

## Verb Tenses

A verb indicates the time of an action, event or condition by changing its form. Through the use of a sequence of tenses in a sentence or in a paragraph, it is possible to indicate the complex time-based relationship of actions, events, and conditions

There are many ways of categorizing the twelve possible verb tenses. The verb tenses may be categorized according to the **time frame** (past tenses, present tenses, and future tenses) or **aspect**, which refers to the nature of the action described by the verb.

Past Tenses	Present Tenses	Future Tenses
simple past ("I went") past progressive ("I was going") past perfect ("I had gone") past perfect progressive ("I had been going")	simple present ("I go") present progressive ("I am going") present perfect ("I have gone") present perfect progressive ("I have been going")	simple future ("I will go") future progressive ("I will be going") future perfect ("I will have gone") future perfect progressive ("I will have been going")

There are three aspects: **indefinite (or simple)**; **complete (or perfect)**; **continuing (or progressive)**.

The three **indefinite tenses**, or **simple tenses**, describe an action, but do not state whether the action is finished: simple past ("I went"); the simple present ("I go"); the simple future ("I will go").

A verb in the **indefinite aspect** is used when the beginning or ending of an action, an event, or condition is unknown or unimportant to the meaning of the sentence. The indefinite aspect is also used to indicate a habitual or repeated action, event, or condition.

The three **complete tenses**, or **perfect tenses**, describe a finished action: the past perfect ("I had gone"); the present perfect ("I have gone"); the future perfect ("I will have gone").

A verb in the **complete aspect** indicates that the end of the action, event, or condition is known and is used to emphasize the fact that the action is complete. The action may, however, be completed in the present, in the past, or in the future.

The three **incomplete tenses**, or **progressive tenses**, describe an unfinished action: the past progressive ("I was going"); the present progressive ("I am going"); the future progressive ("I will be going").

A verb in the **continuing aspect** indicates that the action, event, or condition is ongoing in the present, the past, or the future.

It is also possible to **combine the complete tenses and the incomplete tenses**, to describe an action which was in progress and then finished: the past perfect progressive ("I had been going"); the present perfect progressive ("I have been going"); the future perfect progressive ("I will have been going").

Each of the twelve verb tenses has a very specific function. Your job as a writer is to first determine what it is you want to do, say, or convey, and then match the correct verb tense for your desired function. It will also be important to keep verb tense consistent whenever possible, only shifting tense to indicate shifts in time or aspect.