* or *mankind* can be used to represent the human race and has no article:

***Man** will eventually destroy himself.*

However, the more gender-neutral term *humankind* is preferable to *man* or *mankind*:

***Humankind** will eventually destroy itself.*

### Related topics:

- [The indefinite article with a member of a class](#)

## The definite article with ordinal numbers, superlative adjectives, ONLY, NEXT, LAST, SAME, RIGHT and WRONG

The definite article is used before ordinal numbers and superlative adjectives:

*This is **the first** time I've ridden a horse.*

*The 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen **the bloodiest** wars in the history of humankind.*

*Jill is **the most intelligent** girl in the class.*

Most has meanings which do not take the definite article *the*:

*That was **most kind** of you. (very kind)*

***Most people** who lose weight regain it in a very short time. (the majority of people)*

The definite article is also used before *only, next, last, same, right* and *wrong* + noun:

*You are **the only person** I can tell.*

*When is **the next train** to Cambridge?*

*They have **the same surname**, but they are not relatives.*

*What is **the right answer**?*

## The definite article with adjectives

The definite article can be used before an adjective to refer to all the people described by it. If *the* + adjective is followed by a verb, it will take a plural form:

***The rich** get rich, and **the poor** stay poor.  
Only **the brave** are free.*

Many adjectives that describe a nationality behave in the same way unless they end in *-an*:

***The English** are famous for being very polite.  
**The French** eat a lot of cheese.*

But:

***Canadians** play a lot of hockey.*

Quotes:

- *Fate leads the willing, and drags along the reluctant.* - [Seneca](#)
- *It is the familiar that usually eludes us in life. What is before our nose is what we see last.* - [William Barret](#)

# The definite article with geographical names

The definite article is used with certain geographical names:

## Countries

Names of countries which are collective, plural or modified by an adjective or an *of*-construction take the definite article *the*:

*the Czech Republic*  
*the Netherlands*  
*the People's Republic of China*  
*the Philippines*  
*the United Kingdom (UK)*  
*the United States of America (USA)*

## Bodies of water

*the Amazon*  
*the Ganges*  
*the (English) Channel*  
*the Panama Canal*  
*the Atlantic (Ocean)*  
*the Pacific (Ocean)*

## Deserts

*the Gobi (Desert)*  
*the Kalahari Desert*  
*the Mojave Desert*  
*the Patagonian Desert*  
*the Sahara (Desert)*

## Mountain ranges

*the Alps*  
*the Andes*  
*the Appalachians*  
*the Great Dividing Range*  
*the Himalayas*

## Points of the compass

*the North*  
*the South*  
*the East*  
*the West*  
*the South Pole*  
*the North Pole*  
*the south of Italy*  
*the Far East*

But:

***North*** America  
We were travelling ***west***.

## Some constellations and other heavenly bodies

*the Big Dipper (AmE) / the Plough (BrE)*  
*the Pleiades*  
*the Cigar Galaxy*  
*the Crab Nebula*

But:

*Orion*  
*Cassiopeia*

## Related topics:

- [The zero article with geographical names](#)

## The definite article with historical references

The definite article is often used with historical references:

*The Iraq War* has divided the international public.

*The Renaissance* started in Italy and slowly spread throughout Europe.

But:

*This course surveys the second wave of English Romanticism.*

## The definite article with musical instruments and dances

The definite article is used with musical instruments and dances:

*I can't play **the piano**.*

*Can you do **the foxtrot**?*



## **The definite article with names of families**

The definite article is used with the plural form of the name of a family to refer to all the members of the family:

***The Parkers** are coming for dinner tonight.  
Are you trying to keep up with **the Joneses**?*

## The definite article with names of places and institutions

The definite article is used before a place name if it consists of an adjective followed by a noun:

*the National Gallery*

*the British Isles*

*the British Council*

*the Royal Court*

The definite article is also used if the name of a place or an institution contains the possessive *of*-construction:

*the University of Chicago*

*the Leaning Tower of Pisa*

*the Tower of London*

*the Cape of Good Hope*

*the Island of Lesbos*

*the Isle of Man*

*the Gulf of Maine*

# The definite article with proper names

The definite article is used with a proper name if the reference is unclear without an additional phrase:

*No, I mean **the Mr Brown** from Australia.*

## Related topics:

- [The indefinite article with proper names](#)
- [The zero article with proper names](#)

## The definite article with titles and positions

The definite article is used with titles and positions which are unique.

*Barthez has never been **the goalkeeper for Crystal Palace FC**.*

***The head of department** allowed me to retake the exam.*

***The Queen** will be opening a new music hall next month.*

***The Pope** is the head of the Roman Catholic Church.*

## **The definite article with titles of books, newspapers etc.**

The definite article is only used with titles of books, newspapers etc. if it is part of the title itself:

***The Lord of the Rings** was written by J. R. R. Tolkien.*

*Do you ever read **The Times**?*

## The definite article with unique objects

The definite article is used before a noun which refers to a specific, unique object:

***The moon** rises at 7.30 tomorrow.*

***The earth** revolves around the sun.*

*I'd love to live by **the sea**.*

*The captain checked the position of **the Northern Star** to determine the location of his ship.*

Other examples are:

*the sky*

*the equator*

*the North Pole*

*the Internet*

*the Matrix*

*the world*

We should bear in mind, however, that there are other suns and moons in the universe, and when we refer to these they might not be considered as unique:

*The planet Mars has two **moons**.*

*Every solar system has **a sun**.*

# The zero article (-)

We use the term zero article when a noun is not preceded by a definite article (*the*) or indefinite article (*a, an*).

- [The zero article with proper names](#)
- [The zero article with names of places and institutions](#)
- [The zero article with meals](#)
- [The zero article with names of days, months, seasons, holidays and parts of the day](#)
- [The zero article with names of pubs, restaurants etc. ending in 'S](#)
- [The zero article with names of sports, games and activities](#)
- [The zero article with geographical names](#)
- [The zero article with places](#)
- [The zero article with prepositional phrases](#)

# The zero article with proper names

A proper name is normally not preceded by an article:

***Turner** is my favourite painter.*

*Where's **Peter**?*

***Uncle Jerry** visited us the other day.*

## Quotes:

- *Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton asked why.* - [Bernard Baruch](#)

## Related topics:

- [The indefinite article with proper names](#)
- [The definite article with proper names](#)



# **The zero article with names of places and institutions**

Names of places and institutions which consist of a proper name and another noun do not take an article:

*Johns Hopkins University*  
*Trafalgar Square*  
*Victoria Station*  
*George Washington Bridge*  
*JFK Airport*

## The zero article with meals

Names of meals normally do not take an article:

*Did you have **breakfast** this morning?*

*I'll have fruit for **lunch**.*

*Let's go out for **dinner** tonight.*

But if there is an adjective before the name of the meal or a phrase or clause after it, an article is used:

***The breakfast that they served** was fabulous.*

*I had **a quick lunch** at Wendy's.*

*That was **the most delicious dinner** I've had in a while.*

## The zero article with names of days, months, seasons, holidays and parts of the day

Names of days, months, seasons and holidays are normally not preceded by an article:

*on Monday*  
*in March*  
*in summer*  
*at Christmas*

The same is true for certain parts of the day (with the exception of *in **the** morning/afternoon/evening*):

*at noon*  
*at night*  
*at midnight*  
*before dusk*  
*after sunset*  
*at sunrise*

But if there is an adjective before the noun or a phrase or clause after it, the noun usually takes an article:

*on **the** Monday of that week*  
***the** summer I met my future husband*  
***the best** Christmas I've ever had*  
*it was **a** beautiful sunset*

### Quotes:

- *Christmas is a time when you get homesick - even when you're home.* - [Carol Nelson](#)
- *To be interested in the changing seasons is a happier state of mind than to be hopelessly in love with spring.* - [George Santayana](#)
- *April is a promise that May is bound to keep.* - [Hal Borland](#)
- *In summer, the song sings itself.* - [William Carlos Williams](#)

## The zero article with names of pubs, restaurants etc. ending in 'S

Names of pubs, restaurants etc. that use the possessive 's construction do not take an article:

*We went to **Maggie's** last night.*

*Let's meet at **Jack's Diner**.*

## The zero article with names of sports, games and activities

Names of sports, games and activities are not preceded by an article:

*I love **swimming**.*

***Rummy** is definitely much more difficult than **solitaire**.*

*She suggested playing **Activity**.*

# The zero article with geographical names

Certain geographical names do not take an article:

## Continents

*Africa*  
*Antarctica*  
*Asia*  
*Australia*  
*Europe*  
*North America*  
*South America*

But:

*the Americas* (North and South America)  
*the Antarctic*  
*the Arctic*

## Names of countries

Most country names do not take an article:

*Chile*  
*France*  
*Kazakhstan*  
*Namibia*  
*New Zealand*

But:

*the Czech Republic*  
*the Netherlands*  
*the People's Republic of China*  
*the Philippines*  
*the United Kingdom (UK)*  
*the United States of America (USA)*

## Lakes

*Lake Geneva*

*Lake Lopnor*  
*Lake Michigan*  
*Lake Victoria*  
*Loch Ness*

## **Mountain peaks**

*Mawson Peak*  
*Mont Blanc*  
*(Mount) Everest*  
*Mount Kenya*  
*Mount Washington*

But:

*the Matterhorn*

## **Cities**

*Beijing*  
*Bucharest*  
*New York*  
*Reykjavík*  
*Rio de Janeiro*

But:

*the Hague*  
*the Vatican*

## **Streets and roads**

*Downing Street*  
*Michigan Avenue*

But:

*the High Street*  
*the Mall*  
*the E5*

## **Related topics:**

- [The definite article with geographical names](#)



## The zero article with places

Nouns that refer to certain places and institutions do not take an article when we are talking about the purpose they are used for:

*The children are at **school**.* (studying)

*What time do you usually go to **bed**?* (to sleep)

*The murderer was sentenced to 10 years in **prison**.* (as a punishment)

Other examples are:

*church*

*class*

*college*

*court*

*hospital*

*market*

*town*

*university*

But if we mean the place (usually the building) itself, the definite article *the* is used:

*He went to **the bed** to check if the children were sleeping.*

*In 1985, there was a fire in **the school**.*

***The prison** is outside of the city.*

# The zero article with prepositional phrases

Certain prepositional phrases do not take an article:

*in charge*

*in tears*

*in danger*

*at war*

*by heart*

*beyond control*

*on time*

*by car*

But if there is a word or phrase that modifies the noun, an article is used:

*We drove **in a red car**.*

*Hurricanes are **beyond the control of governments**.*

*He got wounded **in the Second World War**.*

# Exercises: Articles

For exercises on articles, go to [Exercises: articles and nouns](#) at the end of [Chapter 10: Countable and uncountable nouns](#).

# Chapter 10: Countable and uncountable nouns

- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)
- [Nouns with countable and uncountable meanings](#)
- [Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns \(SOME, ANY, NO, MANY, MUCH, FEW, LITTLE etc.\)](#)
- [Partitive expressions with uncountable nouns](#)
- [Nouns with a singular form and a singular or plural meaning \(collective nouns\)](#)
- [Nouns which are always plural](#)
- [Nouns with a plural form and a singular meaning](#)
- [Nouns with the same singular and plural forms](#)
- [Irregular plural forms](#)
- [Exercises: articles and nouns](#)

# The difference between countable and uncountable nouns

Countable nouns can be counted (*a/one book, two books, a lot of books*), while uncountable nouns cannot (*\*a/one news, \*two freedoms*). Therefore, uncountable nouns only have singular forms and are followed by singular verbs. We should bear in mind that, even though a noun is uncountable in English, the word for it in another language may well be countable, and vice versa. When in doubt, one should always consult a dictionary. However, certain kinds of nouns are usually countable or uncountable in English:

## Countable nouns

- people (*a teacher, a child, a gentleman*)
- animals (*a butterfly, an elephant, a whale*)
- plants (*a flower, a bush, a tree*)
- physical objects (*a bag, a pen, a mountain*)
- units (*a litre (of), a kind of, a part of, a family, a village, a word*)

## Uncountable nouns

- abstract ideas (*love, death, beauty*)
- gases (*smoke, air, steam*)
- liquids (*water, milk, blood*)
- substances and materials (*wood, iron, fabric*)
- other substances consisting of many small particles (*sugar, rice, sand*)

## Quotes:

- *Life is like riding a bicycle - in order to keep your balance, you must keep moving.* - [Albert Einstein](#)
- *The best way to gain self-confidence is to do what you are afraid to do.* - [Author unknown](#)
- *I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.* - [Bill Cosby](#)
- *The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary.* - [Donald Kendall](#)
- *Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared.* - [Edward Vernon Rickenbacker](#)
- *The greatest weariness comes from work not done.* - [Eric Hoffer](#)

- *Gossip needn't be false to be evil - there's a lot of truth that shouldn't be passed around.* - [Frank A. Clark](#)
- *Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it.* - [Henry David Thoreau](#)
- *Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.* - [Jim Rohn](#)
- *Freedom lies in being bold.* - [Robert Frost](#)
- *Friendship is a sheltering tree.* - [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#)
- *Fate leads the willing, and drags along the reluctant.* - [Seneca](#)
- *Life is a shipwreck but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats.* - [Voltaire](#)
- *Knowledge is learning something every day. Wisdom is letting go of something every day.* - [Zen saying](#)

# Nouns with countable and uncountable meanings

Some nouns have both countable and uncountable meanings:

| Substances                                                  |                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Countable meaning                                           | Uncountable meaning                                                        |
| <i>I need <b>an iron</b> to press my trousers.</i>          | <i>Steel is made from <b>iron</b>.</i>                                     |
| <i>My grandma raises <b>chickens</b>.</i>                   | <i>Would you prefer <b>chicken</b> or turkey?</i>                          |
| <i><b>A rolling stone</b> gathers no moss.</i>              | <i>Different kinds of <b>stone</b> can be used for different purposes.</i> |
| <i>We found ourselves in the middle of <b>the wood</b>.</i> | <i>All the desks in here are made of <b>wood</b>.</i>                      |
| <i><b>A glass</b> of beer, please.</i>                      | <i><b>Glass</b> does not conduct electricity well.</i>                     |
| <i>Would you like <b>a coffee</b>?</i>                      | <i>Would you like <b>some coffee</b>?</i>                                  |

| Activities                                                                                     |                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Countable meaning                                                                              | Uncountable meaning                                        |
| <i>I had <b>an interesting thought</b> yesterday.</i>                                          | <i>Eastern <b>thought</b> is characterised by dualism.</i> |
| <i>Simon got <b>a basketball</b> for Christmas.</i>                                            | <i><b>Basketball</b> is played by teams of five.</i>       |
| <i>Mr Pit runs <b>a business</b> selling recyclable diapers.</i>                               | <i>Online <b>business</b> is thriving these days.</i>      |
| <i>No war is <b>a just war</b>.</i>                                                            | <i>I've just read <b>War and Peace</b> by Tolstoy.</i>     |
| <i>My literature professor's cats usually get their names from Shakespeare's <b>works</b>.</i> | <i>How was <b>work</b> today?</i>                          |

| Abstract notions                                                      |                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Countable meaning                                                     | Uncountable meaning                                          |
| <i>This boy is <b>a real help</b> around the house.</i>               | <i>I need <b>some help</b> to finish this essay.</i>         |
| <i><b>Languages</b> can become extinct.</i>                           | <i><b>Language</b> is a human instinct.</i>                  |
| <i>Those apples are real <b>beauties</b>.</i>                         | <i><b>Beauty</b> is in the eye of the beholder.</i>          |
| <i>It's always good to do small <b>kindnesses</b> for each other.</i> | <i>I thanked her for her <b>kindness</b>.</i>                |
| <i>The play was <b>a success</b>.</i>                                 | <i><b>Success</b> is often only the result of hard work.</i> |

## Emotions

| Countable meaning                                                   | Uncountable meaning                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>And now, some of my <b>worries</b> about the project.</i>        | <i><b>Worry</b> is usually a destructive emotion.</i>                                     |
| <i>He was torn between two <b>loves</b>.</i>                        | <i>All you need is <b>love</b>.</i>                                                       |
| <i>I have <b>a fear</b> of heights.</i>                             | <i>Aristotle's definition of catharsis is based on experiencing pity and <b>fear</b>.</i> |
| <i>There are <b>hopes</b> of finding a remedy for your disease.</i> | <i><b>Hope</b> dies last.</i>                                                             |
| <i>It is <b>a pleasure</b> to have met you.</i>                     | <i>Pat finds great <b>pleasure</b> in nursing.</i>                                        |

### Quotes:

- *To be successful, you have to have your heart in your business, and your business in your heart. - [Thomas Watson, Sr.](#)*



# Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns (SOME, ANY, NO, MANY, MUCH, FEW, LITTLE etc.)

Determiners precede and modify nouns. Some determiners can only be used with countable or uncountable nouns, while others can be used with both. Countable nouns take a singular or plural form depending on the determiner which precedes them.

## A, AN

- with singular countable nouns:

*A **man** and a **woman** came in.*

*I heard **an** interesting **story** at the office yesterday.*

## THE

- with singular or plural countable nouns:

*He showed me around **the** **house**.*

***The** **apples** were peeled and quartered.*

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*She jumped into **the** **water**.*

## the zero article

- with singular or plural countable nouns:

*I'm going to **bed** early.*

***Mondays** are always busy here.*

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*A magnet attracts **iron**.*

## THIS, THAT

- with singular countable nouns:

***This film** was good.*

*I like **that shirt**.*

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*Where did you buy **this wine**?*

***That cheese** smells delicious.*

## THESE, THOSE

- with plural countable nouns:

*Can I try on **these jeans**?*

*How do you like **those cherries**?*

## SOME, ANY, NO

- with singular countable nouns:

*I was just talking to **some guy** from school.*

***Any sensible person** would have done the same.*

*I am **no scientist**.*

- with plural countable nouns:

*I have **some problems**.*

*I don't have **any problems**.*

*I have **no problems**.*

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*I have **some time**.*

*I don't have **any time**.*

*I have **no time**.*

## EVERY

- with singular countable nouns:

***Every cloud** has a silver lining.*

## FEW, A FEW, FEWER, THE FEWEST

- with plural countable nouns:

*There were **few people** at the concert. (not many)*

*There were **a few people** at the concert. (some)*

*We had **fewer computers** a year ago.*

*This medicine has **the fewest side effects**.*

## **LITTLE, A LITTLE, LESS, THE LEAST**

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*There is **little hope** that he will survive. (not much)*

*There is **a little hope** that he will survive. (some)*

*Tim should spend **less time** on the computer.*

*This medicine does **the least harm**.*

## **MANY, MORE, (THE) MOST, MOST OF THE**

- with plural countable nouns:

*There were not **many people** at the concert. (few)*

***More people** came to the concert than expected.*

***Most mammals** live on land.*

*Tom got **the most votes**.*

***Most of the visitors** were art students.*

## **MUCH, MORE, (THE) MOST, MOST OF THE**

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*There is not **much hope** that he will survive. (little)*

*There is **more hope** that he will survive.*

***Most furniture** is made of wood.*

*Which candy bar has **the most sugar** in it?*

***Most of the time** I'm not at home.*

## **A LOT OF, LOTS OF, PLENTY OF**

- with plural countable nouns:

*There are **a lot of tables and chairs** in the room.*

*There are **lots of tables and chairs** in the room.*

*There are **plenty of tables and chairs** in the room.*

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*We have **a lot of space** in the car.*

*We have **lots of space** in the car.*

*We have **plenty of space** in the car.*

## **A NUMBER OF**

- with plural countable nouns:

*A **number of questions** arose at the meeting.*

## **AN AMOUNT OF**

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*The word budget means **an amount of money** we have available to spend.*

## **ANOTHER**

- with singular countable nouns:

*Can you think of **another example**?*

## **OTHER**

- with plural countable nouns:

***Other boys** would have done the same.*

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*Is there **other software** available?*

## **THE OTHER**

- with singular or plural countable nouns:

*I'd prefer **the other car**.*

***The other students** went home.*

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*The **other news** is that they are getting married in June.*

## **ENOUGH**

- with plural countable nouns:

*Do you have **enough pens** for everyone?*

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*Is there **enough milk** in the fridge?*

## **ALL, ALL THE**

- with plural countable nouns:

***All students** must take a placement test at the beginning of the course.  
I couldn't answer **all the questions**.*

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*Not **all coffee** is bitter.  
The robber took **all the money**.*

## **BOTH**

- with plural countable nouns:

***Both sides** wanted peace.*

## **EITHER, NEITHER**

- with singular countable nouns:

*You can choose **either way**.  
**Neither player** has won the game.*

## **NONE OF THE**

- with plural countable nouns:

*Luckily, **none of the soldiers** were killed.*

- with singular uncountable nouns:

*None of the music they played attracted me.*

## EACH

- with singular countable nouns:

*Each question carries one mark.*

## Quotes:

- *Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses.* - [Alphonse Karr](#)
- *If you don't think every day is a good day, just try missing one.* - [Cavett Robert](#)
- *Some days there won't be a song in your heart. Sing anyway.* - [Emory Austin](#)
- *Live every day as if it were going to be your last; for one day you're sure to be right.* - [Harry "Breaker" Harbord Morant](#)
- *Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.* - [Pablo Picasso](#)
- *Some things have to be believed to be seen.* - [Ralph Hodgson](#)
- *Every English poet should master the rules of grammar before he attempts to bend or break them.* - [Robert Graves](#)
- *A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.* - [Winston Churchill](#)
- *Knowledge is learning something every day. Wisdom is letting go of something every day.* - [Zen saying](#)

# Partitive expressions with uncountable nouns

Partitive expressions make it possible to count things expressed by uncountable nouns. The most common ones include *bit*, *piece* and *item*:

*There was a **bit** of annoyance in his voice.*

*Let me give you a **piece** of advice.*

*Several **items** of jewellery were stolen.*

Other examples of everyday partitive expressions are:

*I'd like a **loaf** of bread, two **bars** of chocolate and a **tube** of toothpaste, please.*

*Can I have another **slice** of cake?*

*Mateusz drank a **glass** of beer.*

# Nouns with a singular form and a singular or plural meaning (collective nouns)

Collective nouns, such as *family* and *audience*, have a singular form but can be followed by a singular or a plural verb, depending on whether we treat the group as a unit (singular) or as a number of individuals (plural):

*My **family** is big.*

*His **family** were against his plans.*

*The **audience** was captivated by the performance.*

*This channel's target **audience** are young adults.*

Other examples of collective nouns are:

*board*

*committee*

*community*

*crew*

*crowd*

*government*

*group*

*jury*

*staff*

*team*

Some collective nouns are often used with other countable nouns:

*A **team of researchers** is working on this project.*

*A **group of people** were standing in front of the building.*

A number of collective nouns are used with certain kinds of animals:

*a colony of ants*

*a flock of sheep*

*a herd of cattle*

*a pack of wolves*

*a swarm of bees*



# Nouns which are always plural

Certain nouns only have plural forms:

*These **scissors** are for cutting paper.*

*Your **clothes** are dirty.*

*Have you seen my **glasses**? I want to read the newspaper.*

*What kind of **goods** does your company produce?*

*The table of **contents** should not contain any pictures.*

*I ran up the **stairs** and tore the door open.*

*The police used **firearms** to disperse the crowd.*

*I live on the **outskirts** of the city.*

Some of these nouns are often used with the expression *a pair of*, as they refer to things made up of two parts:

*a pair of trousers*

*a pair of jeans*

*a pair of shoes*

*a pair of slippers*

*a pair of glasses*

*a pair of gloves*

*a pair of earrings*

The nouns *people* (meaning more than one person) and *police* are always plural:

***People** say that the **police** are investigating the case.*

*People* can refer to a nation, religion or race, in which case it is considered as a singular noun and can be used in a singular or plural form:

*They are **a welcoming and hospitable people**.*

*At college, he took a course on the history of the **peoples** of the British Isles.*

## Quotes:

- *Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses. - [Alphonse Karr](#)*
- *People are not disturbed by things, but by the view they take of them. - [Epictetus](#)*
- *A city is a large community where people are lonesome together. - [Herbert Prochnow](#)*

# Nouns with a plural form and a singular meaning

Certain nouns have a plural form (ending in -s) but a singular meaning: *news*; *shingles*, *mumps*, *ricketts*; *dominoes*, *billiards*, *darts* etc.:

*What's the **news**?*

***Shingles** is caused by the same virus as chicken pox.*

***Billiards** is a game which connects mathematics and football.*

Nouns ending in -ics can either take a singular (if they are considered as the name of a science) or a plural verb (if they express a specific application of the science):

***Mathematics** was never easy for Tom.*

*The teacher told him that his **mathematics** were well below the standard.*

*(his understanding of mathematics or his results)*

***Rhetorics** was one of the seven free arts.*

*His **rhetorics** were doing more harm to our case than any mistake we had ever made. (his way of expressing ideas)*

***Acoustics** is the study of sounds.*

*Poor classroom **acoustics** create a negative learning environment for many students. (audibility in the classroom)*

# Nouns with the same singular and plural forms

Certain nouns have an identical singular and plural form. Some of these nouns end in -s: *means, series, species*.

*The bicycle is a **means** of transport.*

*The five human senses are our **means** of communication with the material world.*

*A **series** of burglaries has been going on around the neighbourhood.*

*What are your favourite TV **series**?*

*A new **species** of bird has been discovered in Indonesia recently.*

*Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, more than 500 marine **species** have become extinct in the US.*

Other examples are:

*aircraft*

*deer, sheep*

*fish, carp, pike, salmon, trout*

# Irregular plural forms

The plural of a noun is usually formed by adding -s to the singular form:

*mistake* » *mistakes*

For certain nouns, if the singular noun ends in -f or -fe, the plural ending is -ves:

*elf* » *elves*

*knife* » *knives*

*thief* » *thieves*

*hoof* » *hooves*

But there are nouns which do not follow this rule:

*cliff* » *cliffs*

*chief* » *chiefs*

*cuff* » *cuffs*

*roof* » *roofs*

A number of nouns have irregular plural forms:

*child* » *children*

*ox* » *oxen*

*foot* » *feet*

*goose* » *geese*

*tooth* » *teeth*

*mouse* » *mice*

*louse* » *lice*

*man* » *men*

*woman* » *women*

Nouns of Latin or Greek origin may keep their original plural forms:

*crisis* » *crises*

*bacterium* » *bacteria*

*appendix* » *appendices*

*formula* » *formulae*

**Quotes:**

- *Men for the sake of getting a living forget to live.* - [Margaret Fuller](#)
- *Children make you want to start life over.* - [Muhammad Ali](#)
- *Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.* - [Plato](#)

# Exercises: articles and nouns

## Articles and nouns - Exercise 1

Fill in the gaps with *a*, *an*, *the* or nothing.

1. Could you buy ... bottle of ... wine? ... Maxim and Sylvia are coming over for ... dinner.
2. ... [h]uman blood is made up of ... red blood cells, ... white blood cells and ... plasma.
3. ... Chinese is definitely much more difficult to learn than ... Russian.
4. Do you ever watch ... hockey? Did you see ... match ... last night?
5. ... [l]ife on ... other planets is possible, but ... scientists haven't confirmed it yet.
6. ... [w]indows were open, and ... air in ... room was fresh.
7. ... Greg kicked ... football into ... net, and ... spectators cheered.
8. ... [k]nowledge is ... power, but only if you know how to use it.
9. "I'll have ... cappuccino and ... sandwich." "With ... ham or ... cheese?"
10. Have you heard ... news? ... Cynthia gave ... birth to ... baby boy ... this morning.
11. Will you come to ... mall with me? I'd like to buy ... silk scarf.
12. Can I give you ... piece of ... advice?
13. ... [a]nger is ... destructive emotion that does more harm than good.
14. ... [l]ot of passengers were also injured in ... crash.
15. ... [c]omputer virus is ... program that spreads by making ... copies of itself.
16. "How is ... your meal?" " ... [f]ish is superb, and ... chips are nice too."
17. ... Moon travels around ... Earth at ... speed of 2,288 miles ... hour.
18. ... Joanna works in ... old people's home as ... nurse.
19. Which do you prefer, ... tea or ... coffee?
20. ... [e]lectric light bulb was invented by ... Joseph Swan at ... end of ... 19<sup>th</sup> century.
21. What's ... next item on ... list?
22. ... [w]ounded were taken to ... nearest hospital immediately.
23. I've been to ... USA, but I've never been to ... France.
24. ... Atlantic Ocean lies between ... North America and ... Europe in ... north and ... Africa and ... South America in ... south.
25. You'll need half ... kilo of ... potatoes for this recipe.
26. ... Orion and ... Pleiades are ... sky's two brightest objects and can be seen even without ... binoculars.
27. ... Jerry can play ... guitar, but he is not ... very good singer.
28. Let's have ... breakfast at ... McDonald's.

29. I think ... April is ... most beautiful month of ... year.  
30. I've never tried ... skiing, but I love ... skating.

## Articles and nouns - Exercise 2

**Choose the best answer for each of the following sentences.**

1. Where ... my gloves? I can't see ... anywhere.
  1. is / it
  2. are / them
2. She likes to buy her ... in designer shops.
  1. cloth
  2. clothes
3. Shingles ... not as dangerous today as, for example, in the Middle Ages.
  1. are
  2. is
4. My girlfriend's favourite TV ... are Modern Family and The Big Bang Theory.
  1. series'
  2. series
5. The police ... looking for the woman who was driving the red car.
  1. are
  2. is
6. About a dozen ... were grazing on the hillside.
  1. sheep
  2. sheeps
7. The men ... arrested.
  1. was
  2. were
8. Could you give me a hand with my ... ?
  1. luggage
  2. luggages
9. Both Karl and Alice ... to invite Emily.
  1. want
  2. wants
10. Children are given too ... these days.
  1. much homework
  2. many homeworks
11. New ... are discovered every day.
  1. species
  2. specieses
12. ... the Dutch better at English than Germans?

1. Are
2. Is
13. Any ... fine for me. I am not choosy.
  1. beers are
  2. beer is
14. We've got some ... left over from last night.
  1. hamburgers
  2. hamburger
15. Most people ... spicy dishes.
  1. like
  2. likes
16. ... kids are as interested in mathematics as Tina.
  1. Few
  2. A few
17. Rock breaks scissors, scissors ... paper, paper covers rock.
  1. cuts
  2. cut
18. I have been putting aside ... money each month for a new guitar.
  1. little
  2. a little
19. Sarah practises yoga every ... .
  1. mornings
  2. morning
20. My feet ... cold. I need some socks.
  1. are
  2. is
21. Michael has been a pilot for over two decades. He has a lot of ... .
  1. experiences
  2. experience
22. At the beginning of the new year, Felix had all his ... cut off.
  1. hair
  2. hairs
23. My eyesight has got worse. I need ... .
  1. a new glass
  2. new glasses
24. If enough ... subscribe to our channel, we can make savings on advertising.
  1. person
  2. people
25. ... have you got now?
  1. How much time
  2. How many times



## Articles and nouns - Exercise 3

**Find the word which should not be in the sentence.**

1. I like the pop music in general but I don't like what they play at most clubs.
2. There are a plenty of mistakes you can make when starting a business.
3. Did you have enough of time to finish the exercise?
4. Millions of young people will be going to the university next year.
5. She yawned, told us good night and went to the bed.
6. I have learnt a lot of useless things in my life, but my least favourite subject is still the History.
7. I go running three times a week, and I also do the yoga.
8. That's my brother on the left. He is the one wearing a rubber boots.
9. I was able to solve a few riddles but not the all.
10. The Queen was a very good band.

## Articles and nouns - Exercise 4

**Decide if the following sentences are correct or incorrect.**

1. I really like the burgers at the Mike's Borrachos.
2. What's glass made of?
3. The Friday is my favourite day of the week.
4. What's for lunch?
5. Where did you buy this jeans?
6. The people generally enjoy talking about themselves.
7. The Canadians are said to be very polite and considerate.
8. I should put on other shirt. This one is stained.
9. Every children like playing with jigsaw puzzles.
10. Both students made the same mistake.

## Articles and nouns - Exercise 5

**Fill in the gaps with *this, that, these, those, some, any, no, many, much, few, a few, little, a little, all, every, each, both, either, neither, other* or *another*.**

1. I don't know ... people who still use a land-line phone.
2. It's still quite early, so we've had very ... customers so far.
3. I don't like ... dress. This one's too bright, and that one's too short.
4. Who's the ... boy, standing next to Kevin?
5. I would say I have ... friends, but not a lot.
6. ... man over there is my uncle Charlie.

7. ... news is good news.
8. Not ... of what he said was true.
9. ... bug is an insect, but not ... insects are bugs.
10. The committee interviewed ... candidate separately.
11. Have you got ... brothers or sisters? Or are you an only child?
12. ... books here in my bag are from the university library.
13. The soup needs ... salt. Not much though, just a pinch.
14. This restaurant is awful. Let's go to ... place.
15. ... her parents were artists, which inspired Jane to become a writer herself.

## Articles and nouns - Exercise 6

**Fill in the gaps in the following sentences with *a*, *an*, *the* or nothing and then discuss the statements with your partner.**

1. ... [m]en are better ... drivers than ... women.
2. ... [s]uccess is more important than ... happiness.
3. ... [a]ge limit for buying ... alcohol should be raised to ... 25.
4. ... [p]eople spend far too much time on ... Internet today.
5. ... [b]est advice is what you do not want to hear.
6. ... [c]lothes make ... man.
7. ... [f]amily always comes before ... friends.
8. ... [s]hops should be closed on ... Sundays.
9. ... [r]ich get richer as ... poor get poorer.
10. ... [e]verybody should have ... right to ... free education.
11. ... [b]est way to gain ... self-confidence is to do what you are afraid to do.
12. ... [e]very day is ... good day.
13. ... [d]ogs make ... best pets.
14. ... [d]riving should be taught at ... school.
15. ... [t]ourism does more ... harm than ... good.

## Articles and nouns - Exercise 7

**Make questions with *How much* and *How many* to ask your partner. Ask for more information.**

1. friends / have
2. time / spend on the Internet
3. alcohol / drink a week
4. English books / have
5. coffee / drink a day
6. hours a day / spend travelling

7. pairs of shoes / have
8. e-mails / get a day
9. times a month / go out
10. meat / eat

## Answer key: articles and nouns

### Answer key - Articles and nouns - Exercise 1

1. Could you buy a **bottle** of **wine**? **Maxim and Sylvia** are coming over for **dinner**.
2. **Human blood** is made up of **red blood cells**, **white blood cells** and **plasma**.
3. **Chinese** is definitely much more difficult to learn than **Russian**.
4. Do you ever watch **hockey**? Did you see **the match last night**?
5. **Life** on **other planets** is possible, but **scientists** haven't confirmed it yet.
6. **The windows** were open, and **the air** in **the room** was fresh.
7. **Greg** kicked **the football** into **the net**, and **the spectators** cheered.
8. **Knowledge** is **power**, but only if you know how to use it.
9. "I'll have a **cappuccino** and a **sandwich**." "With **ham** or **cheese**?"
10. Have you heard **the news**? **Cynthia** gave **birth** to a **baby boy this morning**.
11. Will you come to **the mall** with me? I'd like to buy a **silk scarf**.
12. Can I give you a **piece of advice**?
13. **Anger** is a **destructive emotion** that does more harm than good.
14. **A lot of passengers** were also injured in **the crash**.
15. **A computer virus** is a **program** that spreads by making **copies** of itself.
16. "How is **your meal**?" "**The fish** is superb, and **the chips** are nice too."
17. **The Moon** travels around **the Earth** at a **speed of 2,288 miles an hour**.
18. **Joanna** works in **an old people's home** as a **nurse**.
19. Which do you prefer, **tea** or **coffee**?
20. **The electric light bulb** was invented by **Joseph Swan** at **the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century**.
21. What's **the next item** on **the list**?
22. **The wounded** were taken to **the nearest hospital** immediately.
23. I've been to **the USA**, but I've never been to **France**.
24. **The Atlantic Ocean** lies between **North America** and **Europe** in **the north** and **Africa** and **South America** in **the south**.
25. You'll need **half a kilo of potatoes** for this recipe.
26. **Orion** and **the Pleiades** are **the sky's** two brightest objects and can be seen even without **binoculars**.
27. **Jerry** can play **the guitar**, but he is not a **very good singer**.
28. Let's have **breakfast** at **McDonald's**.
29. I think **April** is **the most beautiful month** of **the year**.

30. I've never tried **skiing**, but I love **skating**.

## [Answer key - Articles and nouns - Exercise 2](#)

1. Where ... my gloves? I can't see ... anywhere. **(2) are / them**
2. She likes to buy her ... in designer shops. **(2) clothes**
3. Shingles ... not as dangerous today as, for example, in the Middle Ages. **(2) is**
4. My girlfriend's favourite TV ... are Modern Family and The Big Bang Theory. **(2) series**
5. The police ... looking for the woman who was driving the red car. **(1) are**
6. About a dozen ... were grazing on the hillside. **(1) sheep**
7. The men ... arrested. **(2) were**
8. Could you give me a hand with my ... ? **(1) luggage**
9. Both Karl and Alice ... to invite Emily. **(1) want**
10. Children are given too ... these days. **(1) much homework**
11. New ... are discovered every day. **(1) species**
12. ... the Dutch better at English than Germans? **(1) Are**
13. Any ... fine for me. I am not choosy. **(2) beer is**
14. We've got some ... left over from last night. **(1) hamburgers**
15. Most people ... spicy dishes. **(1) like**
16. ... kids are as interested in mathematics as Tina. **(1) Few**
17. Rock breaks scissors, scissors ... paper, paper covers rock. **(2) cut**
18. I have been putting aside ... money each month for a new guitar. **(2) a little**
19. Sarah practises yoga every ... . **(2) morning**
20. My feet ... cold. I need some socks. **(1) are**
21. Michael has been a pilot for over two decades. He has a lot of ... . **(2) experience**
22. At the beginning of the new year, Felix had all his ... cut off. **(1) hair**
23. My eyesight has got worse. I need ... . **(2) new glasses**
24. If enough ... subscribe to our channel, we can make savings on advertising. **(2) people**
25. ... have you got now? **(1) How much time**

## [Answer key - Articles and nouns - Exercise 3](#)

1. I like \* pop music in general but I don't like what they play at most clubs. **\*the**
2. There are \* plenty of mistakes you can make when starting a business. **\*a**
3. Did you have enough \* time to finish the exercise? **\*of**
4. Millions of young people will be going to \* university next year. **\*the**
5. She yawned, told us good night and went to \* bed. **\*the**

6. I have learnt a lot of useless things in my life, but my least favourite subject is still \* History. **\*the**
7. I go running three times a week, and I also do \* yoga. **\*the**
8. That's my brother on the left. He is the one wearing \* rubber boots. **\*a**
9. I was able to solve a few riddles but not \* all. **\*the**
10. \* Queen was a very good band. **\*The**

### [Answer key - Articles and nouns - Exercise 4](#)

1. I really like the burgers **at Mike's Borrachos**.
2. Correct
3. **Friday** is my favourite day of the week.
4. Correct
5. Where did you buy **these jeans**?
6. **People** generally enjoy talking about themselves.
7. **Canadians** are said to be very polite and considerate.
8. I should put on **another** shirt. This one is stained.
9. Every **child likes** playing with jigsaw puzzles. / **All children like** playing with jigsaw puzzles.
10. Correct

### [Answer key - Articles and nouns - Exercise 5](#)

1. I don't know **any/many** people who still use a land-line phone.
2. It's still quite early, so we've had very **few** customers so far.
3. I don't like **either** dress. This one's too bright, and that one's too short.
4. Who's the **other** boy, standing next to Kevin?
5. I would say I have **some** / **a few** friends, but not a lot.
6. **That** man over there is my uncle Charlie.
7. **No** news is good news.
8. Not **much/all** of what he said was true.
9. **Every** bug is an insect, but not **all** insects are bugs.
10. The committee interviewed **each** candidate separately.
11. Have you got **any** brothers or sisters? Or are you an only child?
12. **These** books here in my bag are from the university library.
13. The soup needs **a little** / **some** salt. Not much though, just a pinch.
14. This restaurant is awful. Let's go to **another** place.
15. **Both** her parents were artists, which inspired Jane to become a writer herself.

### [Answer key - Articles and nouns - Exercise 6](#)

1. **Men** are better **drivers** than **women**.

2. **Success** is more important than **happiness**.
3. **The age** limit for buying **alcohol** should be raised to **25**.
4. **People** spend far too much time on **the Internet** today.
5. **The best advice** is what you do not want to hear.
6. **Clothes** make **the man**.
7. **Family** always comes before **friends**.
8. **Shops** should be closed on **Sundays**.
9. **The rich** get richer as **the poor** get poorer.
10. **Everybody** should have **the right** to **free education**.
11. **The best way** to gain **self-confidence** is to do what you are afraid to do.
12. **Every day** is a **good day**.
13. **Dogs** make **the best pets**.
14. **Driving** should be taught at **school**.
15. **Tourism** does more **harm** than **good**.

## [Answer key - Articles and nouns - Exercise 7](#)

1. How many friends do you have?
2. How much time do you spend on the Internet?
3. How much alcohol do you drink a week?
4. How many English books do you have?
5. How much coffee do you drink a day?
6. How many hours a day do you spend travelling?
7. How many pairs of shoes do you have?
8. How many e-mails do you get a day?
9. How many times a month do you go out?
10. How much meat do you eat?

# Chapter 11: The subjunctive

The subjunctive is a mood used to express necessity, unreality, wishes or hopes. It is usually difficult to notice, as it has no distinctive forms in current English, only those that resemble other verb forms (bare infinitive, past simple and past perfect).

- [Past perfect subjunctive](#)
- [Past subjunctive](#)
- [Present subjunctive](#)

# Past perfect subjunctive

The past perfect subjunctive has the same form as the past perfect tense:

HAD + PAST PARTICIPLE

It is used in subordinate clauses and expresses unreal past situations:

*I wish they **had arrived** on time. (They didn't arrive on time.)*

*I would've bought the dress if there **hadn't been** such a queue. (There was a long queue, so I didn't buy the dress.)*

*She would rather I **had gone** to bed earlier. (I didn't go to bed early.)*

*He seems as if he **hadn't slept** for days. (He seems not to have slept for days, but he has.)*

## Related topics:

- [The forms of the participle](#)
- [Unreal tenses](#)
- [Third conditional](#)
- [Wishes about the past](#)
- [AS IF / AS THOUGH](#)
- [WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + clause with the past perfect subjunctive](#)
- [Appendix: irregular verb forms](#)



# Past subjunctive

The past subjunctive has the same form as the past simple tense except in the case of the verb *be*. Traditionally, the past subjunctive form of *be* is *were* for all persons, including the first and third person singular. However, today *I/he/she/it was* is more common while *were* is mainly used in formal styles and in the set phrase *if I were you*.

The past subjunctive is used in subordinate clauses and refers to unreal or improbable present or future situations:

*If I **were** you, I would apply right now.* (I am not you.)

*What would you do if you **won** the lottery?* (You probably won't win the lottery.)

*It's time the kids **were** in bed.* (The kids are not in bed.)

*I wish you **were** here.* (You are not here.)

*I'd rather your boyfriend **stopped** calling you in the middle of the night.*  
(Your boyfriend keeps calling you.)

*He looks as if he **knew** the answer.* (He gives the impression that he knows the answer, but he probably doesn't.)

## Related topics:

- [Form: past simple](#)
- [Unreal tenses](#)
- [Second conditional](#)
- [Wishes about the present](#)
- [IT'S \(HIGH\) TIME](#)
- [AS IF / AS THOUGH](#)
- [WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + clause with the past subjunctive](#)
- [Appendix: irregular verb forms](#)

# Present subjunctive

The present subjunctive is identical to the bare infinitive form of the verb in all persons, including the third person singular (no final -s). It is usually used in formal or literary styles:

## In certain set phrases

*I see what you mean. **Be** that as it may, I can't agree with you.* (even so, still)

***Come** what may, I will not resign!* (whatever happens)

*"I am a Jedi. Like my father before me." "So **be** it... Jedi."* (it's okay with me, I accept this)

*I do not want to bore you; **suffice** it to say, we finally got a full refund.* (it is sufficient to say)

## In exclamations that express a wish or hope

***Rest** in peace!*

***Bless** you!*

*God **save** the King!*

## After adjectives such as IMPORTANT, ESSENTIAL, VITAL etc.

*It is/it was + adjective + that* can be followed by a present subjunctive if the adjective expresses importance or necessity or that something should be done:

*It is vital that everybody **get** there before the examination begins.*

*It is desirable that Mr Hanson **hand** in his resignation.*

*It is important that you **be** at home when the lawyers arrive.*

*It is essential that the car **be waiting** at the airport.*

*It is imperative that products **be tested** carefully.*

In such sentences, the present subjunctive can be replaced with the less formal *should + infinitive*:

*It is vital that everybody **should get** there before the examination begins.*

## After verbs such as INSIST, SUGGEST, RECOMMEND etc.

*Mike insisted that I **try** his new muffin recipe.*

*I suggest that your cousin **apply** at once.*

*Carl was injured last week, and the doctor recommended that he **not play** in the next match.*

Again, the present subjunctive can be replaced with *should* + infinitive in less formal styles:

*I suggest that your cousin **should apply** at once.*

**Related topics:**

- [Reporting verb + THAT-clause with the present subjunctive](#)

# Appendix

- [Appendix: irregular verb forms](#)
- [Appendix: spelling rules](#)

# Appendix: irregular verb forms

Base form » Past tense » Past participle

**arise** » arose » arisen

**awake** » awoke » awoken

**be** » was, were » been

**bear** » bore » borne

**beat** » beat » beaten

**become** » became » become

**befall** » befell » befallen

**begin** » began » begun

**behold** » beheld » beheld

**bend** » bent » bent

**bet** » bet » bet

**bid** » bid » bid

**bind** » bound » bound

**bite** » bit » bitten

**bleed** » bled » bled

**blow** » blew » blown

**break** » broke » broken

**breed** » bred » bred

**bring** » brought » brought

**broadcast** » broadcast » broadcast

**build** » built » built

**burn** » burnt/burned » burnt/burned

**burst** » burst » burst

**buy** » bought » bought

**cast** » cast » cast

**catch** » caught » caught

**choose** » chose » chosen

**cling** » clung » clung

**come** » came » come

**cost** » cost » cost

**creep** » crept » crept

**cut** » cut » cut

**deal** » dealt » dealt

**dig** » dug » dug

**do** » did » done

**draw** » drew » drawn

**dream** » dreamt/dreamed » dreamt/dreamed

**drink** » drank » drunk  
**drive** » drove » driven  
**eat** » ate » eaten  
**fall** » fell » fallen  
**feed** » fed » fed  
**feel** » felt » felt  
**fight** » fought » fought  
**find** » found » found  
**fit** » fit/fitted » fit/fitted  
**flee** » fled » fled  
**fling** » flung » flung  
**fly** » flew » flown  
**forbid** » forbade » forbidden  
**forecast** » forecast » forecast  
**forego** » forewent » foregone  
**foresee** » foresaw » foreseen  
**foretell** » foretold » foretold  
**forget** » forgot » forgotten  
**forgive** » forgave » forgiven  
**forsake** » forsook » forsaken  
**freeze** » froze » frozen  
**get** » got » got  
**give** » gave » given  
**go** » went » gone  
**grind** » ground » ground  
**grow** » grew » grown  
**hang** » hung » hung  
**have** » had » had  
**hear** » heard » heard  
**hide** » hid » hidden  
**hit** » hit » hit  
**hold** » held » held  
**hurt** » hurt » hurt  
**keep** » kept » kept  
**kneel** » knelt/kneeled » knelt/kneeled  
**knit** » knit/knitted » knit/knitted  
**know** » knew » known  
**lay** » laid » laid  
**lead** » led » led  
**lean** » leant/leaned » leant/leaned  
**leap** » leapt/leaped » leapt/leaped  
**learn** » learnt/learned » learnt/learned  
**leave** » left » left

**lend** » lent » lent  
**let** » let » let  
**lie** » lay » lain  
**light** » lit/lighted » lit/lighted  
**lose** » lost » lost  
**make** » made » made  
**mean** » meant » meant  
**meet** » met » met  
**mislay** » mislaid » mislaid  
**mislead** » misled » misled  
**mistake** » mistook » mistaken  
**mow** » mowed » mown/mowed  
**pay** » paid » paid  
**prove** » proved » proven/proved  
**put** » put » put  
**quit** » quit » quit  
**read** /ri:d/ » read /red/ » read /red/  
**rid** » rid » rid  
**ride** » rode » ridden  
**ring** » rang » rung  
**rise** » rose » risen  
**run** » ran » run  
**say** » said » said  
**see** » saw » seen  
**seek** » sought » sought  
**sell** » sold » sold  
**send** » sent » sent  
**set** » set » set  
**sew** » sewed » sewn  
**shake** » shook » shaken  
**shear** » sheared » shorn/sheared  
**shed** » shed » shed  
**shine** » shone/shined » shone/shined  
**shoot** » shot » shot  
**show** » showed » shown  
**shrink** » shrank/shrunk » shrunk  
**shut** » shut » shut  
**sing** » sang » sung  
**sit** » sat » sat  
**slay** » slew » slain  
**sleep** » slept » slept  
**slide** » slid » slid  
**sling** » slung » slung

**slit** » slit » slit  
**smell** » smelt/smelled » smelt/smelled  
**speak** » spoke » spoken  
**speed** » sped/speeded » sped/speeded  
**spell** » spelt/spelled » spelt/spelled  
**spend** » spent » spent  
**spin** » spun » spun  
**spit** » spat » spat  
**split** » split » split  
**spoil** » spoilt/spoiled » spoilt/spoiled  
**spread** » spread » spread  
**spring** » sprang » sprung  
**stand** » stood » stood  
**steal** » stole » stolen  
**stick** » stuck » stuck  
**sting** » stung » stung  
**stink** » stank/stunk » stunk  
**stride** » strode » stridden  
**strike** » struck » struck  
**string** » strung » strung  
**strive** » strove » striven  
**swear** » swore » sworn  
**sweep** » swept » swept  
**swell** » swelled » swollen  
**swim** » swam » swum  
**swing** » swung » swung  
**take** » took » taken  
**teach** » taught » taught  
**tear** » tore » torn  
**tell** » told » told  
**think** » thought » thought  
**throw** » threw » thrown  
**thrust** » thrust » thrust  
**tread** » trod » trodden  
**understand** » understood » understood  
**wake** » woke » woken  
**wear** » wore » worn  
**weave** » wove » woven  
**weep** » wept » wept  
**wet** » wet/wetted » wet/wetted  
**win** » won » won  
**wind** » wound » wound



**wring** » wrung » wrung  
**write** » wrote » written

# Appendix: spelling rules

## Present simple -S

The present simple form of the verb is identical to the base form in all persons except the third person singular. The third person singular is formed by adding -s to the base form:

*work* » *works*

*live* » *lives*

*stay* » *stays*

*try* » *tries* (a final -y changes to -ie- after a consonant)

*wash* » *washes*; *kiss* » *kisses*; *watch* » *watches*; *box* » *boxes* (we add -es after -sh, -s, -ch and -x)

*go* » *goes* (we add -es)

*do* » *does* (we add -es)

*have* » *has*

## Past simple -ED

In the case of regular verbs, the past simple is formed by adding -ed to the base form of the verb for all persons:

*look* » *looked*

*stay* » *stayed*

*arrive* » *arrived* (we only add -d if the verb ends in -e)

*try* » *tried* (a final -y changes to -i- after a consonant)

*stop* » *stopped* (we double the final consonant if the verb ends in consonant-vowel-consonant)

## -ING (simple gerund and present participle)

The simple gerund and the present participle are formed by adding -ing to the base form of the verb:

*read* » *reading*

*study* » *studying*

*grow* » *growing*

*relax* » *relaxing*

*answer* » *answering*

*write* » *writing*; *argue* » *arguing* (a final -e is omitted)

*agree* » ***agreeing*** (a final *-ee* does not change)

*lie* » ***lying*** (a final *-ie* changes to *-y-*)

*put* » ***putting***; *regret* » ***regretting***; *readmit* » ***readmitting*** (we double the final consonant if the verb ends in consonant-vowel-consonant, with the exception of *w*, *x* and *y*, and only has one syllable or has the stress on the last syllable)

# List of quotes

## A. K. Best

*The fishing was good; it was the catching that was bad.*

Related topics:

- [Cleft sentences](#)
- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Past simple for past habits and states](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)
- [The gerund as subject](#)

## Aesop

*It is easy to be brave from a safe distance.*

Related topics:

- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)

## Albert Einstein

*Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.*

Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)

## Albert Einstein

*Life is like riding a bicycle - in order to keep your balance, you must keep moving.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE \(GOT\) TO](#)
- [Preposition + gerund](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)
- [The infinitive of purpose](#)

## Albert Einstein

*Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.*

Related topics:

- [Present perfect for past events](#)
- [WHAT \(the thing\(s\) that/which\)](#)

## Alphonse Karr

*Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses.*

Related topics:

- [Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns \(SOME, ANY, NO, MANY, MUCH, FEW, LITTLE etc.\)](#)
- [Nouns which are always plural](#)
- [Present continuous for frequently repeated actions in the present](#)

## Angela Thirkell

*If one cannot invent a really convincing lie, it is often better to stick to the truth.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Zero conditional](#)

## Aristotle

*It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Noun phrase + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Preposition + gerund](#)

## Author unknown

*The best way to gain self-confidence is to do what you are afraid to do.*

Related topics:

- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)
- [The TO-infinitive as a subject complement](#)
- [WHAT \(the thing\(s\) that/which\)](#)

## Ben Irwin

*Most of us spend our lives as if we had another one in the bank.*

Related topics:

- [AS IF / AS THOUGH](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)

## Benjamin Franklin

*Lost time is never found again.*

Related topics:

- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The present and past participles used as adjectives](#)

## Bernard Baruch

*Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton asked why.*

Related topics:

- [Past simple for completed actions in the past](#)

- [SEE, WATCH, HEAR, LISTEN, FEEL, SMELL, NOTICE, OBSERVE + object + bare infinitive](#)
- [The zero article with proper names](#)

## Bill Cosby

*I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.*

Related topics:

- [State verbs and action verbs](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)
- [The gerund as a subject complement](#)
- [TO-infinitive or gerund: FORGET, REMEMBER, REGRET, GO ON, STOP, TRY](#)

## Bill Dana

*I had been told that the training procedure with cats was difficult. It's not. Mine had me trained in two days.*

Related topics:

- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [Past perfect for actions completed before a point in the past](#)
- [Past simple for completed actions in the past](#)
- [Past simple for past habits and states](#)
- [Present simple for present habits and states](#)
- [Tense changes in indirect speech](#)

## Booker T. Washington

*If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.*

Related topics:

- [First conditional](#)
- [Imperatives in the first conditional](#)

## Carol Nelson

*Christmas is a time when you get homesick - even when you're home.*

Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [Relative adverbs: WHERE, WHEN, WHY](#)
- [The indefinite article to describe and classify something](#)
- [The zero article with names of days, months, seasons, holidays and parts of the day](#)

## **Cavett Robert**

*If you don't think every day is a good day, just try missing one.*

Related topics:

- [Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns \(SOME, ANY, NO, MANY, MUCH, FEW, LITTLE etc.\)](#)
- [Imperatives in the first conditional](#)
- [TO-infinitive or gerund: FORGET, REMEMBER, REGRET, GO ON, STOP, TRY](#)

## **Charles Buxton**

*You will never find time for anything. If you want time, you must make it.*

Related topics:

- [First conditional](#)
- [Future simple for predictions](#)
- [Modals in the first conditional](#)

## **Chili Davis**

*Growing old is mandatory; growing up is optional.*

Related topics:

- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The gerund as subject](#)

## **Chinese proverb**

*A book is like a garden carried in the pocket.*



Related topics:

- [Participle clauses](#)
- [Participles in non-finite relative clauses](#)
- [The indefinite article with a member of a class](#)

## Chinese proverb

*To read a book for the first time is to make an acquaintance with a new friend; to read it for a second time is to meet an old one.*

Related topics:

- [The TO-infinitive as a subject complement](#)
- [The TO-infinitive as subject](#)

## Christian Furchtegott Gellert

*Live as you will wish to have lived when you are dying.*

Related topics:

- [Future simple in complex sentences](#)
- [Future time clauses](#)
- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [Verb + TO-infinitive](#)

## Confucius

*To be wronged is nothing unless you continue to remember it.*

Related topics:

- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [IF, EVEN IF, ONLY IF, AS LONG AS, PROVIDED, SUPPOSING, UNLESS, BUT FOR, IF NECESSARY, IF SO, IN CASE etc.](#)
- [The forms of the infinitive](#)
- [The TO-infinitive as subject](#)
- [TO-infinitive or gerund: BEGIN, START, CONTINUE, CEASE, DREAD, INTEND, LOVE](#)

## Cynthia E. Varnado

*It is impossible to keep a straight face in the presence of one or more kittens.*

Related topics:

- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)

## **Cyril Connolly**

*No city should be too large for a man to walk out of in a morning.*

Related topics:

- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Modals to express criticism: CAN, COULD, MIGHT, SHOULD](#)
- [Modals to express suggestions: SHOULD, COULD, MIGHT, SHALL](#)

## **David Russell**

*The hardest thing to learn in life is which bridge to cross and which to burn.*

Related topics:

- [Noun phrase + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Question word + TO-infinitive](#)

## **Dennis and Wendy Mannering**

*Attitudes are contagious. Are yours worth catching?*

Related topics:

- [Other expressions followed by the gerund](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)

## **Donald Kendall**

*The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary.*

Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Relative adverbs: WHERE, WHEN, WHY](#)

- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)

## **E. W. Howe**

*To avoid mistakes and regrets, always consult your wife before engaging in a flirtation.*

Related topics:

- [Preposition + gerund](#)
- [The infinitive of purpose](#)

## **Edward Vernon Rickenbacker**

*Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared.*

Related topics:

- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)
- [IF, EVEN IF, ONLY IF, AS LONG AS, PROVIDED, SUPPOSING, UNLESS, BUT FOR, IF NECESSARY, IF SO, IN CASE etc.](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)
- [The gerund as a subject complement](#)
- [The present and past participles used as adjectives](#)
- [WHAT \(the thing\(s\) that/which\)](#)

## **Eleanor Roosevelt**

*No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [HAVE, GET, LET, MAKE + object + infinitive](#)
- [MAKE + object + bare infinitive](#)

## **Emily Dickinson**

*Saying nothing sometimes says the most.*

Related topics:

- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The gerund as subject](#)

## Emma Goldman

*I'd rather have roses on my table than diamonds on my neck.*

Related topics:

- [WOULD RATHER / WOULD SOONER + simple or continuous infinitive](#)

## Emory Austin

*Some days there won't be a song in your heart. Sing anyway.*

Related topics:

- [Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns \(SOME, ANY, NO, MANY, MUCH, FEW, LITTLE etc.\)](#)
- [Future simple for predictions](#)

## Epicetetus

*People are not disturbed by things, but by the view they take of them.*

Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [Nouns which are always plural](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)

## Eric Hoffer

*The greatest weariness comes from work not done.*

Related topics:

- [Participle clauses](#)
- [Participles in non-finite relative clauses](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)

## Erica Jong

*Advice is what we ask for when we already know the answer but wish we didn't.*

Related topics:

- [WHAT \(the thing\(s\) that/which\)](#)
- [Wishes about the present](#)

## Frank A. Clark

*If you can find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Zero conditional](#)

## Frank A. Clark

*Gossip needn't be false to be evil - there's a lot of truth that shouldn't be passed around.*

Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Modals to express obligation: SHOULD, OUGHT TO](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)
- [The infinitive of purpose](#)
- [The semi-modal NEED](#)

## Galileo Galilei

*I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn't learn something from him.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Present perfect for past events](#)
- [Present perfect with an incomplete period](#)

## George Eliot

*It is never too late to be who you might have been.*

Related topics:

- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Modals to express possibility: MAY, MIGHT, CAN, COULD](#)

## George Santayana

*To be interested in the changing seasons is a happier state of mind than to be hopelessly in love with spring.*

Related topics:

- [The TO-infinitive as subject](#)
- [The zero article with names of days, months, seasons, holidays and parts of the day](#)

## Haim Ginott

*Parents often talk about the younger generation as if they didn't have anything to do with it.*

Related topics:

- [AS IF / AS THOUGH](#)
- [Present simple for present habits and states](#)

## Hal Borland

*April is a promise that May is bound to keep.*

Related topics:

- [BE BOUND + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)
- [The indefinite article to describe and classify something](#)
- [The zero article with names of days, months, seasons, holidays and parts of the day](#)

## Hal Borland

*No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn.*

Related topics:

- [Present simple for general truths](#)

## Hanoch McCarty

*It's not who you are that holds you back, it's who you think you're not.*

Related topics:

- [Cleft sentences](#)
- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)

## Harlan Miller

*I wish we could put up some of the Christmas spirit in jars and open a jar of it every month.*

Related topics:

- [Wishes about the present](#)

## Harry "Breaker" Harbord Morant

*Live every day as if it were going to be your last; for one day you're sure to be right.*

Related topics:

- [AS IF / AS THOUGH](#)
- [BE GOING TO for predictions](#)
- [Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns \(SOME, ANY, NO, MANY, MUCH, FEW, LITTLE etc.\)](#)

## Heinrich Heine

*If the Romans had been obliged to learn Latin, they would never have found time to conquer the world.*

Related topics:

- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [Third conditional](#)

## Helen Rowland

*You will never win if you never begin.*

Related topics:

- [First conditional](#)
- [Future simple for predictions](#)
- [Future simple in complex sentences](#)

## Henry David Thoreau

*As if you could kill time without injuring eternity.*

Related topics:

- [AS IF / AS THOUGH](#)

## Henry David Thoreau

*Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it.*

Related topics:

- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)
- [The continuous aspect](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)
- [The forms of the infinitive](#)

## Henry Ford

*There is no man living that cannot do more than he thinks he can.*

Related topics:



- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Participle clauses](#)
- [Participles in non-finite relative clauses](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)

## Henry Miller

*We should read to give our souls a chance to luxuriate.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express obligation: SHOULD, OUGHT TO](#)
- [The infinitive of purpose](#)

## Herbert Prochnow

*A city is a large community where people are lonesome together.*

Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Nouns which are always plural](#)
- [Relative adverbs: WHERE, WHEN, WHY](#)
- [The indefinite article with a member of a class](#)

## Hippocrates

*Let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food.*

Related topics:

- [HAVE, GET, LET, MAKE + object + infinitive](#)

## Irish proverb

*If you do not sow in the spring, you will not reap in the autumn.*

Related topics:

- [First conditional](#)
- [Future simple for predictions](#)
- [Future simple in complex sentences](#)

## Isaac Asimov

*What would I do if I had only six months left to live? I'd type faster.*

Related topics:

- [Second conditional](#)
- [The modal WOULD to express unreal situations](#)

## Jim Rohn

*Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.*

Related topics:

- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)
- [WHAT \(the thing\(s\) that/which\)](#)

## Joey Adams

*If it weren't for the fact that the TV set and the refrigerator are so far apart, some of us wouldn't get any exercise at all.*

Related topics:

- [IF, EVEN IF, ONLY IF, AS LONG AS, PROVIDED, SUPPOSING, UNLESS, BUT FOR, IF NECESSARY, IF SO, IN CASE etc.](#)
- [Second conditional](#)
- [The modal WOULD to express unreal situations](#)

## John A. Simone, Sr.

*If you're in a bad situation, don't worry it'll change. If you're in a good situation, don't worry it'll change.*

Related topics:

- [First conditional](#)
- [Future simple for predictions](#)
- [Imperatives in the first conditional](#)

## John Wooden

*A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment.*

Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)
- [The indefinite article with a member of a class](#)

## Kelvin Throop

*If people behaved like governments, you'd call the cops.*

Related topics:

- [Second conditional](#)
- [The modal WOULD to express unreal situations](#)

## Lao Tse

*A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE \(GOT\) TO](#)
- [The indefinite article with a member of a class](#)

## Lao Tse

*Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.*

Related topics:

- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)

## Leo Tolstoy

*If you want to be happy, be.*

Related topics:

- [Imperatives in the first conditional](#)

## Lily Tomlin

*The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you are still a rat.*

Related topics:

- [IF, EVEN IF, ONLY IF, AS LONG AS, PROVIDED, SUPPOSING, UNLESS, BUT FOR, IF NECESSARY, IF SO, IN CASE etc.](#)
- [Zero conditional](#)

## Marcus Aurelius

*What is not good for the swarm is not good for the bee.*

Related topics:

- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [WHAT \(the thing\(s\) that/which\)](#)

## Margaret Fuller

*Men for the sake of getting a living forget to live.*

Related topics:

- [Irregular plural forms](#)
- [Preposition + gerund](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [TO-infinitive or gerund: FORGET, REMEMBER, REGRET, GO ON, STOP, TRY](#)

## Marie Curie

*Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood.*

Related topics:

- [BE + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [The forms of the infinitive](#)

## Mark Twain

*If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE \(GOT\) TO](#)
- [Zero conditional](#)

## Mark Twain

*The secret of getting ahead is getting started.*

Related topics:

- [Preposition + gerund](#)
- [The passive with GET](#)

## Marlene Dietrich

*It is the friends you can call up at 4 a.m. that matter.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Cleft sentences](#)
- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)

## Mary Engelbreit

*If you don't like something change it; if you can't change it, change the way you think about it.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Imperatives in the first conditional](#)

## Mignon McLaughlin

*What you have become is the price you paid to get what you used to want.*

Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Modals to express habits: WILL, WOULD, USED TO](#)
- [Past simple for completed actions in the past](#)
- [Present perfect for past events](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)
- [The infinitive of purpose](#)
- [WHAT \(the thing\(s\) that/which\)](#)

## Muhammad Ali

*Children make you want to start life over.*

Related topics:

- [HAVE, GET, LET, MAKE + object + infinitive](#)
- [Irregular plural forms](#)
- [MAKE + object + bare infinitive](#)
- [Verb + TO-infinitive](#)

## Nan Porter

*If cats could talk, they wouldn't.*

Related topics:

- [Second conditional](#)
- [Modals to express willingness / unwillingness: WILL, WOULD](#)

## Native American proverb

*No river can return to its source, yet all rivers must have a beginning.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)

## Native American proverb

*The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears.*

Related topics:

- [Second conditional](#)
- [The modal WOULD to express unreal situations](#)

## Nelson Henderson

*The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.*

Related topics:

- [Non-defining relative clause](#)
- [Pronouns used in non-defining relative clauses](#)
- [The TO-infinitive as a subject complement](#)
- [Verb + TO-infinitive](#)

## Oscar Wilde

*We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.*

Related topics:

- [Present continuous for actions in progress at the time of speaking](#)
- [Present simple for present habits and states](#)
- [The continuous aspect](#)

## Oscar Wilde

*To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up.*

Related topics:

- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)
- [The TO-infinitive as subject](#)

## Pablo Picasso

*Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.*

Related topics:

- [Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns \(SOME, ANY, NO, MANY, MUCH, FEW, LITTLE etc.\)](#)

- [Future time clauses](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [Question word + TO-infinitive](#)
- [The indefinite article to describe and classify something](#)

## Peter Drucker

*The best way to predict the future is to create it.*

Related topics:

- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The TO-infinitive as a subject complement](#)

## Peter Marshall

*Small deeds done are better than great deeds planned.*

Related topics:

- [Participle clauses](#)
- [Participles in non-finite relative clauses](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)

## Plato

*Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.*

Related topics:

- [Irregular plural forms](#)
- [Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE \(GOT\) TO](#)
- [Noun phrase + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [SAY, TELL and ASK](#)

## Ralph Hodgson

*Some things have to be believed to be seen.*

Related topics:



- [Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns \(SOME, ANY, NO, MANY, MUCH, FEW, LITTLE etc.\)](#)
- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE \(GOT\) TO](#)
- [The forms of the infinitive](#)

## Ralph Waldo Emerson

*What we call results are beginnings.*

Related topics:

- [WHAT \(the thing\(s\) that/which\)](#)

## Robert Brault

*Each day is an opportunity to travel back into tomorrow's past and change it.*

Related topics:

- [Noun phrase + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)

## Robert Frost

*Freedom lies in being bold.*

Related topics:

- [Preposition + gerund](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)

## Robert Graves

*Every English poet should master the rules of grammar before he attempts to bend or break them.*

Related topics:

- [Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns \(SOME, ANY, NO, MANY, MUCH, FEW, LITTLE etc.\)](#)

- [Modals to express obligation: SHOULD, OUGHT TO](#)
- [Verb + TO-infinitive](#)

## Ruth E. Renkl

*You live longer once you realize that any time spent being unhappy is wasted.*

Related topics:

- [Form: passive voice](#)
- [Participle clauses](#)
- [Participles in non-finite relative clauses](#)
- [SPEND, WASTE + object + present participle](#)

## Samuel Levenson

*You must learn from the mistakes of others. You can't possibly live long enough to make them all yourself.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE \(GOT\) TO](#)
- [The infinitive of purpose](#)

## Samuel Taylor Coleridge

*Friendship is a sheltering tree.*

Related topics:

- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)
- [The present and past participles used as adjectives](#)

## Satchel Paige

*How old would you be if you didn't know how old you were?*

Related topics:

- [Second conditional](#)

- [The modal WOULD to express unreal situations](#)

## Seneca

*Fate leads the willing, and drags along the reluctant.*

Related topics:

- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The definite article with adjectives](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)

## Sophocles

*It is terrible to speak well and be wrong.*

Related topics:

- [Adjective + TO-infinitive](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)

## Spanish proverb

*Whoever gossips to you will gossip about you.*

Related topics:

- [Future simple for predictions](#)
- [WHATEVER, WHOEVER, WHICHEVER, WHEREVER, WHENEVER](#)

## Swedish proverb

*Those who wish to sing always find a song.*

Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)
- [Verb + TO-infinitive](#)

## Tehyi Hsieh

*Action will remove the doubts that theory cannot solve.*

Related topics:

- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Future simple for predictions](#)
- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)

## **Thomas Edison**

*I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express willingness / unwillingness: WILL, WOULD](#)
- [Present perfect for past events](#)
- [The perfect aspect](#)

## **Thomas Watson, Sr.**

*To be successful, you have to have your heart in your business, and your business in your heart.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE \(GOT\) TO](#)
- [Nouns with countable and uncountable meanings](#)
- [The infinitive of purpose](#)

## **Vince Lombardi**

*We would accomplish many more things if we did not think of them as impossible.*

Related topics:

- [Second conditional](#)
- [The modal WOULD to express unreal situations](#)

## **Vita Sackville-West**

*Flowers really do intoxicate me.*

Related topics:

- [DO, DOES, DID + bare infinitive](#)
- [The auxiliaries DO and DOES for emphasis](#)

## Voltaire

*Life is a shipwreck but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE \(GOT\) TO](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)
- [TO-infinitive or gerund: FORGET, REMEMBER, REGRET, GO ON, STOP, TRY](#)

## Washington Irving

*A barking dog is often more useful than a sleeping lion.*

Related topics:

- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The indefinite article with a member of a class](#)
- [The present and past participles used as adjectives](#)

## William Barret

*It is the familiar that usually eludes us in life. What is before our nose is what we see last.*

Related topics:

- [Cleft sentences](#)
- [Defining relative clause](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [Pronouns used in defining relative clauses](#)
- [Pseudo-cleft sentences](#)
- [The definite article with adjectives](#)
- [WHAT \(the thing\(s\) that/which\)](#)

## William Carlos Williams

*In summer, the song sings itself.*

Related topics:

- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The zero article with names of days, months, seasons, holidays and parts of the day](#)

## **William Frederick Book**

*A man must be master of his hours and days, not their servant.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express obligation: MUST, HAVE \(GOT\) TO](#)
- [The indefinite article with a member of a class](#)

## **William Safire**

*Only in grammar can you be more than perfect.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express ability: CAN, COULD, BE ABLE TO](#)
- [ONLY AFTER, ONLY IF, ONLY IN THIS WAY etc., NOT UNTIL](#)

## **Winston Churchill**

*I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else.*

Related topics:

- [Other expressions followed by the gerund](#)
- [Present simple for present habits and states](#)
- [The indefinite article to describe and classify something](#)

## **Winston Churchill**

*A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.*

Related topics:

- [Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns \(SOME, ANY, NO, MANY, MUCH, FEW, LITTLE etc.\)](#)
- [Present simple for general truths](#)
- [The indefinite article with a member of a class](#)

## Yogi Berra

*If you don't know where you're going, you might never get there.*

Related topics:

- [Modals to express possibility: MAY, MIGHT, CAN, COULD](#)
- [State verbs and action verbs](#)
- [Zero conditional](#)

## Zen saying

*When you get to the top of a mountain, keep climbing.*

Related topics:

- [Future time clauses](#)

## Zen saying

*Knowledge is learning something every day. Wisdom is letting go of something every day.*

Related topics:

- [Determiners with countable and uncountable nouns \(SOME, ANY, NO, MANY, MUCH, FEW, LITTLE etc.\)](#)
- [The difference between countable and uncountable nouns](#)
- [The gerund as a subject complement](#)

# List of exercises

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# Glossary

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## [A](#)

### action

A general term to express that somebody or something is doing something.

### adjective

A part of speech that modifies, qualifies or restricts a noun or a pronoun. (*It's a **nice** house. The apples are **ripe**. He's very **talented**.*)

### adverb

A part of speech that modifies a verb, adjective, adverb or conjunction. (*I could **hardly** say a word. That car is **incredibly** expensive.*)

### affirmative sentence

A declarative sentence that indicates "yes"; also called a positive sentence. (*Adam plays squash a lot.*)

### agent

The doer of an action; the person or thing that is doing something. The agent is not necessarily the subject of the sentence. (***Jim** called you this morning. Hamlet was written by **Shakespeare**.*)

### article

Any of the words *a*, *an* and *the*, used to limit or give definiteness to a noun. *A* and *an* are indefinite articles, while *the* is a definite article. (***A** man was standing on **the** platform.*)

## aspect

A verbal category that relates an action to the passage of time. It can express duration (continuous (or progressive) aspect) or completion (perfect aspect).

## auxiliary verb

A helping verb used with main verbs that expresses mood, voice or tense. (*I **can't** swim. When **were** you born? They **are** working on it now. **Have** they left?)*

## B

## bare infinitive

The infinitive without *to*. It can be simple (**write**), continuous (**be writing**), perfect (**have written**) or perfect continuous (**have been writing**). The term "bare infinitive" is often used to refer to the simple bare infinitive (**write**), which is identical to the base form of the verb.

## base form

The form of a verb to which inflections are added, e.g. *go, meet* and *want*. Inflected forms of these verbs include, e.g. *goes, meeting* and *wanted*. The base form is the one listed in dictionaries.

## C

## clause

A group of related words with a subject and a verb. Sometimes the subject may not be mentioned explicitly in the clause itself but found in a nearby clause. (***While walking through the park**, Tom lost his keys.*)

## complement

A word or phrase that comes after the verb and is required to make the sentence complete. (*The weather was **beautiful**. Carol is **a teacher**.*)

## complete period of time

A period of time that has finished and does not include the time of speaking. (*Lena didn't go skiing **last year**.*)

## completion

A concept related to the perfect aspect that expresses that an action has finished. (*He **has finished** university.*)

## conjunction

A part of speech that connects words, clauses or sentences. (*The room was dark **and** cold. **Although** everyone heard the news, no one seemed to care.*)

## context

The situation within which something exists or happens or an utterance is made.

## continuous aspect

The aspect that expresses duration, formed with *be* + verb-*ing*. (*What **are** you **doing**?*)

## D

## declarative sentence

The sentence type used to make statements. A declarative sentence may be affirmative or negative. (*Adam plays squash a lot. Tim has no friends.*)

## definite

Pertaining to a specific person, thing, idea or time. (*I know **the guy you are talking about**.*)

## direct object

The directly affected object of the verb. (*Let's have **a coffee**. She told me **her name**.*)

## **ditransitive verb**

A verb that has two objects: a direct object and an indirect object. (*She **told me her name**.*)

## **duration**

A concept related to the continuous aspect that expresses that an action is in progress. (*What **are you doing**?*)

## **E**

## **emphasis**

Special importance or attention given to something. (*We **do want** to help you.*)

## **event**

A general term to express that somebody or something is doing something or that something is happening. (*The lights turned red.*)

## **expression**

A word or group of words used in a specific situation. (*Good morning, at six and on the sofa*)

## **F**

## **focus**

The main or central point of attention or interest; what is emphasised. (*It was **János Irinyi** who invented the non-explosive match in 1836.*)

## **formal**

Not part of colloquial or everyday speech; official. (*I shall be with you shortly.*)

## H

### **hypothetical**

Unreal, imagined.

## I

### **imperative sentence**

The sentence type used to express suggestions, directions or orders. (*Take a seat, please.*)

### **incomplete period of time**

A period of time that includes the time of speaking. (*I have known him **for two years.***)

### **indefinite**

Not pertaining to a specific person, thing, idea or time. (***Somebody** left you a **message** this morning.*)

### **indirect object**

To or for whom the action of the verb is being done; the receiver of the action. (*She told **me** her name.*)

### **inflection**

A change in or addition to the form of a word that shows a change in the way it is used in sentences. (*He likes what you **cooked.***)

### **informal**

Part of colloquial or everyday speech. (*I'll be with you in a sec.*)

## **instrument**

Something that the doer uses in performing the action. (*She covered the child with a **blanket**.*)

## **interrogative sentence**

The sentence type used to express a direct question. (*What are you doing?*)

## **intransitive verb**

A verb that does not take a direct object. (*How long have you been **living** here?*)

## **inversion**

A construction in which a verb or an auxiliary precedes the subject. (*Here comes **the bus**. You don't work here, **do you?***)

## **M**

## **main clause**

A clause that could be a sentence in itself. (***I wouldn't go there** if I were you. When I called her, **she was studying**.*)

## **main verb**

A verb that can express an action or a state in itself; also called a lexical verb. (*Adam **plays** squash a lot. This watch **belonged** to my grandfather.*)

## **N**

## **negative sentence**

A declarative sentence that indicates "no". (*Tim has no friends.*)

## noun

A part of speech that names a person, place or thing. (*The **koala** is a **marsupial**.*)

## O

## object

A person or thing that is affected by the action of a verb or is involved in the result of an action. (*Can you help **me**?*)

## P

## particle

A word that is joined to the verb in a phrasal verb. (*He is looking **after** his ageing parents.*)

## perfect aspect

The aspect that expresses completion, formed with *have* + past participle. (*He **has finished** university.*)

## period of time

The length of time between two points of time. (*He works **from 8 to 4**. We've been staying here **for two weeks**.*)

## point in time

A specific moment in time. (*She came home **at six**. I was born **in 1980**.*)

## progress

An action is said to be in progress when it is happening. (*When I called her, she **was studying**.*)

## **pronoun**

A part of speech that refers to or stands instead of a noun. (*Who do **you** think **I am**?*)

## **punctuation**

The use of special marks to structure and organise written language: full stop (.), comma (,), question mark (?), exclamation mark (!), apostrophe ('), quote ("), colon (:), semi-colon (;), hyphen (-), dash (–), parentheses (( )) and brackets ([ ]).

## **Q**

### **question word**

A word that introduces a *wh*-question. (***What** are you doing? **How** old are you?*)

## **R**

### **reference point**

A point in time in relation to which an action takes place. (***When I called her**, she was studying. They had all arrived by **10 o'clock**.*)

## **S**

### **state**

A condition that exists at a specific time. (***I was sick**. He doesn't have your address.*)

### **structure**

The way in which the parts of a sentence, clause or expression are arranged.



(**make + object + bare infinitive** in the sentence *The teacher **made me rewrite** the composition.*)

## subject

The person or thing that performs the action of a verb or that is described by a verb. (***You** look pretty. **The house** was destroyed by fire.*)

## subordinate clause

A clause that cannot be a sentence in itself and is linked to a main clause. (*I wouldn't go there **if I were you**. **When I called her**, she was studying.*)

## T

## tense

A grammatical category that is marked by verb inflection. Tenses are used in order to express when an event or action is happening in time or when a state exists.

## time

A concept related to our perception of reality; that part of existence which is measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks etc.

## time marker

A verb or auxiliary that marks the reference point of a non-finite form. (*The telephone **is known to have been invented** by Bell. He **denied** being in love with the suspect. They **must have missed** their flight.*)

## time of speaking

A point in time at which an utterance is made.

## TO-infinitive

The infinitive with *to*. It can be simple (***to write***), continuous (***to be writing***), perfect (***to have written***) or perfect continuous (***to have been writing***).

## transitive verb

A verb that takes a direct object. (*I **know** him quite well.*)

## U

## unreal tense

A verb form that expresses a hypothetical situation. (*I wish you **were** here.*)

## utterance

Something that somebody says in a specific context.

## V

## verb

A part of speech that expresses an action or a state. (*What kind of music do you **like**?*)

## voice

The form of the transitive verb (active or passive) that shows the relation of the subject of the sentence to the action of the verb. In an active sentence, the subject is the agent or doer of the action. (***My mom** made the cake.*) With the passive voice, the subject is the recipient of the action. (***The cake** was made by my mom.*)

## W

## wh-question

A question that starts with a question word. (*What are you doing? How old are you?*)

## Y


### **yes/no question**


A question without a question word; one to which the answer is "yes" or "no". (*Are you old enough to enter?*)


# Symbols used in this book

- *Italics* indicate examples:  
*Can, could, will* and *would* are used to express requests.  
*The book will be published.* (an example of the passive voice)
- **Boldface** in examples highlights the words or phrases under discussion:  
*A few minutes ago, they **were still dancing.*** (past continuous tense)
- An asterisk [ \* ] indicates that a word or phrase is inappropriate or incorrect:  
*\*I **am needing** a new phone. / I **need** a new phone.*  
*\*The **woman who she** answered the door was about forty years old. / The **woman who** answered the door was about forty years old.*
- Brackets ( ) in examples indicate that the word or phrase in brackets can be omitted. *It's (high) time* means that both *it's time* and *it's high time* are acceptable.
- A slash [ / ] in examples indicates an alternative between words or phrases.  
*As if / as though* means that either *as if* or *as though* is acceptable.
- The symbol » indicates a relationship between two items:  
*look » looked* (the base form and past tense form of the verb *look*)  
*I have » I've* (the latter is a contracted form of the former)


## Symbols used in the timeline diagrams

  
TS indicates the time of speaking.

  
indicates a specific point in time: *What were you doing **when you heard the explosion?** They got home **at 10 o'clock.***

  
indicates a period of time: *I haven't smoked **today.** Joe lived in Boston **for ten years.***

  
indicates a completed action: *I **bought** a car yesterday.*

  
indicates an action in progress or happening over a period of time: *It's **raining.** Soon, he'll **have been running** for 4 hours.*

———— indicates a state: *George **likes** pudding. I **was** happy.*

..... indicates repeated or habitual actions: *I **go** to the gym twice a week. I've **been coughing** all day.*

# Bibliography

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# Afterword

Thank you for reading this book.

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Thank you!

Péter Simon



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