

Grammar and practice

1 Personal development

Tense and aspect

Tense is how verb forms are related to time. In English we can choose present or past. Aspect refers to how we see things: perfect (completed or finished) or continuous (in progress). As English has no future tense, lots of other forms are used instead (see module 2.3).

Present tense	
+ nothing (i.e. simple)	<i>I live</i>
+ perfect aspect	<i>I have lived</i>
+ continuous aspect	<i>I am living</i>
+ perfect and continuous aspects	<i>I have been living</i>
Past tense	
+ nothing (i.e. simple)	<i>I lived</i>
+ perfect aspect	<i>I had lived</i>
+ continuous aspect	<i>I was living</i>
+ perfect and continuous aspects	<i>I had been living</i>

Conversations and narratives use the widest range of tenses and aspects. Academic writing has fewer verbs with an aspect and the continuous is particularly unusual. Over 90% of verbs in academic texts are in the present or past simple.

1 Fill in the spaces in the text below with an appropriate verb from the box. Do not change the verb form.

be don't envisage has suggested intend 'm put smarten up to build to take to watch 've been learning 've learned

Over the next two years my plan is (1) _____ on what I have achieved recently and make myself more employable. First, I (2) _____ to focus on brushing up my academic writing skills in English. That will (3) _____ a good start. I (4) _____ English for about six years now, but it's only recently that I (5) _____ how to write an academic essay in English. I (6) _____ any particular obstacles as far as my work is concerned, but I do need (7) _____ the initiative more. My line manager (8) _____ that I (9) _____ my appearance a bit. I guess he has a point. I should also consistently (10) _____ work first – after all I (11) _____ not a student anymore! It would be disastrous for my colleagues (12) _____ me throw away everything I've worked for so far. In short my new motto is: focus, plan, act!

Some structures are normally followed by the past tense, even though the actual time being referred to is the present. These include: *it's (about/high) time*, *I wish*, *I'd rather* and unreal (hypothetical) *if*.

In the structure *have something (done)* we use the past participle. Informally we can say *get something done*.

2 Complete the sentences by putting the verb in brackets into the most appropriate tense and aspect.

- 1 It's time I _____ (look) again at my training priorities.
- 2 Commodity prices _____ (not rise) this fast since 2008.
- 3 I wish I _____ (have) more time to finish the job properly.
- 4 Our sales figures _____ (get) worse by the day – something must be done about it.
- 5 I had the document _____ (draw up) by the new legal firm – they did a great job.
- 6 How long _____ (be) you here for – is it next Tuesday you fly back?
- 7 It _____ (be) when I was flying to Shanghai that the idea came to me.
- 8 That must be the tenth time you _____ (ask) me that question.
- 9 I need a reply. Tell Francesca I _____ (wait) for her to get back to me.
- 10 _____ (you/write) many applications yet?
- 11 This time I really _____ (need) you to deliver the goods and come up with something brilliant.
- 12 I'd rather you _____ (not advertise) that position just yet – we haven't definitely got funding for it.
- 13 You look like you _____ (run) through the rain – why are you all wet?
- 14 You _____ (look) a lot more up for it these days – I guess your holiday did you the world of good.

The present continuous

This may refer to the immediate present, but it often refers to around now, whether the weeks, months or years (or longer) around now. In all cases the present continuous refers to events which are unfinished.

3 Read the sentences below and decide whether the present continuous in each one is most likely to refer to: right now (RN), around now (AN), the longer term (LT) or the future (F).

- 1 The polar ice caps are melting.
- 2 I'm seeing Diego then – how about 11.30?
- 3 The local currency is still slipping against the euro.
- 4 He's becoming more and more forgetful.
- 5 Ahmad's just finishing it off – I'll get it to you very soon.
- 6 I'm working on my dissertation so I won't be able to see you for a while.
- 7 Sea levels are rising and some low-lying coastal settlements are being threatened.
- 8 She's having a baby.
- 9 Are you laughing at me?
- 10 They're building a new multimedia centre when the old library gets knocked down.