

3 Sense verbs *see, hear, feel, etc.*

We do not usually use the continuous form with verbs which describe a sense or a form of perception, e.g. *hear, notice, see, smell, taste*:

✗ *I'm noticing that your wife never comes to the matches. Doesn't she like cricket?*

✓ *I notice that your wife never comes to the matches. Doesn't she like cricket?*

✗ *I'm hearing that you're not too happy with the management's proposal.*

✓ *I hear that you're not too happy with the management's proposal.*

We usually use the simple form or *can/could* + sense verb when we experience something without intentionally using the sense, i.e. the action is involuntary:

I (can) smell the fertiliser on the fields every time I open the back door!

We also use the simple form when the verb is intransitive:

The fertiliser on the fields smells really horrible!

With *smell* and *taste*, we can use the continuous for a deliberate action:

I (can) taste cream in this. (there is cream in the dish; involuntary action)

I'm tasting the cream. (the cream might be bad; intentional action of checking)



We usually use the verbs *see* and *hear* only in the involuntary sense; we use *look at, watch* or *listen to* for an intentional action:

✗ *Can you keep the noise down? I'm hearing something on the radio.*

✓ *Can you keep the noise down? I'm listening to something on the radio.*

If they have a different meaning, we can use the continuous:

I'm seeing a new doctor now. (= visiting as a patient)



Some verbs of feeling can be used in both the simple and the continuous with no change in meaning:

My wrist hurts/is hurting again – I must go to the physiotherapist.

I think those mussels may have been bad. Do you feel/Are you feeling OK today?

4 Performative verbs *thank, apologise, etc.*

Performative verbs are verbs which can actually perform the action they describe when they are used in the first person and the present tense; they address the listener/reader directly:

On behalf of the company, I apologise for any inconvenience caused.

Common examples are:

accept agree apologise congratulate declare deny disagree forbid forgive guarantee insist invite order predict promise recommend refuse request suggest thank warn

When we use these verbs in the present, they are usually in the simple form:

Railtrack apologises for the disruption to services this weekend.

We recommend the new tapas restaurant in the town centre.

If we use these verbs to refer to the past or future, we can use them in the continuous form.

Compare:

PRESENT ✗ *I'm thanking you all for joining us today.*

✓ *I thank you all for joining us today.*

PAST ✓ *He warned the children not to swim too far from the beach.*

✓ *When we arrived, he was warning the children not to swim too far from the beach.*

FUTURE ✓ *I'm inviting about sixty people to Jenna's party – OK?*