Every language in the world has **verb tenses**. These tenses, which refer to the present, past, and future, explain when something — such as an action, event, or state -– happened. The problem is that although all languages have verb tenses, not all languages have the same verb tenses or use them in a similar way. That’s why **English tenses** are often confusing to ESL students.

The charts below provide a quick reference to help you understand the tenses in English more easily:

* Chart 1 lists each English tense and explains when to use it.
* Chart 2 gives an example of each tense, in active and passive form.
* Chart 3 provides time words and expressions commonly used with the verb tenses, to help you recognize when to use each tense.

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| Overview of English Verb Tenses |
| Present Simple | Usage: | general action, habitual action, general truth |
| Example: | *I work in a hospital.* |
| Present ContinuousPresent Progressive | Usage: | ongoing or temporary action |
| Example: | *Sorry, I can’t talk right now. I am working.* |
| Past Simple | Usage: | completed action or condition |
| Example: | *I worked for ten hours yesterday.* |
| Past ContinuousPast Progressive | Usage: | past ongoing action, past interrupted action |
| Example: | *I was working on my project when you called.* |
| Future | Usage: | planned or unplanned future action |
| Example: | *I will work at the main branch next week.* |
| Present Perfect | Usage: | action that happened at an indefinite time in the past and continues to the present |
| Example: | *I have worked at the bank for three years.* |
| Past Perfect | Usage: | past action that happened before another past action. |
| Example: | *I had already worked for several years before I got married.* |
| Future Perfect | Usage: | future action that will happen before another future action |
| Example: | *I will have worked here for five years next July.* |
| Present Perfect ContinuousPresent Perfect Progressive | Usage: | past action that started in the past and continues to the present |
| Example: | *I have been working on that project for the last two weeks.* |
| Past Perfect ContinuousPast Perfect Progressive | Usage: | past ongoing action that was completed before some other past action |
| Example: | *I had been sleeping at my desk when my boss fired me.* |
| Future Perfect ContinuousFuture Perfect Progressive | Usage: | future ongoing action that will occur before another action |
| Example: | *I will have been working here for ten years tomorrow, so we’re having a party.* |

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| Examples of English Verb Tenses |
| Verb Tense | **Example – ACTIVE** | **Example – PASSIVE** |
| Present Simple | I work. | The work is done. |
| Present ContinuousPresent Progressive | I am working. | The work is being done. |
| Past Simple | I worked. | The work was done. |
| Past ContinuousPast Progressive | I was working. | The work was being done. |
| Future | I will work.I’m going to work. | The work will be done.The work is going to be done. |
| Present Present | I have worked. | The work has been done. |
| Past Perfect | I had worked. | The work had been done. |
| Future Perfect | I will have worked. | The work will have been done. |
| Present Perfect ContinuousPresent Perfect Progressive | I have been working. | – |
| Past Perfect ContinuousPast Perfect Progressive | I had been working. | – |
| Future Perfect ContinuousFuture Present Progressive | I will have been working. | – |

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| Common Time Expressions for English Verb Tenses |
| Verb Tense | **Example – ACTIVE** | **Time Clues** |
| Present Simple | I work. | every day / morning / nightalwaysneversometimesusuallyfrequentlyrarelyseldom |
| Present ContinuousPresent Progressive | I am working. | nowright nowat the present timethis weekend |
| Past Simple | I worked. | yesterdaylast nightlast week / month / yearlast summer / winter |
| Past ContinuousPast Progressive | I was working. | whilewhen |
| Future | I will work.I’m going to work. | tomorrownext week / month /yearin the futuresoon |
| Present Present | I have worked. | sinceuntil noweverneverfor two hours / days / monthsmany times |
| Past Perfect | I had worked. | alreadyby the timetill thentill that time |
| Future Perfect | by the time…already | The work will have been done. |
| Present Perfect ContinuousPresent Perfect Progressive | for the past four yearsfor the last two daysup to now | – |
| Past Perfect ContinuousPast Perfect Progressive | I had been working. | beforesincefor three hours / days / weeks |
| Future Perfect ContinuousFuture Present Progressive | I will have been working. | by the timefor six months / years |