MANAGING VERB TENSES INCLUDING THE PERFECT AND PROGRESSIVE TENSES

Introduction

The series of handouts on “Managing Verb Tenses” is designed to explain the perfect tenses. However, to understand how to write with the perfect tenses, it is also necessary to include a brief discussion of the simple tenses as well. Many beginning writers are content to only misuse the perfect tenses—when and if they do use them—but, most often, they simply ignore tenses other than the simple past, present, and future.

First of all, why are so many variations in verb used in the English language? Why are there present, past perfect, present progressive, past, past perfect, past perfect progressive and many other tenses? Why is there so much trouble from grade to grade both in teaching and in learning how to use verbs in the English language? Also, why do we need action verbs, state of being verbs, auxiliary verbs, verb phrases, verbals, and active and passive voices?

People are complex, and language reflects these complexities. The verb system in English helps to express variation in time that would otherwise be lost. What, for example, are the differences in the following sentences:

1. I wrote a letter
2. I have been writing this letter for an hour
3. I have already written a letter
4. I had written a letter before I studied for astronomy

Let's diagram the activities.

The diagram below will be used to explain the way verbs can be used to depict various time zones.

| Present
| Past -------------- Future
| TS – Time of Speaking
**Simple Past Tense**

I wrote a letter.

**Perfect Present Progressive**

I have been writing this letter for an hour.

The verb phrase “have been writing” suggests an activity that started at a time in the past (an hour ago) and continues to the present and perhaps, into the future. The progressive tense is formed by adding “ing” to the verb—run; running, play; playing; go, going—and by joining this main verb the auxiliary (or helping) verbs “have been.”

**Present Perfect Tense**

I have already written a letter.
The verb phrase “have already written” suggests that an activity started in the past was closely linked to the present.

**Past Perfect Tense**

I had written a letter before I studied astronomy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XX</td>
<td>TS – (Time of Speaking)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The verb phrase “had written” suggests that one action (“had written”) was completed at some time in the past and, in addition, completed before another simple past action (“studied”).

It is important to realize that there are five principle parts or tenses or verbs:

**REGULAR VERBS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Present + s</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Past Participial</th>
<th>Present Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Walk</td>
<td>walks</td>
<td>walked</td>
<td>walked</td>
<td>walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Jump</td>
<td>jumps</td>
<td>jumped</td>
<td>jumped</td>
<td>jumping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Play</td>
<td>plays</td>
<td>played</td>
<td>played</td>
<td>playing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**IRREGULAR VERBS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Write writes</td>
<td>wrote written writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. See sees</td>
<td>saw seen seeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Go goes</td>
<td>went gone going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do does</td>
<td>did done doing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The future tenses of the verb simply utilizes the present tense form with an auxiliary like, will, should, may, can.

*The past participle is composed of the verbs have of has plus the main verb.*
The first tenses to understand are the present and present progressive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Present Progressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I vote early.</td>
<td>Joe is voting for the favored candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari votes early too.</td>
<td>She is picking a different candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James plays the guitar.</td>
<td>I am planning to sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see the flag.</td>
<td>They are running late, so they will not see the flag</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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TS – (Time of Speaking)

The present tenses utilize the first part of the verb; the present progressive tense utilizes the fifth part of the verb along with the part of the verb to be (am, is, are):

I am running.
He is running.
They are running.

Also, the present tense is closely tied to the “time of speaking,” whereas the present progressive tense indicates an activity in progress at the time of speaking and slightly beyond. Notice the difference in usage between the present and the present progressive tenses. In the present tense, the action could have occurred in the past, but it is reported in the present. In the sentence “I vote early,” the suggestion maybe that the individual has voted several times in the past and when he does vote, it is usually early in the morning, perhaps, at 7:00 a.m. or 8:00 a.m. To put the sentence in the past tense, “I voted early,” indicates the action already occurred. To use the present progressive suggests that the action is occurring “right now.” The only major grammatical difference between the present and the present progressive tense is that the present progressive calls for the use of an auxiliary (am, is, are) plus the verb with an “ing” suffix.
EXERCISE WITH THE PRESENT AND PRESENT PROGRESSIVE TENSES

Directions: Circle the correct present or present progressive verbs.

1. He (try, tries, trying) too hard.
2. John (running, is running, were running) around the clock.
3. She always (go, going, goes) to school alone.
4. I (write, writes, writing) a letter to my brother every day.
5. They (love, loves, is loving) swimming because it (help, helps, helping) them lose weight.
6. Mary (is studying, study, studies) for the math exam right not, but later on she can (help, helps, helping) with the dishes.
7. Francis (work, works, is working) with his computer right now, but he (is planning, plans, plan) to go out tonight.
8. The baker (is trying, tries, are trying) to bake pizza.
9. We (are running, runs, run) late, so we (is going, goes, are going) without him.
10. Angela (sees, see, is seeing) the counselor on Thursday, so I am (seeing, see, will be seeing) him on Monday.