

12 Tenses Chart with Examples

Grade/Class 6 to 9, Year 7 to 10. One verb, all twelve tenses.

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There are not twelve rules to learn. There are three times and four aspects, and twelve is simply what you get when you cross them. Read down a column and only the time changes. Read across a row and only the shape changes.

write	Simple	Continuous	Perfect	Perfect continuous
Past	she wrote <i>yesterday</i>	she was writing <i>all afternoon</i>	she had written <i>before I called</i>	she had been writing <i>for an hour before that</i>
Present	she writes <i>every day</i>	she is writing <i>right now</i>	she has written <i>already, so far</i>	she has been writing <i>since seven, for two hours</i>
Future	she will write <i>tomorrow</i>	she will be writing <i>this time tomorrow</i>	she will have written <i>by Friday</i>	she will have been writing <i>for a year by June</i>

Aspect	What it means	How it is built	Picture it as
Simple	One whole action. How long it took does not matter.	the verb on its own	a dot
Continuous	In the middle of happening at that moment.	be plus the -ing form	a line
Perfect	Already finished before that moment, and it still counts there.	have plus V3	a tick placed earlier
Perfect continuous	Running for a stretch that leads right up to that moment.	have been plus the -ing form	a line ending in a tick

THE HELPER LADDER

The helping verbs never swap places. They climb in this order in every one of the twelve tenses: will, then have, then be, then the main verb.

she will have been writing uses all four rungs. she has written uses rungs two and four. she is writing uses rungs three and four.

Whatever sits immediately in front decides the shape of the next word. After a modal, V1. After have, has or had, V3. After a be form, -ing.

Write your verb in the small box on the left of the top row, then fill in the twelve cells. Do it from memory first and check it against page three afterwards. Doing this once a week with a different verb is worth more than reading the chart ten times.

verb:	Simple	Continuous	Perfect	Perfect continuous
Past				
Present				
Future				

TWO QUESTIONS, IN THIS ORDER

1. When did it sit? Past, present or future. That picks the row.
 2. How did it sit in that time? A dot, a line, a tick placed earlier, or a line ending in a tick. That picks the column.
- Ask them in that order. Working from the shape of the words first is what makes students confuse had with has.

VERBS WORTH TRYING IN THE BLANK GRID

Start with a rule keeper, where V2 and V3 are the same word: walk, watch, finish, open, clean.
 Then try a rule breaker, where the third form is its own word: eat ate eaten, go went gone, write wrote written, break broke broken, speak spoke spoken, take took taken.
 The rule breakers are the ones that cost marks, because the third form only ever appears after have, has or had.

The marker word is the fastest way to name a tense, and in an exam it is usually sitting in the question waiting to be found. Read the marker before you look at the verb.

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Tense	Example	Words that give it away
Present simple	She writes letters.	every day, usually, always
Present continuous	She is writing a letter.	right now, at the moment
Present perfect	She has written the letter.	already, just, yet, so far
Present perfect continuous	She has been writing all morning.	since, for two hours
Past simple	She wrote a letter.	yesterday, last week, in 2019
Past continuous	She was writing when I called.	while, all afternoon, when I called
Past perfect	She had written it before I called.	before, by the time, already by then
Past perfect continuous	She had been writing for an hour.	for an hour before that
Future simple	She will write tomorrow.	tomorrow, next week, soon
Future continuous	She will be writing at nine.	this time tomorrow, at nine
Future perfect	She will have written it by Friday.	by Friday, by then
Future perfect continuous	She will have been writing for a year by June.	for a year by June

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