

All tenses - revision

Grammar Lesson, Examples & 30 Practice Questions

All Tenses – Revision

English has many tenses, and each one tells us something different about **when** something happens, **how long** it lasts, and **whether it is finished** or still continuing. At B2 level, you are expected to use all the main tenses accurately and to choose between them with confidence.

This lesson is a complete revision of all the main English tenses. We will look at each tense, its form, its main uses, and clear examples. We will also highlight the most important differences between similar tenses and the most common mistakes learners make.

By the end of this revision, you will have a clear overview of all tenses in one place — a useful reference you can return to whenever you need it.

The Present Tenses

Present Simple

Form: subject + base verb (+ -s/-es for third person singular)

She **works** in a hospital.

They **play** football every Sunday.

He **doesn't eat** meat.

Main uses:

- Habits and routines: *I go to the gym three times a week.*
- General truths and facts: *Water boils at 100°C.*
- Permanent situations: *She lives in Madrid.*
- Schedules and timetables: *The train leaves at 9.15.*

Present Continuous

Form: subject + *am/is/are* + verb-*ing*

She **is working** late tonight.

They **are playing** in the garden right now.

He **isn't listening** to me.

Main uses:

- Actions happening now, at this moment: *I'm writing an email.*
- Temporary situations: *He's staying with his parents this week.*
- Future arrangements (fixed plans): *We're meeting them on Friday.*

- Changing or developing situations: *Prices are rising quickly.*
- Annoying habits (with *always*): *She's always losing her keys!*

Present Perfect Simple

Form: subject + *have/has* + past participle

I **have visited** Japan twice.

She **has just finished** her report.

They **haven't seen** that film yet.

Main uses:

- Past experiences (when the time is not specified): *Have you ever tried sushi?*
- Recent actions with a result in the present: *I've lost my wallet — I can't find it anywhere.*
- With *just, already, yet, still*: *He's already left.*
- With *for* and *since* for unfinished time periods: *I've lived here for ten years.*

Present Perfect Continuous

Form: subject + *have/has been* + verb-*ing*

I **have been waiting** for an hour.

She **has been studying** all morning.

They **haven't been sleeping** well lately.

Main uses:

- Actions that started in the past and are still continuing: *He's been working here since 2018.*
- Actions that have recently stopped but have a visible result: *She looks tired — she's been running.*
- To emphasise the duration of an activity: *We've been talking for two hours!*

The Past Tenses

Past Simple

Form: subject + past form of the verb (regular: -*ed*; irregular: learned separately)

She **worked** in London for five years.

They **went** to the cinema last night.

He **didn't enjoy** the concert.

Main uses:

- Completed actions at a specific time in the past: *I called you at 8 o'clock.*
- A sequence of past events: *She arrived, sat down, and opened her laptop.*
- Past habits or states (often with *used to*): *We used to live in the countryside.*

Past Continuous

Form: subject + *was/were* + verb-*ing*

She **was cooking** when I arrived.

They **were watching** a film at midnight.

He **wasn't paying** attention.

Main uses:

- An action in progress at a specific moment in the past: *At 7pm, I was having dinner.*
- A background action interrupted by a shorter action: *I was reading when the phone rang.*
- Two simultaneous past actions: *While she was cooking, he was setting the table.*

Past Perfect Simple

Form: subject + *had* + past participle

She **had already left** when I arrived.

They **had never seen** snow before.

He **hadn't finished** his work, so he stayed late.

Main uses:

- An action completed before another past action: *By the time we got there, the show had started.*
- To make the order of past events clear: *She explained what had happened.*
- With reporting verbs and reported speech: *He said he had sent the email.*

Past Perfect Continuous

Form: subject + *had been* + verb-*ing*

She **had been working** all day, so she was exhausted.

They **had been arguing** before I walked in.

He **hadn't been sleeping** well for weeks.

Main uses:

- An ongoing action that continued up to a specific past moment: *I had been waiting for an hour when she finally called.*
- To explain the cause of a past situation: *His eyes were red because he had been crying.*

The Future Tenses

Will (Future Simple)

Form: subject + *will* + base verb

I **will help** you with that.

She **won't be** at the meeting.

Do you think it **will rain** tomorrow?

Main uses:

- Spontaneous decisions made at the moment of speaking: *I'll answer the phone.*
- Predictions based on opinion or belief: *I think she'll pass the exam.*
- Promises, offers, and requests: *I'll always be here for you.*

- Facts about the future: *The sun will rise at 6.30 tomorrow.*

Be Going To

Form: subject + *am/is/are going to* + base verb

I **am going to apply** for that job.

She **is going to have** a baby.

They **aren't going to travel** this year.

Main uses:

- Plans and intentions decided before the moment of speaking: *We're going to redecorate the flat.*
- Predictions based on present evidence: *Look at those clouds — it's going to rain.*

Future Continuous

Form: subject + *will be* + verb-*ing*

At this time tomorrow, I **will be flying** to Rome.

She **will be presenting** her results next week.

They **won't be working** on Saturday.

Main uses:

- An action that will be in progress at a specific time in the future: *This time next week, we'll be lying on the beach.*
- Expected or planned events that are part of a normal routine: *Will you be passing the post office? Could you post this letter?*

Future Perfect Simple

Form: subject + *will have* + past participle

By June, she **will have finished** her degree.

They **will have left** by the time you arrive.

I **won't have saved** enough money by then.

Main uses:

- An action that will be completed before a specific time in the future: *By next year, I will have lived here for a decade.*

Future Perfect Continuous

Form: subject + *will have been* + verb-*ing*

By Friday, she **will have been working** here for twenty years.

They **will have been travelling** for twelve hours by the time they land.

Main uses:

- To emphasise the duration of an action that will still be in progress up to a future point: *By the time the project ends, we will have been working on it for two years.*

Complete Tenses Reference Table

Tense	Form	Example	Key Use
Present Simple	work / works	She works every day.	Habits, facts, timetables
Present Continuous	am/is/are working	She is working now.	Actions happening now, future plans
Present Perfect Simple	have/has worked	She has worked there for years.	Experience, recent results, unfinished time
Present Perfect Continuous	have/has been working	She has been working all day.	Ongoing actions, emphasis on duration
Past Simple	worked / went	She worked yesterday.	Completed past actions, specific time
Past Continuous	was/were working	She was working when I called.	Background action, interrupted action
Past Perfect Simple	had worked	She had already worked there.	Action before another past action
Past Perfect Continuous	had been working	She had been working for hours.	Ongoing action before a past moment
Future Simple (will)	will work	She will work tomorrow.	Decisions, predictions, promises
Be Going To	am/is/are going to work	She is going to work late.	Plans, evidence-based predictions
Future Continuous	will be working	She will be working at noon.	Action in progress at a future time
Future Perfect Simple	will have worked	She will have worked here for a year.	Completed before a future point
Future Perfect Continuous	will have been working	She will have been working for hours.	Duration up to a future point

Important Differences Between Similar Tenses

Past Simple vs. Present Perfect Simple

This is one of the most common areas of confusion. Use the **past simple** when you mention or imply a finished time. Use the **present perfect** when the time is not specified or when there is a connection to the

present.

I saw her yesterday. → Past simple — *yesterday* is a finished, specific time.

I have seen her. → Present perfect — no specific time; the experience is what matters.

He worked in Paris in 2015. → Finished time in the past.

He has worked in Paris. → We don't know when; it's life experience.

Present Perfect Simple vs. Present Perfect Continuous

Both refer to the past with a connection to the present, but they have a different focus:

- **Present Perfect Simple** focuses on the *result* or *completion*: *I have read that book.* (I finished it.)
- **Present Perfect Continuous** focuses on the *duration* or *ongoing process*: *I have been reading that book.* (I'm still reading it, or I've been busy with it.)

She has written three reports. → Focus on number/completion.

She has been writing reports all morning. → Focus on how long she's been busy.

Past Continuous vs. Past Simple

Use these together when a longer background action is interrupted by a shorter, sudden action.

*I **was having** a shower when the alarm **went** off.*

→ The shower (past continuous) was the background action. The alarm (past simple) was the interrupting event.

Will vs. Be Going To

Will = spontaneous decision or prediction based on opinion:

"The phone's ringing." "I'll get it."

I think prices will increase next year.

Be going to = prior plan or prediction based on evidence you can see:

I'm going to call the plumber — our sink is broken.

She's going to fall — look at her balance!

Future Continuous vs. Future Simple

Will describes a single event or decision:

I'll call you tomorrow.

Future continuous describes an event in progress at a specific future time, or something expected as part of a routine:

I'll be calling you at 3pm — don't go out.

Stative Verbs — Important Note for All Tenses

Some verbs describe states, not actions. These verbs are **not normally used in continuous tenses**, even when the situation is temporary or ongoing. Common stative verbs include: *know, believe, understand, want, need, like, love, hate, prefer, seem, belong, contain, mean, own, remember, forget, hear, see, smell, taste.*

✗ *I am knowing the answer.*

✓ **I know the answer.**

✗ *She is wanting a coffee.*

✓ **She wants a coffee.**

Note: some verbs can be stative or active depending on their meaning.

*I **think** it's a good idea.* → stative (= opinion)

*I **am thinking** about changing jobs.* → active (= considering, process)

*She **has** a car.* → stative (= possession)

*She **is having** lunch.* → active (= experiencing an event)

Common Mistakes

✗ *I have seen her yesterday.*

✓ **I saw her yesterday.** — Use the past simple with specific finished time expressions like *yesterday*, *last week*, *in 2020*, etc.

✗ *She is working here since 2019.*

✓ **She has been working here since 2019.** — Use the present perfect (continuous) with *since* and *for* to describe unfinished time periods.

✗ *When I arrived, she cooked dinner.*

✓ **When I arrived, she was cooking dinner.** — Use the past continuous for the ongoing background action.

✗ *By the time we got there, the film started.*

✓ **By the time we got there, the film had started.** — Use the past perfect for the action that happened first.

✗ *I'm going to answer the phone. Hold on.* (when the phone has just started ringing)

✓ **I'll answer the phone. Hold on.** — Use *will* for spontaneous decisions made at the moment of speaking.

✗ *He didn't arrive yet.*

✓ **He hasn't arrived yet.** — Use the present perfect with *yet* in negative sentences.

✗ *We are knowing the truth.*

✓ **We know the truth.** — *Know* is a stative verb and is not used in continuous tenses.

✗ *I have been writing five emails this morning.* (if the morning is finished)

✓ **I have written five emails this morning.** — Use the present perfect simple when focusing on the completed result or quantity.

✗ *She will have been finishing the project by tomorrow.*

✓ **She will have finished the project by tomorrow.** — Use the future perfect simple (not continuous) when focusing on completion.

✗ *While I read, she was cooking.*

✓ **While I was reading, she was cooking.** — When two actions are happening simultaneously in the past, both should be in the past continuous.

Tense Signals — Key Time Expressions

Certain time expressions are strong signals for particular tenses. Learning these can help you choose the correct tense quickly.

Time Expression	Typical Tense	Example
every day / usually / often / never	Present Simple	She usually walks to work.
at the moment / right now / currently	Present Continuous	He's currently studying in Berlin.
just / already / yet / ever / never / since / for	Present Perfect Simple	Have you ever been to Scotland?
for / since / all day / all morning / lately / recently	Present Perfect Continuous	She's been studying for hours.
yesterday / last week / in 2010 / ago / in those days	Past Simple	They moved here two years ago.
at 5pm (past) / when / while / as	Past Continuous	At 5pm, she was leaving the office.
by the time / before / already / just (past)	Past Perfect Simple	She had already left by the time I arrived.
tomorrow / next week / soon / in the future	Will / Be Going To	They'll arrive tomorrow.
this time tomorrow / at 6pm tomorrow	Future Continuous	This time tomorrow, I'll be travelling.
by next year / by the end of the month / by then	Future Perfect Simple	By June, she will have graduated.

Narrative Tenses — Using Tenses Together in a Story

In storytelling and writing, it is common to use several past tenses together. Each tense plays a different role in the narrative:

- **Past Simple** → for the main events of the story (what happened)
- **Past Continuous** → for background scenes and interrupted actions
- **Past Perfect Simple** → for events that happened before the main story begins
- **Past Perfect Continuous** → for ongoing situations that led up to the main story

Read this short example and notice how all four tenses work together:

*It **was** a dark, rainy evening. Maria **was driving** home from work when her phone **rang**. It was her sister. She explained that their mother **had been feeling** unwell all day and **had finally decided** to call the doctor. Maria immediately **turned** the car around and **headed** to her mother's house.*

- *was a dark, rainy evening* — past simple, setting the scene
- *was driving* — past continuous, ongoing background action
- *rang* — past simple, sudden interrupting event

- *had been feeling* — past perfect continuous, ongoing situation before the main events
- *had decided* — past perfect simple, action before the phone call
- *turned, headed* — past simple, main events of the story

All Tenses – Revision: Quick Summary

Here is a final overview of the key points from this all tenses revision:

- **Present Simple** → habits, facts, permanent situations, timetables
- **Present Continuous** → actions happening now, temporary situations, future arrangements
- **Present Perfect Simple** → experience, recent results, unfinished time (*for/since*)
- **Present Perfect Continuous** → ongoing actions, emphasis on duration
- **Past Simple** → completed past actions at a specific time
- **Past Continuous** → background actions, interrupted actions, simultaneous past actions
- **Past Perfect Simple** → action completed before another past action
- **Past Perfect Continuous** → ongoing action that led up to a past moment
- **Will** → spontaneous decisions, predictions, promises, offers
- **Be Going To** → prior plans, evidence-based predictions
- **Future Continuous** → action in progress at a future time, expected events
- **Future Perfect Simple** → action completed before a future point
- **Future Perfect Continuous** → duration of action up to a future point

Remember: choosing the correct tense depends on **when** the action happens, **how long** it lasts, **whether it is finished**, and its **connection to another time**. Time expressions are your best clues.

Now practise **all tenses** in the exercises below.

All tenses - revision – Practice Test

B2 | 30 Questions: Multiple Choice, Fill-in-the-Gap & Fill-in-the-Blank

Part 1: Multiple Choice (Questions 1–10)

1 By the time we arrived at the station, the train ____ already ____.

- A** has / left
- B** had / left
- C** was / leaving
- D** would / leave

2 I ____ for this company for ten years next June.

- A** will work
- B** am working
- C** will have been working
- D** have worked

3 She ____ a novel when the phone rang.

- A** read
- B** was reading
- C** has read
- D** had been reading

4 He told me he ____ the report the following day.

- A** will finish
- B** finishes
- C** would finish
- D** has finished

5 I ____ to the gym three times this week, and it's only Wednesday.

- A** went
- B** go
- C** have been
- D** was going

6 By 2030, scientists ____ a cure for many diseases.

- A** will find
- B** find
- C** will have found
- D** are finding

7 They ____ in Paris for two years before they decided to move back.

- A** lived
- B** have lived
- C** were living
- D** had been living

8 Look at those dark clouds! It ____ soon.

- A** is going to rain
- B** will rain
- C** rains
- D** has rained

9 We ____ dinner when you called, so we couldn't answer immediately.

- A** had
- B** have had
- C** were having
- D** have been having

10 She ____ Spanish for two years, so she speaks it quite well now.

- A** studied
- B** has been studying
- C** studies
- D** is studying

Part 2: Fill in the Gap (Questions 11–20)

11 By the time we arrived at the theatre, the performance ____ already ____.

- A** had already started
- B** already started
- C** has already started

12 She ____ for this company for ten years when she finally got promoted.

- A** had been working
- B** has been working
- C** was working

13 I ____ my keys everywhere but I still can't find them.

- A** have been looking for
- B** am looking for
- C** looked for

14 By next summer, they ____ the new bridge.

- A** will have completed
- B** will complete
- C** are completing

15 When I was a child, we ____ to the seaside every August.

- A** used to go
- B** were going
- C** have gone

16 She realised she ____ her passport at home.

- A** had left
- B** has left
- C** was leaving

17 Don't call me at 8 p.m. — I ____ dinner with my family.

- A** will be having
- B** will have
- C** am having

18 The report ____ to the board of directors by the end of this week.

- A** will have been submitted
- B** will be submitting
- C** has been submitted

19 While Tom ____ his presentation, the projector suddenly broke down.

- A** was giving
- B** gave
- C** had given

20 I ____ this novel three times already — it's absolutely brilliant.

- A** have read
- B** read
- C** am reading

Part 3: Fill in the Blank (Questions 21–30)

21 By the time we arrived at the station, the last train _____ .

22 She _____ at the company for over five years and still enjoys her job.

23 Don't call him between 8 and 9 — he _____ his weekly meeting then.

24 Look at those dark clouds! It _____ any minute now.

25 I _____ a novel when suddenly the lights went out.

26 By next June, they _____ the construction of the new bridge.

27 He _____ Japan three times, so he knows the culture well.

28 We _____ for almost an hour before the doctor finally called us in.

29 She rarely _____ to the gym on weekdays because she finishes work late.

30 At this time tomorrow, I _____ over the Atlantic on my way to New York.

Answer Key & Explanations

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Part 1: Multiple Choice

1. **B** Correct Answer: had / left ✓ Explanation: We use the past perfect (had + past participle) to describe an action that was completed before another past event. The train had already left before we arrived.
2. **C** Correct Answer: will have been working ✓ Explanation: We use the future perfect continuous to emphasise the duration of an action that will still be in progress at a specific future point. Next June signals a future deadline, making will have been working the correct choice.
3. **B** Correct Answer: was reading ✓ Explanation: The past continuous (was/were + -ing) describes an action that was in progress when another shorter action interrupted it. She was reading when the phone rang.
4. **C** Correct Answer: would finish ✓ Explanation: In reported speech, when the reporting verb is in the past (told), will changes to would. He said he would finish it the following day.
5. **C** Correct Answer: have been ✓ Explanation: The present perfect is used for actions that happened within an unfinished time period (this week). Have been indicates repeated visits with a connection to the present.
6. **C** Correct Answer: will have found ✓ Explanation: The future perfect (will have + past participle) is used to describe an action that will be completed before a specific point in the future. By 2030 is the future deadline.
7. **D** Correct Answer: had been living ✓ Explanation: The past perfect continuous (had been + -ing) emphasises the duration of an activity that was ongoing before a specific past event. They had been living there for two years before they moved.
8. **A** Correct Answer: is going to rain ✓ Explanation: We use be going to when there is present evidence for a future prediction. The dark clouds are visible evidence that rain is coming soon.
9. **C** Correct Answer: were having ✓ Explanation: The past continuous is used for an action that was in progress at the moment another action occurred. Were having dinner was interrupted by when you called.
10. **B** Correct Answer: has been studying ✓ Explanation: The present perfect continuous (has/have been + -ing) is used to show an activity that started in the past and is still relevant now, often explaining a present result. She has been studying Spanish, which is why she speaks it well.

Part 2: Fill in the Gap

11. **A** Correct Answer: had already started ✓ Explanation: We use the past perfect to describe an action that was completed before another past action. By the time we arrived, the performance had already started.
12. **A** Correct Answer: had been working ✓ Explanation: The past perfect continuous is used to show a continuing action that happened before a specific point in the past. She had been working there for ten years when she got promoted.
13. **A** Correct Answer: have been looking for ✓ Explanation: The present perfect continuous expresses an ongoing action that started in the past and is still relevant now. I have been looking for my keys everywhere.
14. **A** Correct Answer: will have completed ✓ Explanation: The future perfect describes an action that will be finished before a specific future time. By next summer, they will have completed the bridge.
15. **A** Correct Answer: used to go ✓ Explanation: Used to expresses a past habit or repeated action that no longer happens. We used to go to the seaside every August.
16. **A** Correct Answer: had left ✓ Explanation: The past perfect shows that leaving her passport happened before she realised it, both actions being in the past. She realised she had left her passport at home.
17. **A** Correct Answer: will be having ✓ Explanation: The future continuous describes an action that will be in progress at a specific future moment. I will be having dinner at 8 p.m.
18. **A** Correct Answer: will have been submitted ✓ Explanation: The future perfect passive is used when an action will be completed by a future deadline and the agent is not mentioned. The report will have been submitted by the end of the week.
19. **A** Correct Answer: was giving ✓ Explanation: The past continuous describes a background action in progress when a sudden interrupting event occurred. While Tom was giving his presentation, the projector broke down.
20. **A** Correct Answer: have read ✓ Explanation: The present perfect is used with already to express life experiences or repeated actions with a connection to the present. I have read this novel three times already.

Part 3: Fill in the Blank

21. **had already left** Correct Answer: had already left ✓ Explanation: We use the past perfect to show that one past action happened before another past action. The train left before we arrived.
22. **has been working|has been working** Correct Answer: has been working ✓ Explanation: We use the present perfect continuous to describe an action that started in the past and is still continuing. The time expression for over five years confirms this.

23. **will be having** Correct Answer: will be having ✓ Explanation: We use the future continuous to describe an action that will be in progress at a specific moment in the future. He will be having a meeting at that time.
24. **is going to rain|'s going to rain** Correct Answer: is going to rain ✓ Explanation: We use be going to for predictions based on present evidence. The dark clouds are visible evidence that rain is coming.
25. **was reading** Correct Answer: was reading ✓ Explanation: We use the past continuous for a background action that was in progress when a shorter event (past simple) interrupted it. Was reading is the longer action; went out is the interruption.
26. **will have completed|will have completed** Correct Answer: will have completed ✓ Explanation: We use the future perfect to describe an action that will be finished before a specific point in the future. By next June signals this structure.
27. **has visited|'s visited** Correct Answer: has visited ✓ Explanation: We use the present perfect for past experiences with relevance to the present. The number of visits explains his current knowledge of the culture.
28. **had been waiting** Correct Answer: had been waiting ✓ Explanation: We use the past perfect continuous to emphasise the duration of an action that was ongoing up to a point in the past. For almost an hour highlights the duration.
29. **goes** Correct Answer: goes ✓ Explanation: We use the present simple for habits and routines. The adverb rarely and the general routine described confirm this tense is correct.
30. **will be flying|'ll be flying** Correct Answer: will be flying ✓ Explanation: We use the future continuous to describe an action that will be in progress at a specific future time. At this time tomorrow confirms we need the future continuous.

Score Guide

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 27–30 Correct | Excellent! You have mastered this topic. |
| 23–26 Correct | Very good! Review the rules you missed. |
| 18–22 Correct | Good start. Re-read the lesson and examples. |
| 0–17 Correct | Study the lesson again before retaking the test. |