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The present

Present simple (*I walk*) and present continuous (*I am walking*)

The present simple is used for facts, habits, routines, and schedules.

All our employees speak English. (fact)
I break for lunch at 12.30. (habit / routine)
Mr Wu's flight arrives at 18.45. (schedule)

The present continuous is used to talk about actions happening at or around the time of speaking, temporary actions, and developing actions.

She's visiting a client at the moment. (time of speaking)
I'm still working on my MBA. (around now)
We're using headhunters to recruit the new director. (temporary action)
Our products are becoming better known worldwide. (developing action)

Present perfect (*I have walked*)

The present perfect is used for past actions which have some effect on or result in the present: for example, to describe actions in unfinished time periods, or actions that have very recently happened (including news).

We haven't heard anything about the contract. (unfinished time period = from start of waiting to now)
We've just relocated to Paris. Everything's very hectic. (very recently happened)
Someone's broken into the CEO's office! (news)

The present perfect continuous (*I have been walking*) is used when we want to emphasize the action rather than its result, and to stress how long something has taken.

I've been travelling for thirty-two hours.
American English uses perfect tenses less often than British English. For example, the past simple is often used where British English uses the present perfect.
I already gave back the laptop. (BrE: I've already given back the laptop.)

The past

Past simple (*I walked*)

The past simple is used for actions that happened in finished time periods, past situations, and past habits and routines.

I worked far too hard during my twenties. (finished time period = my twenties)
My father had three employees. I have 3,000. (past situation)
Every few weeks she threatened to quit, so I'm not surprised. (habit / routine)

Past continuous (*I was walking*)

The past continuous is used for actions in progress at a time in the past. It can give background information when used with the past simple (which gives the main information).

I was travelling to work at 7.30. (in progress)
She was considering taking early retirement when they fired her. (background information)

Past perfect (*I had walked*)

The past simple is the most common tense used for past actions. The past perfect is used with the past simple to show earlier actions.

Several markets had reported problems with the product, so we withdrew all stock.
Often, especially in American English, the past simple is used in both cases.
We stopped production as several markets reported problems.
There is also a past perfect continuous, used to emphasize the length of an action.
She looked tired at the meeting, as she had been travelling for 32 hours.

Used to and be / get used to

Used to can refer to past habits, routines, and states. We do not use it when we talk about exactly when something happened, or for how long.

Before email, we used to send everything by post.
Where did you use to work?

Be used to is different. We use it when someone is familiar with something. Get used to means 'become familiar with'.

I'm used to working late, unfortunately.
I'm getting used to working from home now – it was lonely at first.

State and action verbs

Some verbs describe states – of being, thinking, belonging, feeling, tasting, etc. These state verbs are always used in simple tenses.

My boss thinks he's always right. I disagree. (way of thinking)
Our offices have an onsite fitness centre. (possession)
Most of the food in the canteen tastes of cardboard! (sense)

Action verbs describe things happening, and can have simple or continuous forms.

The staff team's playing football tonight. They play every Wednesday evening.

Some state verbs can also be used with active meanings. With these meanings, continuous tenses are possible.

I was thinking of resigning anyway. (action: considering)
I'm having lunch with the Polish rep tomorrow. (action: eating)
I'm tasting thirty wines tonight for the company ball. (action: trying out a food / drink)

The future

Will future (*I will walk*)

Will is used for general predictions about the future, especially for things we can be sure about.

Interest rates will rise later this year in order to cool inflation.

Will is often used for offers, promises, and immediate decisions.

The machine's broken, so I'll go outside for some coffee.
(immediate decision)

Your train's cancelled? I'll give you a lift if you like. (offer)
I'll spend less time on the Internet from now on. (promise)

Going to future (*I am going to walk*) and present continuous for the future

Going to, like *will*, is used for predictions about the future. Often both forms are possible. But we use *going to* especially when the prediction is based on present evidence.

Interest rates are going to rise later this year, the bank's quarterly report suggests.

Both *going to* and the present continuous are used to describe future arrangements. Usually both tenses are possible, but we use *going to* especially when the arrangement is a plan or an intention (not fixed), and the present continuous when the arrangement is definite.

We're going to take on three more people at associate level, as long as the finance committee approves it.

We're taking on three more people at associate level. The jobs were advertised in this morning's paper.

Future continuous (*I will be walking*)

We use the future continuous when we predict what will be in progress in the future.

I'll be giving presentations all morning.

We use the future continuous to talk about things that are a result of plans, routines, and arrangements. The present continuous and *going to* are usually also possible.

We'll be stopping for coffee at 11.30, and after that Tomas will be giving a talk on brand recognition.

Future perfect (*I will have walked*)

The future perfect is used to show that an action will be complete before a specified future time, or before another future event.

We will have opened branches in Prague, Budapest, and Lisbon by 2015.
I'm so late – the meeting will have finished by the time I arrive.

There is also a future perfect continuous. This is used to focus on an action, rather than its result.

Petr will have been working here thirty years this July.

Conditionals

Most conditionals contain a clause beginning with *if*. This clause usually comes first, but not always. We use conditionals to talk about one thing causing another, and for suggestions, advice, criticism, offers, requests, etc.

If the train's late again, I'll scream. (cause and effect)
I'd take the job if I were you. (advice)

We can use other phrases instead of *if* in conditionals. See Unit 37 for examples. These clauses follow the same patterns as the *if*-clauses below.

Zero conditional (*If they cancel a flight, they lose thousands.*)

The zero conditional is used when one thing always follows another. Present tenses are used in both clauses.

If you're late, it looks unprofessional.

First conditional (*If they cancel the flight, I'll call you.*)

The first conditional is used for realistic possibilities. We use a present tense (simple, continuous, or perfect) in the *if*-clause, and *will* in the main clause.

If the meeting goes well, we'll have a deal.

If he's lived here for ten years, he'll know the way to the conference centre.

Second conditional (*If they cancelled the flight, I'd be furious.*)

The second conditional is used for hypothetical possibilities: with unreal situations, or future situations that are less likely to happen than in a first conditional. We use a past tense in the *if*-clause, and *would* (or *could* / *might*) in the main clause.

If our offices were open-plan, we'd have less privacy. (unreal situation = they're not open-plan)

If sanctions were imposed on that market, we'd lose 10% of worldwide sales. (unlikely situation = sanctions probably won't be imposed)

Third conditional (*If they hadn't cancelled the flight, we would have been in Tokyo twelve hours ago.*)

The third conditional is used for past possibilities that did not happen. We use the past perfect in the *if*-clause, and *would have* in the main clause.

They would have been market leaders by now if they'd followed my advice. (= but they didn't)

If Tony hadn't been so ambitious, our family life would have been happier. (= but he was)

Mixed conditional (*If they hadn't cancelled the flight, we'd be in Tokyo now.*)

Other tense combinations are possible, for example to talk about a past possibility with a present result.

If those files hadn't been lost, we'd all be at home by now.

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Passives

We use a tense of *be* + past participle to form the passive.

She was told about her promotion yesterday. (past simple *be* = was, past participle = told)

Those made redundant will be given three months' salary. (future *be* = will be, past participle = made)

We use a passive to focus on an action or those affected by an action, rather than on those doing the action. Often we don't know who did the action, or it's not important, but we can use *by* if we want to say who did the action.

Letters are being sent to those affected. (= we don't know who's sending the letters)

The thief has been arrested. (= not important who arrested him)
She was recruited by my predecessor.

We often use a passive to describe a process, such as the manufacture of a product.

The parts are made in China and the machines are assembled at our plant in India. Then they're shipped to distributors in fifteen countries, to be sold all round the world. (passive verbs = are made, 're assembled, 're shipped, to be sold)

Modal verbs

The modal verbs are: *can, could, may, might, will, would, shall, should, must, and ought to*. *Need* can be a modal verb or an ordinary verb. We use modals to talk about ability (*can*), necessity (*must, need*), obligation and advice (*should, ought to*), permission (*can, may*), deductions (*must, can't*), possibility (*could, may, might*), and hypothesis (*would*).

Their forms are always the same. There is no infinitive, no -ing form, and no third person -s. To make a modal verb negative, add -n't or *not*. In questions, the modal verb goes before the subject (without *do*).

I can't see you ... This videoconferencing machine might be broken. Erm, could you phone the support staff?

A modal verb is followed by the infinitive without *to* of an ordinary verb. The infinitive may be perfect, continuous, or passive. (The forms with the perfect infinitive are sometimes called 'past modals'.)

You must remember to apply the discount – it should be showing on the till.

They should have warned us that they might be held up.

It is sometimes possible to use a phrase in place of a modal verb: for example, *be able to* for *can / could* (to talk about ability / possibility), *have to* for *must*, *be supposed to* for *ought to / should*, *be allowed to* for *can / may* (to talk about permission). This is especially useful when we need a form that is impossible with a modal verb.

To be able to work effectively in teams is essential to this role.

(~~To can work~~...)

Having to take minutes of every meeting is such a chore.

(~~Meeting take~~...)

Must and have to

We use both *must* and *have to* to talk about obligation. We use *must* when the obligation is the speaker's, and *have to* when it comes from outside the speaker – although *have to* is often used in both senses.

I must / have to remember to phone my wife from the conference. (personal obligation)

All conference delegates have to collect a welcome pack. (rule)

In the negative, we use *don't have to* when something is unnecessary, and *mustn't* when something is forbidden or wrong.

You mustn't print out images from banned websites. (= it's banned)

You don't have to print out the images – I'll bring paper copies. (= it's unnecessary)

We can use *must* with a perfect infinitive for certainty about the past. In the negative and questions, we use *can, not must*.

Distribution costs must have risen.

She can't have signed the invoice in the right place.

To talk about an obligation in the past, use *had to* (not *must*).

We had to open all our cases at the customs desk.

Can / could and was / were able to

We can use *be able to* in place of *can* to talk about ability.

She's not able to come to the meeting, but her assistant can come instead.

In the past, we use *could* to talk about general ability, and *was / were able to* when we are talking about ability on specific occasions.

We could work from home in my previous job. (general ability = no specific time)

I was able to work from home on Friday, as I had no meetings. (a specific time = for a specific reason)

Need and need to

Need can be used with the form of a modal verb (no third person -s, no infinitive, etc.) or an ordinary verb.

She needn't ask before borrowing the keys. (modal) or

She doesn't need to ask before borrowing the keys. (non-modal)

We use *need* as a modal verb to talk about necessity in specific, immediate situations. We can also use the ordinary verb form in these situations. We always use the ordinary verb *need* to talk about general necessity.

You needn't / don't need to come to the strategy meeting tomorrow.

You don't need to come to strategy meetings, but you can if you want to. (~~You needn't come~~...)

Articles, nouns, and quantifiers

The indefinite article (a / an)

Use *a / an* to talk about something for the first time.

There's a new receptionist on duty. (= first mention of the new receptionist)

That's a nice file. Is it new? (= we have never talked about the file before)

Use *a / an* to define something.

A memory stick is a storage device. (= definition of a memory stick)

Use *a / an* when ordering one of something.

I'll have a whisky and a glass of white wine, please.

The definite article (the)

Use *the* when you talk about an object and you expect the other person to know exactly what / who you are talking about – for example, after mentioning something for the first time, or when there is only one of something.

The meeting yesterday wasn't very productive. (= everyone knows which meeting)

There's a new receptionist on duty. She's the third new receptionist this month.

The CEO's PA needs the password for the account.

Many nouns use the structure *the* ___ of ___.

the head of Shell
the top of the stairs
the Confederation of British Industry

When you mean 'all of a kind', use either *the* + singular noun or use a plural noun with no article. To talk about classes of people, you can use either *the* + adjective or adjective + plural noun.

The computer has revolutionized business.
Computers have revolutionized business.
The young are so badly qualified.
Young people are so badly qualified.

No article

General descriptions of uncountable nouns do not use an article.

Life is hard.

General descriptions of countable nouns do not use an article. The countable noun becomes plural.

Applicants should submit a CV and covering letter.
(~~the applicants / an applicant~~)

Compound nouns

Compound nouns are made up of two or more nouns. We only add *-s* to the final noun.

Our phone bills are too high, the accounts manager told us.

We can also make compound nouns from other parts of speech.

away day heads up get together

Group nouns

Some singular nouns refer to several people (or things), e.g. *team, committee*. When we are thinking of these collective nouns as one unit, we use a singular verb. When we are thinking of them as a collection of individuals, we can use either a singular or plural verb (in American English, always singular).

The government is going to put up income tax. The public are likely to have different views on this.

When we think of a plural quantity or amount as a single unit, a singular verb is used.

An MBA and three degrees is impressive.
Five courses is too much at lunchtime.

Plural-only and singular nouns

Plural-only nouns are nouns not used in the singular, such as *clothes, outskirts, congratulations*. Singular nouns end in *-s* but are used only in the singular, such as *news, economics, athletics*.

Quantifiers

Quantifiers tell us the number or amount of something. The most common are: (*a*) *few, many, each, every, much, (a) little, some, any, most, several, no*. They usually precede a noun, but they can sometimes replace nouns (as pronouns).

Have you been on many courses? – Yes, several.

A few and *many* are used only with plural countable nouns. *Each* and *every* are used only with singular countable nouns. *Much* and (*a*) *little* are used only with uncountable nouns.

A few customers buy every product we make, with little discernment.

Adverbs

Adverbs tell us when, where, or how an action happens. They can usually go at the beginning of a clause, at the end, or before the main verb. The position depends on the type of adverb and its role in the sentence.

Stupidly, I forgot to save the document.
I stupidly forgot to save the document.
I forgot to save the document, stupidly.

Adverbs of degree usually go before adjectives or other adverbs, and modify their meaning.

I'm very busy at the moment.
She loses concentration too easily.

But they can also precede and modify a verb.

I really think we should extend the deadline.

We use the adverbs *only, even, just, and at least* to focus on one part of a clause.

Even a monkey could do the maths on this project!
Just three people received higher bonuses than me.

Adverbs such as *when, once, and after* can tell us the order in which things happened (sequence).

I'll go home after I've replied to this email.
When our product is launched, we can all relax.

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We use the adverbs *when*, *while*, and *as* for things that happened at the same time.

While we were at the conference, our offices were closed.
They bowed when I expected to shake hands.

Verbs

Gerund or infinitive?

Some verbs are followed by an *-ing* form. Others have an infinitive.

My job involves travelling a lot. (~~involves to travel~~)
She seems to be away from her desk. (~~seems being~~)

A few verbs can be followed by either an *-ing* form or an infinitive, with little difference in meaning.

In good weather, I prefer to cycle / cycling to work.

With other verbs, the meaning changes.

I remember meeting you at the Copenhagen conference.
(remember + *-ing* form = past reference)
I hope they remember to meet me at the airport. (remember + infinitive = future reference)

With *advise*, *allow*, *permit*, and *forbid*, we use an infinitive if there is an object, or an *-ing* form if there is no object.

She advised me to take early retirement.
I'd advise taking early retirement if you can afford it.

Phrasal verbs

A phrasal verb is a verb followed by a short adverb ('particle'). Some phrasal verbs do not have an object, and others do.

I get up at 6.45 every day. (no object)
They've put up prices. (object = prices)

If the object is a noun, it can go before or after the particle. If the object is a pronoun, it must go before (not after) the particle.

They've put the launch off until April. or
They've put off the launch until April.
They've put it off until April. (~~They've put off it until April.~~)

A prepositional verb is a verb followed by a preposition + object. The object cannot go in between the verb and preposition.

Don't think about the future – it comes soon enough. (~~Don't think the future about....~~)

Three-part verbs have verb + adverb + preposition. The object goes after the preposition.

I'm looking forward to the weekend.

Sentences and clauses

Compound and complex sentences

Sentences made up of more than one clause may be of two types. In compound sentences, the clauses are joined with *and*, *but*, or *or* (these are co-ordinating conjunctions). The information in each clause is equally important.

You talk about strategy and I'll give the annual results.
business one : one

A complex sentence has a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses. The subordinate clause is preceded by a word such as *because*, *before*, *that*, *which*, *in order that*, *since*, *when*, or *who*.

Since the water cooler's broken, drinks in the restaurant will be free today.

Relative clauses

Relative clauses give more information about a noun phrase in the preceding clause. They begin with a relative pronoun: *who*, *whom*, *which*, or *that*. Note that *whom* is used only in formal English, and is quite rare.

Defining relative clauses give information without which the sentence would not be complete. They most often begin with the relative pronoun *that*.

She's the candidate *that* we'll appoint.

We can use the relative pronouns *who*, *whom*, and *which*, in place of *that*, or we can miss it out.

She's the candidate *who* / *whom* we'll appoint.
She's the candidate we'll appoint.

Non-defining relative clauses give information that is not essential to our understanding. They must begin *who*, *whom*, or *which* (not *that* and not without any pronoun). We usually separate them with commas.

The candidate we saw second, *whom* we appointed, was the most impressive.

Reduced relative clauses do not have a relative pronoun, and they use a participle in place of a full verb phrase.

The best candidate will be the one combining enthusiasm and experience. (= the one that / *who* combines)
Interviewees dressed in cartoon ties make a bad first impression. (= *who* are dressed)

A present participle replaces an active verb; a past participle replaces a passive verb.

Cleft sentences

We can begin a sentence with *it* or *what* to emphasize one part of the sentence.

It was in Italy that sales grew most. (= sales grew most in Italy)
What boosted sales growth most was the weak dollar. (= the weak dollar boosted sales growth most)

The emphasis in the first (*It*) sentence is on the words after *it*. In the second (*what*) sentence, the emphasis is on the phrase at the end. Cleft sentences are also used for a better flow from one sentence to another.

Result clauses

We can join clauses and sentences with *so* to say that one thing results from (is a consequence of) another. *Consequently*, *therefore*, and *as a result* are also used.

The talks broke down, so the union went on strike.
There were bad floods. Consequently, all trains were delayed.

So (...) *that* is often used in patterns with adjectives, adverbs, or quantifiers. Informally, *that* is sometimes omitted.

The talks were so unproductive that the union went on strike.
(adjective = unproductive)

The talks ended so bitterly that the union went on strike. (adverb = bitterly)
They had so many demands that a strike was inevitable.
(quantifier = many)

So and so that are used to talk about the consequences of an action. We use so ... for unintended consequences (things that weren't planned) and so that for intended (planned) consequences.

Sue's resigned, so we'll need to advertise her job.
Sue's resigned so that she can spend more time on her novel.

Reported speech

Reported speech means using our own words to report someone else's meaning.

We use a reporting verb such as say, ask, suggest, or agree, followed by that or a question word (who, what, etc.). Informally, that, what, etc. is omitted.

She said (that) she had retired the previous year. (what she said = I retired last year)

We usually go back a tense (present simple → past simple, present perfect → past perfect, past simple → past perfect).

I retired last year. → She said (that) she had retired the previous year.

Modal verbs also change: can → could, will → would, may → might, shall → would (for predictions) / should (for suggestions / offers).

What can you bring to the role? → They asked what I could bring to the role.

Pronouns also change to match the speaker.

I retired → She said she had retired ...

Time phrases also change: now → then, tomorrow → the next / following day, yesterday → the day before / the previous day.

Different reporting verbs have different patterns.

She said (that) she'd take the job. (no indirect object = she said me →)

She told me (that) she'd take the job. (indirect object = me)

She promised to take the job. (verb + to infinitive)

We congratulated her on taking the job. (verb + preposition + -ing form)

I advised her to take the job. (verb + object + to infinitive)

We can use a passive reporting verb with it or there.

There were reported to be major problems.

It was suggested that he was underqualified.

Reported questions

To report a yes / no question, we use if / whether.

Is that your best offer? → I asked if it was their best offer.

When we report open questions, the subject comes before the verb.

What would you like? → He asked what I would like.