

The lesson on one page

Twelve tenses is not twelve rules. It is three times crossed with four aspects. The time answers when. The aspect answers how the action sits inside that time. Ask both questions in that order and the grid gives you the answer.

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>

THE TWO QUESTION TEST

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.

The helper ladder

A helping verb, also called an auxiliary verb, carries no meaning of its own. It exists only to build a tense around the main verb, and the helpers never swap places. They climb in this order in every one of the twelve tenses.



THE AFTER TEST

The word immediately in front tells the verb what shape to take.

After will, or any modal: the plain V1 form. She will eat.

After have, has or had: always V3. She has eaten.

After am, is, are, was, were, be or been: always the -ing form. She was eating.

Most past participle mistakes are made by a student who knows the word eaten perfectly well and was simply not looking at the word in front of it.

THE WHAT TEST

Say the subject, say the verb, then ask what, or whom.

Ali kicked what? The ball. A word answers, so kicked is transitive and the ball is its object.

Ali arrived what? Nothing can answer, so arrived is intransitive.

A word after the verb is not automatically an object. He slept badly: badly answers how, not what, so slept is intransitive.

This sheet is the printable twin of a free interactive lesson. Everything below can be done on paper alone. The teaching notes on this page are written for the adult; the student pages carry no notes aimed over their head.

If they get stuck, say this

What you see	What to say
They freeze at the word aspect.	Ignore the word. Ask: was it one whole thing, was it in the middle of happening, was it already finished, or had it been running for a while?
They write has went, had drank, have ate.	Point at the word in front. After have, has or had, the verb has to be the third form. Ask them to say the three forms out loud: go, went, gone.
They cannot tell past perfect from present perfect.	Cover the verb. Ask which time the whole sentence is sitting in. Had belongs to the past, has and have belong to now.
They put an s on a modal, as in she cans.	Modals never change for he, she or it. Say the whole set out loud once: can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would.
Everything after the verb looks like an object.	Make them ask the question out loud. Slept badly: slept what? If the question sounds silly, there is no object.

SPLITTING THIS ACROSS TWO SITTINGS

First sitting, about 25 minutes: the lesson page, then Parts A, B and C. That covers naming a tense, the helper ladder and the three verb forms.

Second sitting, about 25 minutes: Parts D, E and F. Part D asks the student to produce a tense rather than recognise one, which is harder, and Part F is proof reading, which is harder again.

Mark Part A together and let the student mark the rest against the key.

Score record

Part	A	B	C	D	E	F	Total
Out of	10	10	10	10	6	6	52
First try							
Second try							

Where American and British spelling differ, this sheet avoids the word. Where a spelling is the lesson itself, both are named and both are correct.

Part A: name the tense (10 marks)

Name the tense of each sentence. Ask when first, then ask how it sits in that time.

1. She has been waiting at the gate since noon.

2. By the time we arrived, the film had started.

3. This time tomorrow we will be flying to Lahore.

4. The postman delivers letters at nine every day.

5. They will have finished the roof by Friday.

6. The mechanic is checking the brakes at the moment.

7. Last winter the pipes froze twice.

8. By June she will have been teaching here for ten years.

9. We have visited that museum three times so far.

10. The children were sleeping when the storm began.

Part B: the helper ladder (10 marks)

Will, then have, then be, then the verb. The order never moves.

11. Which order of helpers is correct? will have been walking, have will been walking, or been will have walking

12. She ____ been revising since seven, and she is still at her desk.

13. I ____ never seen a match like that.

14. The children ____ playing when the rain began.

15. By June next year they ____ lived here for ten years.

16. Right now my father ____ repairing the ceiling fan.

17. Before the rain started, the players ____ been training for an hour.

18. We ____ not allowed to enter the hall yesterday.

19. Look, the baby ____ smiling at you.

20. They ____ lived in Karachi since 2019.

Part C: V1, V2 and V3 (10 marks)

Whatever sits in front decides the shape. After have, has or had it is always V3.

21. What is the V3 form of write?

22. Which sentence is correct? He has went home, or he has gone home.

23. What is the V3 form of break?

24. Which sentence is correct? They had drank all the juice, or they had drunk all the juice.

25. After a modal such as must, which form comes next?

26. What is the V3 form of speak?

27. What is the V3 form of take?

28. What is the V3 form of begin?

29. What is the V3 form of see?

30. What is the V3 form of be?

Part D: build the tense (10 marks)

Read the time words before you write anything.

31. Yesterday the tailor ____ my shirt. (mend)

32. Right now the engineers ____ the new bridge. (test)

33. By the time we arrived, the film ____ already. (start)

34. By next Friday the builders ____ the roof. (complete)

35. Tomorrow the results ____ on the notice board. (appear)

36. Every morning the milkman ____ before six. (arrive)

37. All afternoon the children ____ in the courtyard. (play)

38. Since seven this morning my brother ____ for his test. (revise)

39. This time tomorrow we ____ to Islamabad. (fly)

40. For an hour before the guests came, my mother ____ in the kitchen. (cook)

Part E: transitive or intransitive (6 marks)

Decide whether each verb takes an object. Say the verb, then ask what.

41. The gardener planted forty rose bushes.

42. The train arrived twenty minutes late.

43. She needs a new pencil box.

44. The lights flickered twice during the storm.

45. The old clock stopped at midnight.

46. We enjoyed the concert enormously.

Part F: find the fault and write the line again (6 marks)

Every line below breaks the after test in one place.

47. She has wrote three letters this week.

48. They had went home before the rain started.

49. He can swims faster than anyone in the class.

50. We was watching the match when the power went off.

51. By Sunday they will finished the whole roof.

52. I am knowing the answer to that question.

Part A: name the tense

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Present perfect continuous | 2. Past perfect |
| 3. Future continuous | 4. Present simple |
| 5. Future perfect | 6. Present continuous |
| 7. Past simple | 8. Future perfect continuous |
| 9. Present perfect | 10. Past continuous |

Part B: the helper ladder

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------|
| 11. will have been walking | 12. has |
| 13. have | 14. were |
| 15. will have | 16. is |
| 17. had | 18. were |
| 19. is | 20. have |

Part C: V1, V2 and V3

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 21. written | 22. He has gone home. |
| 23. broken | 24. They had drunk all the juice. |
| 25. V1, the plain form | 26. spoken |
| 27. taken | 28. begun |
| 29. seen | 30. been |

Part D: build the tense

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 31. mended | 32. are testing |
| 33. had started | 34. will have completed |
| 35. will appear | 36. arrives |
| 37. were playing | 38. has been revising |
| 39. will be flying | 40. had been cooking |

Part E: transitive or intransitive

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 41. Transitive | 42. Intransitive |
| 43. Transitive | 44. Intransitive |
| 45. Intransitive | 46. Transitive |

Part F: find the fault and write the line again

47. She has written three letters this week.
48. They had gone home before the rain started.
49. He can swim faster than anyone in the class.
50. We were watching the match when the power went off.
51. By Sunday they will have finished the whole roof.
52. I know the answer to that question.

WHERE THE MARKS USUALLY GO

One mark is given for each correct answer, and 52 marks in total.

In Part D, accept a contraction only if the whole form is right. Learned and learnt are both correct, and so are the two spellings of any verb where American and British usage differ.

In Part F, one mark is given for the corrected line. The student does not have to name the rule to earn it.

The mistake	What it really is	The fix
has went, had drank, have ate	V2 sitting where V3 belongs. The student knows the word gone, they just did not look at the word in front.	Run the after test. Cover everything except the helper.
will finished, will has done	The ladder built out of order, or a rung used twice.	Write the four rungs out and cross off the ones not needed.
she cans, he musts	A modal treated like an ordinary present tense verb.	Modals never take an s and never change shape for a person.
I am knowing, I am wanting	A verb about a state put into the continuous.	Know, want, believe, own and like describe a state, not an action.
Past perfect used where past simple is enough	Over correction. Only use had when one past event clearly finished before another.	Ask: are there two past events here? If not, past simple is right.
Everything after the verb called an object	The what test not actually run out loud.	Make them ask the question. Badly, twice and late are not objects.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Level 4, Voice Vault, uses the what test directly: only a verb with an object can be turned into the passive.

The free interactive version of this lesson has three games, 24 marked exercises and a twelve tense chart to print. It is at <https://numrahedu.com/english/verbs/level-3/>

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