

## 17 The present tenses

*There are two present tenses in English:*

*The present continuous: I am working.*

*The simple present: I work.*

### The present continuous

#### 164 Form

*The present continuous tense is formed with the present tense of the auxiliary verb be + the present participle:*

<u>Affirmative</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Interrogative</u>
I am working	I am not working	am I working?
you are working	you are not working	are you working?
he/she/it is working	he/she/it is not working	is he/she/it working?
we are working	we are not working	are we working?
you are working	you are not working	are you working?
they are working	they are not working	are they working?

Negative interrogative: *am I not working? are you not working? is he not working?* etc.

*Contractions: the verb be can be contracted as shown in 102 B, so the present continuous of any verb can be contracted:*

<u>Affirmative</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Negative</u>
<u>interrogative</u>		
I'm working	I'm not working	aren't I working?
you're working	you're not/you aren't working	aren't you working?
he's working etc.	he's not/he isn't working etc.	isn't he working? etc.

*Note the irregular contraction aren't I? for am I not?*

*Interrogative contractions: am, is, are may be contracted as shown in 104 B:*

*Why's he working? Where're you working?*

#### 165 The spelling of the present participle

- A When a verb ends in a single e, this e is dropped before ing:  
*argue, arguing      hate, haling      love, loving*

except after age, dye and singe:

*ageing      dyeing      singeing*

and verbs ending in ee:

*agree, agreeing      see, seeing*

- B When a verb of one syllable has one vowel and ends in a single consonant, this consonant is doubled before ing:

*hit, hitting      run, running      stop, stopping*

Verbs of two or more syllables whose last syllable contains only one vowel and ends in a single consonant double this consonant if the stress falls on the last syllable:

*admit, admitting      begin, beginning      prefer, preferring*

but

*budget, budgeting*      *enter, entering*  
(stress not on the last syllable).  
A final *l* after a single vowel is, however, always doubled:  
*signal, signalling*      *travel, travelling*  
except in American English.

- C **ing** can be added to a verb ending in **y** without affecting the spelling of the verb:  
*carry, carrying*      *enjoy, enjoying*      *hurry, hurrying*

## 166 Uses of the present continuous tense

- A For an action happening now:  
*It is raining.*  
*I am mil wearing a coat as it isn't cold.*  
*Why are you sitting at my desk?*  
*What's the baby doing? ~ He's tearing up a £5 note.*
- B For an action happening about this time but not necessarily at the moment of speaking:  
*I am reading a play by Shaw.* (This may mean 'at the moment of speaking' but may also mean 'now' in a more general sense.)  
*He is teaching French and learning Greek.* (He may not be doing either at the moment of speaking.)

When two continuous tenses having the same subject are joined by **and**, the auxiliary may be dropped before the second verb, as in the above example. This applies to all pairs of compound tenses:

*She was knitting and listening to the radio.*

For a definite arrangement in the near future (the most usual way of expressing one's immediate plans):

*I'm meeting Peter tonight. He is taking me to the theatre.*

*Are you doing anything tomorrow afternoon? ~ Yes, I'm playing tennis with Ann.*

Note that the time of the action must always be mentioned, as otherwise there might be confusion between present and future meanings, *come and go*, however, can be used in this way without a time expression. (See 202 B.)

## 167 Other possible uses of the present continuous

- A With a point in time to indicate an action which begins before this point and probably continues after it:

*At six I am bathing the baby.* (I start bathing him before six.)

Similarly with a verb in the simple present:

*They are flying over the desert when one of the engines fails.*

The present continuous is rarely used in this way except in descriptions of daily routine and in dramatic narrative, but the past continuous is often combined with a point in time or a verb in the simple past. (See 179 B, C.)

- B With **always**:

*He is always losing his keys.*

This form is used, chiefly in the affirmative:

For a frequently repeated action, usually when the frequency annoys the speaker or seems unreasonable to him: *Tom is always going away for weekends* (present continuous) would imply that he goes away very often, probably too often in the speaker's opinion. But it does not necessarily mean that he goes away every weekend. It is not a literal statement.

Compare with **always** + simple present:

*Tom always goes away at weekends = Tom goes away every weekend.* (a literal statement)

**I/we + always** + continuous tense is also possible here. The repeated action is then often accidental:

*I'm always making that mistake.*

For an action which appears to be continuous:

*He's always working = He works the whole time.*

This sort of action quite often annoys the speaker but doesn't necessarily do so: *He's always reading* could imply that he spends too much time reading, but could also be said in a tone of approval.

The first person could be used here too. The action then, like the other actions here in 2, is usually deliberate.

## 168 Verbs not normally used in the continuous tenses

The continuous tenses are chiefly used for deliberate actions. Some verbs are, therefore, not normally used in the continuous and have only one present tense, the simple present. These verbs can be grouped as follows:

- A Verbs of the senses (involuntary actions): **feel, hear, see, smell**; also **notice** and **observe** (= notice), and **feel, look, taste** used as link verbs (see 18 B, C). **For feel, look, smell, taste**, see also 169. For **hear** and **see**, see also 170.

Verbs such as **gaze, listen, look** (at), **observe** (= watch), **stare** and **watch** imply deliberate use of the senses, and can, of course, be used in the continuous tenses:

*Watch! ~ I am watching but I don't see anything unusual.*

*He is listening to a tape, but he's wearing earphones so nobody else hears it.*

- B Verbs expressing feelings and emotions, e.g. **admire** (= respect), **adore, appreciate** (= value), **care for** (= like), **desire, detest, dislike, fear, hate, like, loathe, love, mind** (= care), **respect, value, want, wish**.

But the continuous can be used with **admire** meaning 'look at with admiration', **appreciate** meaning 'increase in value', **care for** meaning 'look after', **long for, mind** meaning 'look after/concern oneself with', **value** meaning 'estimate the financial worth of', **enjoy** and sometimes **like/love** meaning 'enjoy', and **hate** meaning the opposite, though it is safer to use the simple tenses with **like, love** and **hate**:

*He's enjoying his holiday in the Arctic. He hates tourist places and he doesn't mind the cold.*

*I'm minding my own business.*

*How are you liking/Do you like your new job? ~ I'm hating it/I hate it. I just don't like work, you see.*

- C Verbs of mental activity, e.g. **agree, appreciate** (= understand), **assume, believe, expect** (= think), **feel** (= think), **feel sure/certain, forget, know, mean, perceive, realize, recall, recognize, recollect, remember, see** (= understand), **see through someone** (= penetrate his attempt to deceive), **suppose, think** (= have an opinion), **trust** (= believe/have confidence in), **understand**. But the continuous can be used with **appreciate** meaning 'to increase in value'. See also 171 for **think, assume, expect**.

- D Verbs of possession: **belong, owe, own, possess**:

*How much do I owe you?*

- E The auxiliaries, except **be** and **have** in certain uses. (See 113 B, 115 B, 123.)

**appear** (= seem), **concern, consist, contain, hold** (= contain) **keep** (= continue), **matter, seem, signify, sound** (= seem/appear):

*It concerns us all. This box contains explosives.*

But **appear** meaning 'to come before the public' can be used in the continuous.

## 169 **feel, look, smell** and **taste** used in the continuous forms

- A **feel**

**feel**, when followed by an adjective indicating the subject's emotions or a physical or mental condition, e.g. *angry/pleased, happy/sad, hot/cold, tense/relaxed, nervous/confident*, is normally used in the simple tenses but can also be used in the continuous:

*How do you feel/are you feeling? ~ I feel/am feeling better.*

**feel** meaning 'touch' (usually in order to learn something) can be used in the continuous:

*The doctor was feeling her pulse.*

Similarly, **feel for** meaning 'try to find something by touching':

*He was feeling for the keyhole in the dark.*

But **feel** is not used in the continuous when it means 'sense':

*Don't you feel the house shaking?*

when it means 'think':

*I feel you are wrong*

and when it is used as a link verb:

*The water feels cold.*

**B look**

The continuous is not used with **look** used as a link verb, e.g. *That cake looks good*, or with **look on** (= consider), **look up to** (= respect) and **look down on** (= despise) (see chapter 38). But **look (at)**, **look for/in/into/out** and **look on** (= watch) are deliberate actions and can be used in the continuous tenses:

*He is looking for his glasses.*

*I'm looking out for a better job.*

**C smell**

The continuous is not used with **smell** meaning 'perceive a scent/an odour', e.g. *I smell gas*, or with **smell** used as a link verb, but can be used with **smell** meaning 'sniff at':

*Why are you smelling the milk? Does it smell sour?*

**D taste**

**taste** as a link verb is not used in the continuous:

*This coffee tastes bitter.* (has a bitter taste)

But **taste** meaning 'to test the flavour of' can be used in the continuous:

*She was tasting the pudding to see if it was sweet enough.*

**170 see and hear used in the continuous forms**

**A see** can be used in the continuous when it means 'meet by appointment' (usually for business), 'interview':

*The director is seeing the applicants this morning.*

*I am seeing my solicitor tomorrow.* (See 202.)

Also when it means 'visit' (usually as a tourist):

*Tom is seeing the town/the sights.*

It can also be used in the continuous in the following combinations:

**see about** = make arrangements or enquiries:

*We are seeing about a work permit/or you.* (trying to arrange this)

**see to** = arrange, put right, deal with:

*The plumber is here. He is seeing to the leak in our tank.*

**see somebody out** = escort him/her to the door.

**see somebody home** = escort him/her home.

**see somebody to** + place = escort him/her to + place:

*ANN: Is Bill seeing you home after the party?*

*MARY: No, he's just seeing me to my bus.*

**see someone off** = say goodbye to a departing traveller at the starting point of his journey (usually the station, airport etc.):

*We're leaving tomorrow. Bill is seeing us off at the airport.*

**B hear** can be used in the continuous when it means 'listen formally to' (complaints/evidence etc.):

*The court is hearing evidence this afternoon.*

**hear** meaning 'receive news or letters' can also be used in the continuous form but only in the present perfect and future:

*I've been hearing ail about your accident.*

*You 'll be hearing about the new scheme at our next meeting.*

171 **think, assume and expect used in the continuous forms**

- A **think** can be used in the continuous when no opinion is given or asked for:  
*What are you thinking about? ~ I'm thinking about the play we saw last night. But  
 What do you think of it? (opinion asked for) ~ I don't think much of it. (opinion given)  
 Tom is thinking of emigrating. What do you think of the idea? ~ I think it is a stupid idea.  
 He should stay where he is.*
- B **assume** can be used in the continuous when it means 'accept as a starting point':  
*I'm assuming that you have time to do a lot of research.*  
**assume** power/control of a country or organisation can also be used in the continuous:  
*The new government is assuming power at once.*
- C **expect** can be used in the continuous when it means 'await':  
*I'm expecting a letter. She's expecting a baby in May.*

The simple present tense

172 Form

In the affirmative the simple present has the same form as the infinitive but adds an **s** for the third person singular.

Affirmative	Negative	Interrogative	Negative interrogative
I work	I do not work	do I work?	do I not work?
you work	you do not work	do you work?	do you not work?
he/she/it works	he/she/it does.	does he/she/it work?	does he/she/it work not work?
we work	we do not work	do we work?	do we not work?
you work	you do not work	do you work?	do you not work?
they work	they do not work	do they work?	do they not work?

Irregular verbs form this tense in exactly the same way.

Contractions: the verb **do** is normally contracted in the negative and negative interrogative (see 103 A): *I don't work, he doesn't work, don't, I work? doesn't he work?*

Spelling notes

Verbs ending in **ss, sh, ch, x** and **o** add **es**, instead of **s** alone, to form the third person singular:

*I kiss, he kisses                      I box, he boxes  
 I rush, he rushes                    I do, he does  
 I watch, he watches                I go, he goes*

When **y** follows a consonant we change the **y** into **i** and add **es**:

I carry, he carries                      I copy, he copies      I try, he tries  
 but verbs ending in **y** following a vowel obey the usual rule:  
*obey, he obeys                          I say, he says*

173 The simple present used to express habitual action

The main use of the simple present tense is to express habitual actions:

*He smokes.                      Dogs bark.                      Cats drink milk.*

This tense does not tell us whether or not the action is being performed at the moment of speaking, and if we want to make this clear we must add a verb in the present continuous tense:

*He's working. He always works at night.  
 My dog barks a lot, but he isn't barking at the moment.*

The simple present tense is often used with adverbs or adverb phrases such as: *always, never, occasionally, often, sometimes, usually, every week, on Mondays, twice a year etc.:*

*How often do you wash your hair?*

*I go to church on Sundays*

*It rains in winter.*

or with time clauses expressing routine or habitual actions.

**whenever** and **when** (= whenever) are particularly useful:

*Whenever it rains the roof teaks.*

*When you open the door a light goes on.*

#### 174 Other uses of the simple present tense

A It is used, chiefly with the verb say, when we are asking about or quoting from books, notices or very recently received letters:

*What does that notice say? ~ It says, 'No parking.'*

*What does the book say? ~ It says, 'Cook very slowly.'*

*I see you've got a letter from Ann. What does she say? ~ She says she is coming to London next week.*

*Shakespeare says, 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be.'*

Other verbs of communication are also possible:

*Shakespeare advises us not to borrow or lend.*

*A notice at the end of the road warns people not to go any further.*

B It can be used in newspaper headlines:

**MASS MURDERER ESCAPES**

**PEACE TALKS FAIL**

C It can be used for dramatic narrative. This is particularly useful when describing the action of a play, opera etc., and is often used by radio commentators at sports events, public functions etc.:

*When the curtain rises, Juliet is writing at her desk. Suddenly the window opens and a masked man enters.*

D It can be used for a planned future action or series of actions, particularly when they refer to a journey. Travel agents use it a good deal.

*We leave London at 10.00 next Tuesday and arrive in Paris at 13.00. We spend two hours in Paris and leave again at 15.00. We arrive in Rome at 19.30, spend four hours in Rome etc.*

E It must be used instead of the present continuous with verbs which cannot be used in the continuous form, e.g. love, see, believe etc., so that we can say I love you but not I am loving you. (See 168.)

F It is used in conditional sentences, type 1 (see 221):

*If I see Ann I'll ask her.*

*Unless you take the brake off the car won't move.*

G It is used in time clauses

(a) when there is an idea of routine:

*As soon as he earns any money he spends it.*

*She takes the boy to school before she goes to work.*

(b) when the main verb is in a future form (see 342):

*It will stop raining soon.*

*Then we'll go out. = When it stops raining we'll go out.*



Examples of type (a):

*He worked in that bank for four years.* (but he does not work there now)

*She lived in Rome for a long time.* (but she is not living there now)

Examples of type (b):

My grandmother once saw Queen Victoria.

Did you ever hear Maria Callas sing?

These will be clearer when compared with the present perfect (see 182-4).

C The simple past tense is also used for a past habit:

*He always carried an umbrella.*

*They never drank wine.* (For **used to** indicating past habits, see 162.)

D The simple past is used in conditional sentences, type 2 (see 222). (For use of the unreal past after *as if*, *as though*, *it is time*, *if only*, *wish*, *would sooner/rather*, see chapters 28, 29.)

## The past continuous tense

### 178 Form

The past continuous tense is formed by the past tense of the verb **to be** + the present participle:

<u>Affirmative</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Interrogative</u>
I was working	I was not working	was I working?
you were working	you were not working	Were you working?
he/she/it was working	he/she/it was not working	was he/she/it working?
we were working	we were not working	were we working?
you were working	you were not working	were you working?
they were working	they were not working	were they working?

Negative contractions: *I wasn't working*, *you weren't working* etc.

Negative interrogative: *was he not/wasn't he working?* etc.

See 165 for spelling of the present participle. Remember that some verbs cannot be used in the continuous tenses (see 168).

### 179 Main uses of the past continuous tense

The past continuous is chiefly used for past actions which continued for some time but whose exact limits are not known and are not important. It might be expressed diagrammatically.

'.....' indicates uncertainty about times of starting or finishing:

..... \_\_\_\_\_ .....

Used without a time expression it can indicate gradual development:

*It was getting darker. The wind was rising.*

Used with a point in time, it expresses an action which began before that time and probably continued after it. *At eight he was having breakfast* implies that he was in the middle of breakfast at eight, i.e. that he had started it before eight. *He had breakfast at eight* would imply that started it at eight.

If we replace the time expression with a verb in the simple past tense:

*When I arrived*

X

..... \_\_\_\_\_ • \_\_\_\_\_ .....

# Tom was talking on the phone

We convey the idea that the action in the past continuous started before the action in the simple past and probably continued after it. The diagram may help to show this relationship. The action in the simple past is indicated by X. Compare this combination with a combination of two simple past tenses, which normally indicates successive actions:

*When he saw me he put the receiver down.*

- E We use the continuous tense in descriptions. Note the combination of description (past continuous) with narrative (simple past):

*A wood fire was burning on the hearth, and a cat was sleeping in front of it. A girl was playing the piano and (was) singing softly to herself. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. The girl stopped playing. The cat woke up.*

## 180 Other uses of the past continuous

This tense can be used as a past equivalent of the present continuous:

- A Direct speech: *He said, 'I am living in London.'*

Indirect speech: *He said he was living in London.*

- B Just as the present continuous can be used to express a definite future arrangement:

*I'm leaving tonight. I've got my plane ticket.*

so the past continuous can express this sort of future in the past:

*He was busy packing, for he was leaving that night.* (The decision to leave had been made some time previously.)

- C The past continuous with always:

*He was always ringing me up. He was always working.*

(See 167 B for present continuous with always.)

## 181 Past continuous as an alternative to the simple past

The past continuous can be used as an alternative to the simple past to indicate a more casual, less deliberate action:

*I was talking to Tom the other day.*

The past continuous here gives the impression that the action was in no way unusual or remarkable. It also tends to remove responsibility from the subject. In the above example it is not clear who started the conversation, and it does not matter. Note the contrast with the simple past tense, *I talked to Tom*, which indicates that I took the initiative.

Similarly:

*From four to six Tom was washing the car.*

This would indicate that this was a casual, possibly routine action. Compare with:

*From four to six Tom washed the car.* (implying a deliberate action by Tom)

Note that continuous tenses are used only for apparently continuous uninterrupted actions. If we divide the action up, or say how many times it happened, we must use the simple past:

*I talked to Tom several times. Tom washed both cars.*

But we may, of course, use the continuous for apparently parallel actions:

*Between one and two I was doing the shopping and walking the dog.*

This tense is normally used in this way with a time expression such as *today, last night, in the afternoon*, which could either be regarded as points in time or as periods. Periods can also be indicated by exact times as shown above.

In questions about how a period was spent, the continuous often appears more polite than the simple past: *What were you doing before you came here?* sounds more polite than *What did you do before you came here?*

On the other hand, *What were you doing in my room?* could indicate a feeling that I think you had no right to be there, while *What did you do in my room?* could never give this impression.

## The present perfect tense

### 182 Form and use

- A Form

The present perfect tense is formed with the present tense of have + the past participle:  
*I have worked etc.*

The past participle in regular verbs has exactly the same form as the simple past, i.e. *loved*, *walked* etc. (see spelling rules, chapter 37).  
 In irregular verbs, the past participles vary (see 364).  
 The negative is formed by adding not to the auxiliary.  
 The interrogative is formed by inverting the auxiliary and subject.

<u>Affirmative</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Interrogative</u>
I have worked	I have not worked	have I worked?
you have worked	you have not worked	have you worked?
he/she/it has worked	he/she/it has not worked	has he/she/it worked?
we have worked	we have not worked	have we worked?
you have worked	you have not worked	have you worked?
they have worked	they have not worked	have they worked?

Negative interrogative: *has he not worked?* etc.

Contractions: *have/has* and *have not/has not* can be contracted thus (see 118): *I've worked*, *you haven't worked*, *hasn't he worked?* etc. the contracted forms are often almost inaudible in colloquial speech.

**have** and **has** may also be contracted as shown in 104 B:

*Where 've you been? What's he done?*

B Use

This tense may be said to be a sort of mixture of present and past. It always implies a strong connexion with the present and is chiefly used in conversations, letters, newspapers and television and radio reports.

### 183 The present perfect used with just for a recently completed action

*He has just gone out = He went out a few minutes ago.*

This is a special use of this tense, just must be placed between the auxiliary and the main verb. This combination is used chiefly in the affirmative, though the interrogative form is possible:

### Has he just gone out?

It is not normally used in the negative.

### 184 The present perfect used for past actions whose time is not definite

A The present perfect is used for recent actions when the time is not mentioned:

*I have read the instructions but I don't understand them.*

*Have you had breakfast? ~ No, I haven't had it yet.*

Compare with:

*I read the instructions last night.* (time given, so simple past)

*Did you have breakfast at the hotel?* (i.e. before you left the hotel: simple past)

Note possible answers to questions in the present perfect:

*Have you seen my stamps? ~ Yes, I have/No, I haven't* or *Yes, I saw them on your desk a minute ago.*

*Have you had breakfast? ~ Yes, I have* or *No, I haven't had it yet* or *Yes. I had it at seven o'clock* or *Yes. I had it with Mary.* (time implied)

B Recent actions in the present perfect often have results in the present;

*Tom has had a bad car crash.* (He's probably still in hospital.)

*The lift has broken down.* (We have to use the stairs.)

*I've washed the car.* (it looks lovely.)

But actions expressed by the simple past without a time expression do not normally have results in the present:

*Tom had a bad crash.* (but he's probably out of hospital now)

*The lift broke down.* (but it's probably working again now)

*I washed the car.* (but it may be dirty again now)

Actions expressed by the present perfect + yet usually have results in the present:

*He hasn't come yet.* (so we are still waiting for him)

It can also be used for actions which occur further back in the past, provided the connexion with the present is still maintained, that is that the action could be repeated in the present:

### I have seen wolves in that/west

implies that it is still possible to see them, and

*John Smith has written a number of short stories*

implies that John Smith is still alive and can write more. If, however, the wolves have been killed off and John Smith is dead we would say:

*I saw wolves in that forest once/several times or*

### I used to see wolves here *and*

*John Smith wrote a number of short stories.*

Note also that when we use the present perfect in this way we are not necessarily thinking of any one particular action (the action may have occurred several times) or of the exact time when the action was performed. If we are thinking of one particular action performed at a particular time we are more likely to use the simple past.

### 185 The present perfect used for actions occurring in an incomplete period

This may be expressed by the following diagram:



Each X represents an action. TS stands for 'time of speaking' in the present.

An incomplete period may be indicated by *today* or *this morning/afternoon/evening/week/month/year/century* etc.

Note that the present perfect can be used with *this morning* only up to about one o'clock, because after that this morning becomes a completed period and actions occurring in it must be put into the simple past:

(at 11 a.m.) *Tom has rung up three times this morning already.*

(at 2 p.m.) *Tom rang up three times this morning.*

Similarly, this afternoon will end at about five o'clock:

(at 4 p.m.) *I haven't seen Tom this afternoon.*

(at 6 p.m.) *I didn't see Tom this afternoon.*

The present perfect used with an incomplete period of time implies that the action happened or didn't happen at some undefined time during this period:

*Have you seen him today?* (at any time today) — *Yes, I have/*

*Yes. I've seen him today.* (at some time during the day)

But if we know that an action usually happens at a certain time or in a certain part of our incomplete period we use the simple past tense. If my alarm clock normally goes off at six, I might say at breakfast:

*My alarm clock didn't go off this morning.*

*Imagine that the postman normally comes between nine and ten. From nine till ten we will say:*

### Has the postman come yet/*this morning?*

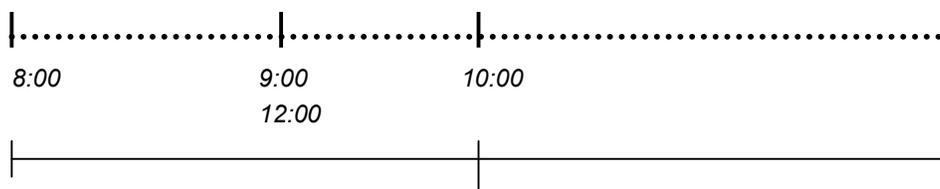
But after this nine to ten period we will say:

### Did the postman come *this morning?*

*We use the past tense here because we are thinking about a complete period of time even though we do not mention it.*

Has the postman come *this morning?*

Did the postman come *this morning?*



*this morning*

C **lately, recently** used with the present perfect also indicate an incomplete period of time.

*In the sentences Has he been here lately/recently? and He hasn't been here lately/recently, **lately/recently** means 'at any time during the last week/month etc. and in He has been here recently, **recently** means 'at some undefined time during the last week/month etc.'*

**lately** is less usual with the affirmative, except for actions covering periods of time:

*There have been some changes lately/recently.  
He's had a lot of bad luck lately/recently.*

**recently**, used with a simple past tense, means 'a short time ago':

*He left recently = He left a short time ago.*

D The present perfect can be used similarly with ever, never, always, occasionally, often, several times etc. and since + a point in time, since + clause, or since, adverb:

1 ANN: Have you ever/allen off a horse?  
TOM: Yes, I've fallen off quite often/occasionally.

But if Tom's riding days are over, we would have;  
ANN: Did you ever/all off a horse? (past tense)  
TOM: Yes. I did occasionally/frequently.

2 I haven't seen him since November.  
Has he written since he left home?  
We had a letter last week. We haven't heard since.  
I've since changed my mind = I've changed my mind since then-

3 The present perfect can be used here for habitual actions:  
They've always answered my letters.  
I've never been late for work.

Sometimes these appear to be continual rather than repeated action:

*Since my accident I have written with my left hand.  
I've worn glasses since my childhood.*

We can then use **for** + a period of time as an alternative to **since** + a point in time:

*I've used my left hand/or a month now.  
I've worn glasses for ten years. (See 186.)*

Note also sentences of this type:

*This is the best wine I have ever drunk.  
This is the worst book I have ever read.  
This is the easiest job I have ever had.  
We can use this construction, without ever, with the first, the second etc. and the only:  
It/This is the first time I have seen a mounted band.  
It is only the second time he has been in a canoe.  
This is the only book he has written.*

### 186 The present perfect used for an action which lasts throughout an incomplete period

Time expressions include *for, since* (see 387), *all day/night/week, all my etc. life, all the time, always, lately, never, recently*.

The action usually begins in the past and continues past the time of speaking in the present:

*He has been in the army for two years. (He is still in the army.)  
I have smoked since I left school. (I still smoke.)  
We have waited all day. (We are still waiting.)  
He has lived here all his life. (He still lives here.)  
He has always worked for us. (He still works for us.)*

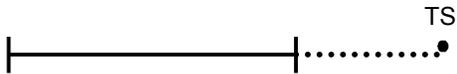
This type of action might be expressed by a diagram thus:

TS

Compare the above sentences with:

- He was in the army for two years.* (He is not in the army now.)
- I smoked for six months.* (and then stopped smoking)
- He lived here all his life.* (Presumably he is now dead.)

In each of the last three examples we are dealing with a completed period of time:



so the simple past tense is used (see 177 B).

Sometimes, however, the action finishes at the time of speaking:

- ANN (on meeting someone): I haven't seen you for ages?* (but I see you now)
- This room hasn't been cleaned for months,* (but we are cleaning it now)
- It has been very cold lately but it's just beginning to get warmer.*

This type of action could be expressed by a diagram thus:



C Verbs of knowing, believing and understanding cannot be used in the present perfect except as shown in A above:

- I have known him for a long time.*
- I have never believed their theories.*

So recent actions, even when the time is not mentioned, must be expressed by the simple past:

- Did you know that he was going to be married?* (Have you known would not be possible) and
- Hello! I didn't know you were in London. How long have you been here?*

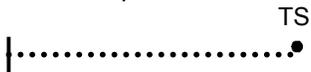
**think** and **wonder** however can be used as in 185 D:

- I have sometimes thought that I should have emigrated.*
- I have often wondered why he didn't marry her.*

D Note that questions/answers such as:

### How long have you been here? — I've, been here six months

will normally be followed by general inquiries in the present perfect about actions occurring within the period mentioned, which is regarded as an incomplete period of time:



because the action of staying, being etc., is not yet finished:

- Have you been to the zoo/the theatre/the museums/the casino?*
- Have you enrolled in a school/found a job/met many people?*

The answers will be in the same tense if no time is mentioned, otherwise they will be in the simple past tense:

- Yes, I have (been to the zoo etc.) or Yes, I went there last week.*
- No, I haven't enrolled yet or Yes, I enrolled on Monday/this morning.*

### 187 The present perfect used with for and since

A **for** is used with a period of time: *for six days, for a long time.*

**for** used with the simple past tense denotes a terminated period of time:

- We lived therefor ten years.* (but we don't live there now)

**for** used with the present perfect denotes a period of time extending into the present:

- We have lived in London for ten years.* (and still live there)

**for** can sometimes be omitted, especially after *be, live and wait*'.

*We're been here an hour/two days.*

**for** (of time) is not used before expressions beginning with *all*:

*They've worked all night.*

**since** is used with a point in time and means 'from that point to the time of speaking'. It is always used with a perfect tense, except as shown in 188 below.

*She has been here since six o'clock.* (and is still here)

*We've been friends since our schooldays.*

Note that there is a difference between **last** and **the last**. Compare:

(a) *I have been here since last week (month, year etc.)* and

(b) *I have been here/or the last week last week.*

in (a), means a point in time about seven days ago.

**the last week**, in (b), means the period of seven days just completed.

**since** + clause is also possible:

*I've worked here since I left school*

and ever since (adverb):

*He had a bad/all last year and has been of/work ever since.*

### 188 **it is + period + since + past or perfect tense**

We can say:

*It is three years since I (last) saw Bill or It is three years since I have seen Bill.*

*I last saw Bill three years ago or I haven't seen Bill for three years.*

*It is two months since Tom (last) smoked a cigarette or It is two months since Tom has smoked a cigarette.*

*He last smoked a cigarette two months ago or He hasn't smoked a cigarette for two months.*

We can use the **it is ... since** construction without the adverb last:

*It is two years since he left the country.*

This, however, is replaceable only by:

*He left the country two years ago.*

We could not use a negative present perfect here as in the sentence about Bill above. *He hasn't been (living) in this country/or the last two years* is possible but isn't an exact equivalent of *He left two years ago*.

This construction can be used in the past:

*He invited me to go riding with him. But it was two years since I had ridden a horse. (I hadn't ridden a horse for two years previous to the invitation so I wasn't sure that I would enjoy it.)*

### 188 **Further examples of the use of the present perfect and Simple past**

A TOM (visiting Philip for the first time): *I didn't know you lived in a houseboat.*

PHILIP: *I've always lived in a houseboat. I was born in one.*

*I thought you were still on holiday. When did you get back? ~ I came back last week.*

*Has your term started yet? ~ Yes, it started on Monday.*

B Note that a conversation about a past action often begins with a question and answer in the present perfect, but normally continues in the simple past, even when no time is given. This is because the action first mentioned has now become definite in the minds of the speakers-.

*Where have you been? ~ I've been to the cinema.*

*What did you see?/What was the film? ~ (I saw) 'Amadeus'. ~ Did you like it?*

HUSBAND: *Where have you been?*

WIFE: *I've been at the sales.*

HUSBAND: *What have you bought?/What did you buy?*

WIFE: *I have bought/I bought you some yellow pyjamas.*

HUSBAND: *Why did you buy yellow? I hate yellow.*

C The present perfect is often used in newspapers and broadcasts to introduce an action which will then be described in the simple past tense. The time of the action is very often given in the second sentence:

*Thirty thousand pounds' worth of jewellery has been stolen from Jonathan Wild and Company, the jewellers. The thieves broke into the flat above some time during Sunday night and entered the shop by cutting a hole in the ceiling.*

But even if the time of the action is not given the past tense will normally be used in the second sentence:

*Two prisoners have escaped from Dartmoor. They used a ladder which had been left behind by some workmen, climbed a twenty-foot wail and got away in a stolen car.*

D The present perfect is often used in Setters:

*I am sorry I haven't written before but I've been very busy lately as Tom has been away.*

*We have carefully considered the report which you sent us on 26 April, and have decided to take the following action.*

## The present perfect continuous tense

### 190 Form

This tense is formed by the present perfect of the verb **to be** + the present participle:

Affirmative: *I have been working, he has been working* etc.

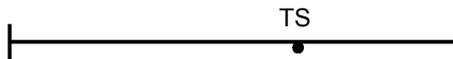
Negative: *I have not/haven't been working* etc.

Interrogative: *have I been working?* etc.

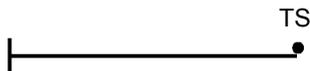
Negative interrogative: *have I not/haven't I been working?* etc.

### 191 Use

This tense is used for an action which began in the past and is still continuing:



or has only just finished:



*I've been waiting for an hour and he still hasn't turned up.*

*I'm so sorry I'm late. Have you been waiting long?*

Remember that a number of verbs are not normally used in the continuous form (see 168), but that some of these can be used in this form in certain cases (see 169-71). We can therefore say:

*Tom has been seeing about a work permit for you.*

*She has been having a tooth out.*

*I've been thinking it over.*

*I've been hearing all about his operation.*

In addition, the verb *want* is often used in this tense, and *wish* is also possible:

*Thank you so much for the binoculars. I've been wanting a pair for ages.*

The present perfect continuous tense does not exist in the passive. The nearest passive equivalent of a sentence such as *They have been repairing the road* would normally be *The road has been repaired lately* (present perfect passive), which is not exactly the same thing.

### 192 Comparison of the present perfect simple and continuous

An action which began in the past and is still continuing or has only just finished can, with certain verbs, be expressed by either the present perfect simple or the present perfect continuous. Verbs which can be used in this way include *expect, hope, learn, lie, live, look, rain, sleep, sit, snow, stand, stay, study, teach, wait, want, work*:

*How long have you learnt English?*

*How long have you been learning English?*

*He has slept for ten hours.*

*He has been sleeping/or ten hours.*

*It has snowed/or a long time.*

*It has been snowing/or a long time.*

- A This is not of course possible with verbs which are not used in the continuous forms (see 168), i.e. the present perfect continuous could not replace the simple present perfect in the following examples:

*They've always had a big garden.*

*How long have you known that?*

*He's been in hospital since his accident.*

Notice also that the present perfect continuous can be used with or without a time phrase. In this way it differs from the simple present perfect, which can only express this type of action if a time phrase is added such as *for six days*, *since June*, *never*. When used without a time expression of this kind, the simple present perfect refers to a single completed action.

- B A repeated action in the simple present perfect can sometimes be expressed as a continuous action by the present perfect continuous:

*I've written six letters since breakfast.*

*I've been writing letters since breakfast.*

*I have knocked five times. I don't think anyone's in.*

*I've been knocking. I don't think anybody's in.*

Note that the present perfect continuous expresses an action which is apparently uninterrupted: we do not use it when we mention the number of times a thing has been done or the number of things that have been done.

- C There is, however, a difference between a single action in the simple present perfect and an action in the present perfect continuous:

(a) *I've polished the car* means that this job has been completed.

(b) *I've been polishing the car* means 'this is how I've spent the last hour'. It does not necessarily mean that the job is completed.

Note also that a single action in the present perfect continuous continues up to the time of speaking, or nearly up to this time:

*He's been taking photos* (he's probably still carrying his camera) but

*He has taken photos.* (This action may or may not be very recent.)

### 193 Some more examples of the present perfect and the present perfect continuous

A *I haven't seen your brother lately. Has he gone away?*

B *Yes, he's/he has been sent to America.*

A *When did he go?*

R *He went last month.*

A *Have you had any letters from him?*

B *I haven't, but his wife has been hearing from him regularly.*

A *Does she intend to go out and join him?*

B *They've been thinking about it but haven't quite decided yet.*

*Unfortunately they've had a lot of expense lately and perhaps haven't got the money for her fare.*

TOM: *What have you done with my knife? (Where have you put it?)*

ANN: *I put it back in your drawer.*

TOM (taking it out): *But what have you been doing with it? The blade's all twisted! Have you been using it to open tins?*

A: *Do you see those people on that little sandy island? They've been waving handkerchiefs for the last half hour. I wonder why.*

B: *They need help. The tide's coming in and very soon that little island will be under water. Have you been sitting here calmly and doing nothing to help them?*

A: *I've never been here before. I didn't know about the tides.*

## The past perfect tense

### 194 Form and use

- A Form This tense is formed with had and the past participle:  
 Affirmative: *I had/'d worked* etc.  
 Negative: *I had not/hadn't worked* etc.  
 Interrogative: *had I worked?* etc.  
 Negative interrogative: *had I not/hadn't I worked?* etc.

B Use

The past perfect is the past equivalent of the present perfect.  
 Present: *Ann has just left. If you hurry you'll catch her.* (See 183.)  
 Past: *When I arrived Ann had just left.*  
 Present: *I've lost my case.* (See 184.)  
 Past: *He had lost his case and had to borrow Tom's pyjamas.*

Unlike the present perfect the past perfect is not restricted to actions whose time is not mentioned. We could therefore say:

*He had left his case on the 4.40 train.*

The present perfect can be used with *since/for/always* etc, for an action which began in the past and is still continuing or has only just finished (see 186). The past perfect can be used similarly for an action which began before the time of speaking in the past, and

- (a) was still continuing at that time or
- (b) stopped at that time or just before it.

But note that the past perfect can also be used:

- (c) for an action which stopped some time before the time of speaking.

Examples of types (a), (b) and (c) are given below:

(a) *Bill was in uniform when I met him. He had been a soldier for ten years/since he was seventeen, and planned to stay in the army till he was thirty.*

*Ann had lived in a cottage for sixty years/ever since she was born, and had no wish to move to a tower block.* (The past perfect continuous tense had been living would also be possible here.)

(b) *The old oak tree, which had stood in the churchyard/or 300 years/since before the church was built, suddenly crashed to the ground.* (The past perfect continuous tense had been standing would also be possible here.)

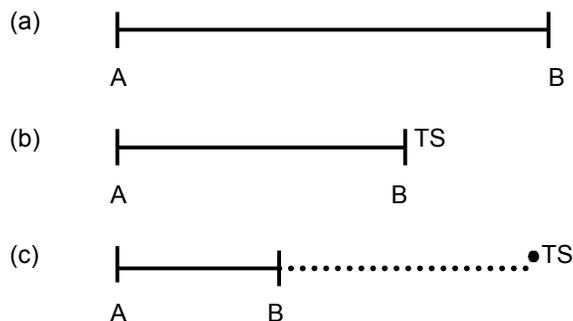
*Peter, who had waited for an hour/since ten o'clock, was very angry with his sister when she eventually turned up.* (had been waiting would also be possible.)

(c) He had served in the army for ten years; then he retired and married. His children were now at school.

Here we cannot use either **since** or the past perfect continuous. Note also that the past perfect here has no present perfect equivalent. If we put the last verb in this sentence into the present tense the other tenses will change to the simple past.

*He served in the army for ten years: then retired and married. His children are now at school.*

These structures are shown below in diagram form, with the line AB for the action in the past perfect, and TS for the time of speaking in the past:



(See also 196 for the use of the past perfect in indirect speech.)

- 3 The past perfect is also the past equivalent of the simple past tense, and is used when the narrator or subject looks back on earlier action from a certain point in the past:

*Tom was 23 when our story begins. His father had died five years before and since then Tom had lived alone. His father had advised him not to get married till he was 35, and Tom intended to follow this advice.*

*I had just poured myself a glass of beer when the phone rang. When I came back from answering it the glass was empty. Somebody had drunk the beer or thrown it away.  
He met her in Paris in 1977. He had last seen her ten years before.  
Her hair had been grey then: now it was white. Or He met her in 1967 and again ten years later. Her hair, which had been grey at their first meeting, was now white.*

But if we merely give the events in the order in which they occurred no past perfect tense is necessary:

*Tom's father died when Tom was eighteen. Before he died he advised Tom not to marry till he was 35, and Tom at 23 still intended to follow this advice.*

*He met her first in 1967 when her hair was grey. He met her again in 1977/He didn't meet her again till 1977. Her hair was now white.*

There is no looking back in the above two examples so no reason for a past perfect.

Note the difference of meaning in the following examples:

*She heard voices and realised that there were three people in the next room.*

*She saw empty glasses and cups and realised that three people had been in the room.  
(They were no longer there,)*

*He arrived at 2.30 and was told to wait in the VIP lounge.*

*He arrived at 2.30. He had been told to wait in the VIP lounge.*

In the third example he received his instructions after his arrival. In the fourth he received them before arrival, possibly before the journey started.

195 Past and past perfect tenses in time clauses

A Clauses with **when**

When one past action follows another. *He called her a liar. She smacked his face*, we can combine them by using **when** and two simple past tenses provided that it is clear from the sense that the second action followed the first and that they did not happen simultaneously:

*When he called her a liar she smacked his face.*

When two simple past tenses are used in this way there is usually the idea that the first action led to the second and that the second followed the first very closely:

*When he opened the window the bird flew out.*

*When the play ended the audience went home.*

*When he died he was given a state funeral.*

The past perfect is used after **when** when we wish to emphasize that the first action was completed before the second one started:

*When he had shut the window we opened the door of the cage.* (We waited for the window to be quite shut before opening the cage.)

*When she had sung her song she sat down.* ('When she sang her song she sat down' might give the impression that she sang seated.)

*When he had seen all the pictures he said he was ready to leave.* (When he had finished looking at them . . .)

Compare with:

*When he saw all the pictures he expressed amazement that one man should have painted so many.* (Immediately he saw them he said this.)

B The past perfect can be used similarly with **as soon as**, **the moment**, **immediately**. (For **as** as a time conjunction, see 332.)

The past perfect can be used with **till/until** and **before** to emphasize the completion or expected completion of an action. But note that in **till/until** + past perfect + simple past combinations the simple past action may precede the past perfect action; and in **before** + past perfect + simple past combinations the simple past action will always precede the past perfect action:

*He refused to go till he had seen all the pictures.*

*He did not wait till we had finished our meal.*

*Before we had finished our meal he ordered us back to work.*

*Before we had walked ten miles he complained of sore feet.*

Past perfect tenses in both time clause and main clause are also possible:

*It was a very expensive town. Before we had been here a week we had spent all our money.*

C **after** is normally followed by a perfect tense:

*After the will had been read there were angry exclamations.*

D We have already stated (see 194) that actions viewed in retrospect from a point in the past are expressed by the past perfect tense. If we have two such actions:

*He had been to school but he had learnt nothing there, so was now illiterate.*

and wish to combine them with a time conjunction, we can use **when** etc. with two past perfect tenses:

*When he had been at school he had learnt nothing, so he was now illiterate.*

But it is more usual to put the verb in the time clause into the simple past:

*When he was at school he had learnt nothing, . . .*

Similarly:

*He had stayed in his father's firm till his father died. Then he had started his own business and was now a very successful man.*

E Verbs of knowing, understanding etc. are not normally used in the past perfect tense in time clauses except when accompanied by an expression denoting a period of time:

*When she had known me for a year she invited me to tea but*

*When I knew the work of one department thoroughly I was moved to the next department or As soon as I knew etc.*

Compare with:

*When I had learnt the work of one department I was moved.*

- F Time clauses containing past perfect tenses can be combined with a main verb in the conditional tense, but this is chiefly found in indirect speech, and some examples will be given in the next paragraph.

196 Use of the past perfect in indirect speech

- A Present perfect tenses in direct speech become past perfect tenses in indirect speech provided the introductory verb is in the past tense:

*He said, 'I've been in England for ten years' = He said that he had been in England for ten years.*

*He said, 'When you've worked for a year you'll get a rise' = He said that when I'd worked for a year I'd get a rise.*

*She said, 'I'll lend you the book as soon as I have read it myself' = She said she'd lend me the book as soon as she'd read it herself.*

- B Simple past tenses in direct speech usually change similarly:

*He said, 'I knew her well' = He said that he had known her well.*

But there are a number of cases where past tenses remain unchanged (see 309-10).

(For the past perfect after **if** (conditional), see 223; after **wish** and **if only**, see 300; after **as if**, **as though**, see 292.)

## The past perfect continuous tense

### 197 Form and use

#### A Form

This tense is formed with **had been** + the present participle. It is therefore the same for all persons:

*I had/I'd been working*  
*they had wit/hadn't been working*  
*had you been working?*  
*had you not/hadn't you been working?*

It is not used with verbs, which are not used in the continuous forms, except with **want** and sometimes **wish**:

*The boy was delighted with his new knife. He had been wanting one for a long time.*

Note that this tense has no passive form. The nearest passive equivalent of a sentence such as *They had been picking apples* would be *Apples had been picked*, which is not the same thing (see B3 below).

#### B Use

The past perfect continuous bears the same relation to the past perfect as the present perfect continuous bears to the present perfect (see 192)

- 1 When the action began before the time of speaking in the past, and continued up to that time, or stopped just before it, we can often use either form (see 192 A):

*It was now six and he was tired because he had worked since dawn = It was now six and he was tired because he had been working since dawn.*

- 2 A repeated action in the past perfect can sometimes be expressed as a continuous action by the past perfect continuous (see 192 B):

*He had tried five times to get her on the phone.*  
*He had been trying to get her on the phone.*

- 3 But there is a difference between a single action in the simple past perfect and an action in the past perfect continuous (see 192 C):

*By six o'clock he had repaired the engine.* (This job had been completed.)  
*He had been repairing the engine* tells us how he had spent the previous hour/half hour etc. It does not tell us whether or not the job was completed.

Another difference is that an action in the present perfect continuous continues up to, or beyond, the time of speaking in the past. An action in the past perfect may occur shortly before the time of speaking, but there could be quite a long interval between them:

*He had been painting the door.* (The paint was probably still wet.)

But

*He had painted the door.* (Perhaps recently, perhaps some time ago.)

## 19 The future

### 198 Future forms

There are several ways of expressing the future in English. The forms are listed below and will be dealt with in the order in which they are given. Students should study them in this order, as otherwise the relationship between them will not be clear.

- (a) The simple present (see 199)
- (b) **will** + infinitive, used for intention (201)
- (c) The present continuous (202)
- (d) The **be going to** form (203-6)
- (e) The 'future simple' **will/shall** + infinitive (207-10)
- (f) The future continuous (211-14)
- (g) The future perfect (216 A)
- (h) The future perfect continuous (216 B)

For **be** + infinitive used to express future plans, see 114.

For **be about** + infinitive and **be on the point of** + gerund, see 144 C.

Note: Most of the auxiliary verbs are dealt with in chapters 11-16, but **will** + infinitive is an essential part of the future, so we have placed it here- It may seem odd that it has been

separated from the future simple but logically it seems best to place it before the present continuous and the **be going to** form.

### 199 The simple present used for the future

This tense can be used with a time expression for a definite future arrangement:

*The boys start school on Monday. I leave tonight.*

instead of the more normal present continuous tense (see 202):

*The boys are starting school on Monday. I'm leaving tonight.*

The difference between them is:

(a) The simple present is more impersonal than the continuous. *I'm leaving tonight* would probably imply that I have decided to leave, but *I leave tonight* could mean that this is part of a plan not necessarily made by me.

(b) The simple present can also sound more formal than the continuous. A big store planning to open a new branch is more likely to say *Our new branch opens next week* than *Our new branch is opening next week*.

(c) The simple present is sometimes used where the continuous would sound a bit clumsy, e.g. when speaking of a series of proposed future actions, like plans for a journey; i.e. we say:

*We leave at six, arrive in Dublin at ten and take the plane on . . .*

instead of:

*We are leaving at six, arriving in Dublin at ten and taking the plane on . . .*

Note, however, that in a sentence such as *My train leaves at six* we are using the simple present for a habitual action. Here, therefore, the simple present is not replaceable by the continuous.

### 200 A note on the meaning of future with intention

When we say that a form expresses future with intention we mean that it expresses a future action which will be undertaken by the speaker in accordance with his wishes, **will** + infinitive and the **be going to** form can be used in this way.

When we say that a form expresses future without intention we mean that it merely states that a certain action will happen. We don't know whether it was arranged by the subject or by some other person and we don't know what the subject thinks of it. The present tense and the future continuous tense can be used in this way.

The present continuous tense in the second or third person conveys no idea of intention, though there may be a hint of intention when the first person is used. The future simple (apart from **will** used as in 201, 205) normally conveys no idea of intention; but see **shall**, 208 B, 234.

### 201 **will** + infinitive used to express intention at the moment of decision (see also 205 E2 and E3)

(a) *The phone is ringing. ~ I'll answer it.*

(b) BILL (to waiter): *I'll have a steak, please.* (*would like* is also possible. See 210 B.)

(c) ANN: *I'd better order a taxi for tonight.*

TOM: *Don't bother. I'll drive you.*

(d) MARY (looking at a pile of letters): *I'll answer them tonight.*

(e) PAUL (who is getting fat and tired of paying parking fines): *I know what to do. I'll sell my car and buy a bike.*

(f) ALAN (on receiving a telegram saying his father is ill): *I'll go home tonight/I'll leave tonight.*

For unpremeditated actions, as above, we must use **will** (normally contracted to 'll). But note that if after his decision the speaker mentions the action again, he will not use **will**, but **be going to** or the present continuous. (**be going to** is always possible; the present continuous has a more restricted use. See 202.)

For example, imagine that to (b) above a friend, Tom, joins Bill before his food has arrived:

TOM: *What are you having/going to have?*

BILL: *I'm having/going to have a steak.*

Similarly, at a later time, in:

(c) Ann might say:

*Tom is driving me /going to drive me to the airport tonight.*

(d) Mary, however, could only say:

*I'm going to answer these letters tonight.* (She hasn't made an arrangement with anybody.)

(e) Paul, similarly, could say:

## I'm going to sell the car

though when he finds a buyer he can say:

*I'm selling the car.*

(f) Alan, however, could say:

*I'm going home tonight*

even though this is, as yet, only a decision, (See 202 B, D.)

(For **will** compared to **be going to**, see 2115.)

## 202 The present continuous as a future form

Note that the time must be mentioned, or have been mentioned, as otherwise there may be confusion between present and future.

A The present continuous can express a definite arrangement in the near future: *I'm taking an exam in October* implies that I have entered for it; and *Bob and Bill are meeting tonight* implies that Bob and Bill have arranged this. If there has merely been an expression of intention, as in 201 (d) and (e) above, we use the **be going to** form.

B But with verbs of movement from one place to another, e.g. *arrive, come, drive, fly, go, leave, start, travel*, verbs indicating position, e.g. *stay, remain*, and the verbs *do* and *have* (food or drink), the present continuous can be used more widely. It can express a decision or plan without any definite arrangement. Alan in 201 (f) can therefore say *I'm going home tonight/I'm leaving tonight* even before he has arranged his journey.

Note also:

*What are you doing next Saturday?* (This is the usual way of asking people about their plans.)

Possible answers:

*I'm going to the seaside.*

*The neighbours are coming in to watch television.*

*I'm not doing anything. I'm staying at home. I'm going to write letters.* (*I'm writing ...* would not be possible.)

C This method of expressing the future cannot be used with verbs which are not normally used in the continuous tenses (see 168). These verbs should be put into the future simple (**will/shall**):

*I am meeting him tonight but I will/shall know tonight.*

*They are coming tomorrow but They will be here tomorrow.*

*We 'll think it over.*

Note, however, that **see**, when it is used for a deliberate action (**see to/about, see someone out/off/home** etc., **see** meaning 'meet by appointment'), can be used in the continuous tenses (see 170):

*I'm seeing him tomorrow.* (I have an appointment with him.)

**to be** can be used in the continuous tenses when it forms part of a passive verb:

*He is being met at the station tonight.*

*Our new piano is being delivered this afternoon.*

D More examples of combinations of **will** + infinitive used at the moment of decision (see 201) and the present continuous tense used as a future form:

*TRAVEL AGENT: Now, how do you want to go to Rome, sir? By air or by train?*

*TRAVELLER (making up his mind): The trains are too slow. I'll fly.*

But afterwards, talking about his plans, this traveller will say:

*I'm flying to Rome next week.*

*ANN: I'll have to pay £150 rent at the end of this month and I don't know where to find the money.*

*TOM: Don't worry. I'll lend you £150.*

Later, but before Tom has actually lent the money, Ann will say:

*Tom is lending me £150.*

*TOM: Would you like to come to the opera tonight?*

*ANN: I'd love to. Shall I meet you there?*

*TOM: No, I'll call for you. About seven?*

*ANN: OK.*

Later, Ann, telling a friend about this plan, will say:

*Tom is taking me to the opera tonight. He's calling for me at seven.*

(The be going to form could replace the continuous tense in the above examples.)

### 203 The be going to form

A Form , The present continuous tense of the verb to go + the full infinitive:

*I'm going to buy a bicycle.*

*She is not going to be there.*

*Is he going to lecture in English?*

B This form is used:

(a) For intention (see 204).

(b) For prediction (see 206).

## 204 The **be going to** form used for intention

The **be going to** form expresses the subject's intention to perform a certain future action. This intention is always premeditated and there is usually also the idea that some preparation for the action has already been made. Actions expressed by the **be going to** form are therefore usually considered very likely to be performed, though there is not the same idea of definite future arrangement that we get from the present continuous. The following points may be noted:

- 1 As already shown, **be going to** can be used for the near future with a time expression as an alternative to the present continuous, i.e. we can say:

*I'm/ am meeting Tom at the station at six.*

*I'm/ am going to meet Tom at the station at six.*

But note that *I'm meeting Tom* implies an arrangement with Tom. *I'm going to meet Tom* does not: Tom may get a surprise!

- 2 **be going to** can be used with time clauses when we wish to emphasize the subject's intention:

*He is going to be a dentist when he grows up.*

*What are you going to do when you get your degree?*

Normally, however, the future simple (shall/will) is used with time clauses. (See 342.)

- 3 **be going to** can be used without a time expression;

*I'm going to play you a Bach fugue.*

*He is going to lend me his bicycle.*

It then usually refers to the immediate or near future.

- 4 As seen in (2) above, the **be going to** form can be used with the verb to be. It is also sometimes found with other verbs not normally used in the continuous tenses:

I am going to think about it. I'm sure I'm going to like it. But on the whole it is safer to use the future simple here.

- 5 Note that it is not very usual to put the verbs go and come into the **be going to** form. Instead we generally use the present continuous tense:

i.e. instead of / am going to go we normally say I am going and instead of / am going to come we very often say / am coming. Note that we can express intention by using will + infinitive- This for<sup>11</sup> is compared with **be going to** in 202.

## 205 Comparison of the use of **be going to** and **will** + infinitive to express intention

Very often we can use either the **be going to** form or **will** + infinitive, but there are differences between them, as a result of which there are occasions when only one of them is possible.

The chief difference is:

- A The **be going to** form always implies a premeditated intention, and often an intention + plan. **will** + infinitive implies intention alone, and this intention is usually, though not necessarily, unpremeditated.

If, therefore, preparations for the action have been made, we must use **be going to**:

I have bought some bricks and I'm going to build a garage.

If the intention is clearly unpremeditated, we must use **will**:

There is somebody at the hall door. - I'll go and open it. (See examples in section E.)

When the intention is neither clearly premeditated nor clearly unpremeditated, either **be going to** or **will** may be used:

I will/am going to climb that mountain one day.

I won't/am not going to tell you my age. But **will** is the best way of expressing determination:

I will help you. (with stress on will) This means 'I definitely intend to help you'.

Other differences:

As already noted, **will** + infinitive in the affirmative is used almost entirely for the first person.

Second and third person intentions are therefore normally expressed by **be going to**:

He is going to resign.

Are you going to leave without paying?

But in the negative **won't** can be used for all persons. So we can say:

He isn't going to resign or He won't resign. But note that **won't** used for a negative intention normally means 'refuse':

He won't resign = He refuses to resign. He isn't going to resign normally means 'He doesn't intend to resign'.

be going to, as already stated, usually refers to the fairly immediate future, will can refer either to the immediate or to the more remote future.

More examples of be going to and will

Examples of be going to used to express intention:

*What are you doing with that spade? - I am going to plant some apple trees.*

*She has bought some wool; she is going to knit a jumper.*

*Why are you taking down all the pictures? ~ I am going to repaper the room.*

*Some workmen arrived today with a roller. I think they are going to repair our road.*

*Why is he carrying his guitar? - He is going to play it in the Underground.*

Note that it would not be possible to substitute will for be going to in any of the above examples, as in each of them there is clear evidence of premeditation.

2 Examples of **will** + infinitive (see 201):

*This is a terribly heavy box. ~ I'll help you to carry it.*

*I've left my watch upstairs. ~ I'll go and get it for you.*

*Who will post this letter/or me? ~ I will.*

*Will you lend me £100? ~ No, I won't.*

3 Some comparisons of **be going to** and **will**

In answer "to Tom's remark *There aren't any matches in the house* Ann might reply either *I'm going to get some today* (premeditated decision) or *I'll get some today* (unpremeditated decision). The first would imply that some time before this conversation she realized that there were no matches and decided to buy some- The second would imply that she had not previously decided to buy matches but took the decision now, immediately after Tom's remark.

Similarly, if Ann says *Where is the telephone book?* and Tom says *I'll get it for you* he is expressing a decision made immediately after Ann's question. If he said *I'm going to get it*, it would mean that he had decided to do this before Ann spoke (presumably because he had anticipated that Ann would want it, or needed it for himself).

4 Note that will/won't does not have any meaning of intention when it is used as indicated in 209 A-E, i.e. when it is used as part of the future simple will/shall. So He won't resign can mean He refuses to resign or / don't expect that he will resign; and in // he hurries he 'll catch up with her, will doesn't express intention but merely states a fact.

## 206 The be going to form used for prediction

A The be going to form can express the speaker's feeling of certainty. The time is usually not mentioned, but the action is expected to happen in the near or immediate future:

*Look at those clouds! It's going to rain.*

*Listen to the wind. We're going to have a rough crossing.*

It can be used in this way after such verbs as *be sure/afraid, believe, think*:

*How pale that girl is! I am sure/I believe/I think she is going to faint.*

B Comparison of **be going to** (used for prediction) with **will** (used for probable future)

**will** is a common way of expressing what the speaker thinks, believes hopes, assumes, fears etc. will happen (see 209 A):

*It will probably be cold/I expect it will be cold.*

*Tomatoes will be expensive this year/I'm sure tomatoes will be expensive.*

**will** and **be going to** are therefore rather similar and often either form can be used:

*It will take a long time to photocopy all the documents = It is going to take a long time to photocopy all the documents.*

But there are two differences:

1 **be going to** implies that there are signs that something will happen, will implies that the speaker thinks/believes that it will happen.

2 **be going to** is normally used about the immediate/fairly immediate future; will doesn't imply any particular time and could refer to the remote future.

For example, *The lift is going to break down* implies that it is making strange noises or behaving in a strange way; we had better get out on the next floor. *The lift will break down* implies that this will happen some time in the future (perhaps because we always overload our lifts, perhaps because it is an XYZ Company lift and they don't last). Similarly (of a sick man), *He is going to get better* implies that there are signs of recovery. Perhaps his

temperature has gone down. *He will get better* implies confidence in his doctor or in the course of treatment, but promises eventual rather than immediate recovery.

## 207 The future simple

### Form

There is no future tense in modern English, but for convenience we often use the term 'future simple' to describe the form will/shall + bare infinitive.

Affirmative	Negative	Interrogative
<i>I will/I'll work or I shall work</i>	<i>I will not/won't work or I shall not/shan't work</i>	<i>shall I work?</i>
<i>you will/you'll work</i>	<i>you will not/won't work</i>	<i>will you work?</i>
<i>he will/he'll work etc.</i>	<i>he will not/won't work etc.</i>	<i>will he work? etc.</i>
<i>we will/we'll work or we shall work</i>	<i>we will not/won't work or we shall not/shan't work</i>	<i>shall we work?</i>
<i>you will/you 'll work</i>	<i>you will not/won't work</i>	<i>will you work?</i>
<i>they will/they'll work</i>	<i>they will not/won't work</i>	<i>will they work?</i>

For interrogative contractions, see 104.

Negative interrogative: *will he not/won't he work?* etc.

## 208 First person **will** and **shall**

A Formerly **will** was kept for intention:

**I will wait for you = I intend to wait for you**

and **shall** was used when there was no intention, i.e. for actions where the subject's wishes were not involved:

*I shall be 25 next week.*

*We shall know the result next week.* (It will be in the papers.)

*Unless the taxi comes soon we shall miss our plane.*

*I'm sure I shan't lose my way.*

*I shall see Tom tomorrow.* (Perhaps we go to work on the same train.)

**shall**, used as above, is still found in formal English, but is no longer common in conversation. Instead we normally use **will**:

*I will be 25 next week.*

*We 'll know the result tomorrow.*

*Unless the taxi comes soon we 'll miss the plane.*

*I'm sure I won't lose my way.*

Sometimes, however, **will** might change the meaning of the sentence. If in *I shall see Tom tomorrow* we replace **shall** by **will**, we have *I will see Tom tomorrow*, which could be an expression of intention. To avoid ambiguities of this kind we use the future continuous tense:

*I'll be seeing Tom tomorrow.* (See 211-14.)

**shall**, however, is still used in the interrogative:

In question tags after **let's**: *Let's go, shall me?*

In suggestions: *Shall we take a taxi?*

In requests for orders or instructions: *What shall I do with your mail?*

In speculations: *Where shall we be this time next year?* (Here, though, **will** is also possible.)

B **shall** for determination

We have already noted (see 201, 205) that determination is normally expressed by **will**. But sometimes public speakers feel that to express determination they need a 'heavier' word, a word not normally used much, and so they say **shall**:

(in a speech) *We shall fight and we shall win.*

*We will fight and we shall win* would be equally possible.

**shall** used in this way sometimes carries the idea of promise which we get in second person **shall**:

*You shall have a sweet = I promise you a sweet.* (See 234 A.)

In *we shall win* the speaker is promising victory.  
**shall** can be used in this way in ordinary conversation:

*I shall be there, I promise you.*

But *will* here is equally possible and less trouble for the student. When in doubt use *will*.

## 209 Uses of the future simple

To express the speaker's opinions, assumptions, speculations about the future. These may be introduced by verbs such as *assume, be afraid, be/feel sure, believe, daresay, doubt, expect, hope, know, suppose, think, wonder* or accompanied by adverbs such as *perhaps, possibly, probably, surely*, but can be used without them:

*(I'm sure) he 'll come back.*

*(I suppose) they 'll sell the house.*

*(Perhaps) we 'll find him at the hotel.*

*They'll (probably) wait for us.*

The future simple can be used with or without a time expression **be going to** is sometimes possible here also, but it makes the action appear more probable and (where there is no time expression) more, immediate. *He'll build a house* merely means 'this is my opinion', and gives no idea when the building will start. But *He's going to build a house* implies that he has already made this decision and that he will probably start quite soon.

The future simple is used similarly for future habitual actions which we assume will take place:

*Spring will come again.*

*Birds will build nests.*

*People will make plans.*

*Other men will climb these stairs and sit at my desk.*

(*will be coming/building/making/climbing/sitting* would also be possible.)

The future simple is used in sentences containing clauses of condition, time and sometimes purpose:

*If I drop this glass it will break.* (See 221.)

*When it gets warmer the snow will start to melt.* (See 342.)

*I'm pulling this letter on top of the pile so that he'll read it first.* (See 336.)

Note that in an **if**-clause or a time clause we don't use the future simple even when the meaning is future:

*He will probably be late but If he is late . . . and*

*It will get warmer soon but When it gets warmer . . .*

Verbs not normally used in the continuous tenses, e.g. auxiliary verbs, verbs of the senses, of emotion, thinking, possessing etc. (see 168), usually express the future by the future simple, though **be going to** is sometimes possible:

*He 'll be here at six.*

*You 'll have time for tea.*

*She'll wonder where you are.*

*They'll know tonight.*

The future simple is used, chiefly in newspapers and news broadcasts, for formal announcements of future plans and for weather forecasts. In conversations such statements would normally be expressed by the present continuous or **be going to** form or, for plans only, by the present continuous:

*NEWSPAPER: The President will open the new heliport tomorrow.*

*The fog will persist in all areas.*

But the average reader/listener will say:

*The President is going to open/is opening . . .*

*The fog is going to persist/continue . . .*

F **won't** can be used with all persons to express negative intention. So *He won't pay* can mean either *He refuses to pay* or *I don't think he 'll pay*.

**I/we will** can express affirmative intention (see 201), but **he/you/they will** do not normally express intention. They may appear to do so sometimes in such sentences as *My son/brother/husband etc. will help you*, but the intention may be the speaker's rather than the subject's.

## 210 will contrasted with want/wish/would like

A **will** must not be confused with **want/wish/would like**.

**will** expresses an intention + a decision to fulfil it:

I will buy it = I intend to buy it/I'm going to buy it.

**want/wish/would like** merely expresses a desire. They do not give any information about intended actions. (See also 296, 299.)

B Note, however, that **I'd like** is often a possible alternative to *I'll have/take*:

*CUSTOMER* (in a shop): *I'd like/I'll have a pound of peas, please.*

*DINER* (in a restaurant): *I'd like/I'll have the soup, please.*

Both can be used for invitations:

## Would you like a drink? or Will you have a drink?

When accepting an invitation we can use either form:

*I'd like/I'll have a sherry, please.*

But the two forms are not interchangeable in the negative, so if we wish to refuse an invitation we must say:

*I won't have anything, thanks or I don't want anything, thanks.*

**wouldn't like** means 'would dislike', so could not be used here.

### 211 The future continuous tense

A Form

This tense is made up of the future simple of to be + the present participle. In the first person, will is more usual than shall, except in the interrogative.

Affirmative *I/we will/shall be working*  
*he/she/it/you/they will be working*

Negative *I/we will/shall not be working*  
*he/she/it/you/they will not be working*

Interrogative *shall/will I/we be working?*  
*will he/she/it/you/they be working?*

Contractions as shown in 207.

Negative interrogative: *will he not/won't he be working?* etc.

Use

This tense has two uses:

It can be used as an ordinary continuous tense.

It can express a future without intention.

### 212 The future continuous used as an ordinary continuous tense

Like other continuous tenses it is normally used with a point in time, and expresses an action which starts before that time and probably continues after it. This use is best seen by examples. Imagine a class of students at this moment -9.30 a.m. We might say:

*Now they are sitting in their classroom. They are listening to a tape. This time tomorrow they will be sitting in the cinema. They will be watching a film. On Saturday there is no class. So on Saturday they will not be sitting in the classroom. They will be doing other things. Bill will be playing tennis. Ann will be shopping. George will still be having breakfast.*

A continuous tense can also be used with a verb in a simple tense:

*Peter has been invited to dinner with Ann and Tom. He was asked to come at eight but tells another friend that he intends to arrive at seven. The friend tries to dissuade him: 'When you arrive they'll still be cooking the meal!'*

### 213 The future continuous used to express future without intention

Example: *I will be helping Mary tomorrow.*

This does not imply that the speaker has arranged to help Mary or that he wishes to help her. It merely states that this action will happen. The future continuous tense used in this way is somewhat similar to the present continuous, but differs from it in the following points.

The present continuous tense implies a deliberate future action. The future continuous tense usually implies an action which will occur in the normal course of events. It is therefore less definite and more casual than the present continuous:

*I am seeing Tom tomorrow.*

*I'll be seeing Tom tomorrow.*

The first implies that Tom or the speaker has deliberately arranged the meeting, but the second implies that Tom and the speaker will meet in the ordinary course of events (perhaps they work together). This difference is not always very important, however, and very often either tense can be used. We can say:

*He'll be taking his exam next week or*

*He is taking his exam next week.*

*He won't be coming to the party or*

*He isn't coming to the party.*

The present continuous can only be used with a definite time and for the near future, while the future continuous can be used with or without a definite time and for the near or distant future.

We can say:

*I am meeting him tomorrow but*

*I'll be meeting him tomorrow/next year/some time. (or without a time expression at all)*

### 214 The future continuous and will + infinitive compared

A There is approximately the same difference between **will** + infinitive and the future continuous as between **will** + infinitive and the present continuous. **will** + infinitive expresses future with intention. The future continuous expresses future without intention.

In this sentence:

#### **I'll write** to Mr Pitt and tell him about Tom's new house

the verb in bold type expresses intention. The speaker announces a deliberate future action in accordance with his own wishes. But in the sentence:

**I'll be writing** to Mr Pitt and I'll tell him about Tom's new house

the verb in bold type expresses no intention. It is a mere statement of fact and implies that this letter to Mr Pitt will be written either as a matter of routine or for reasons unconnected with Tom's new house. Similarly, *Tom won't cut the grass* means Tom refuses to cut it, while

*Tom won't be cutting the grass* is a mere statement of fact, giving no information about Tom's feelings. Perhaps Tom is away, or ill, or will be doing some other job.

B **will** + infinitive can express invitation, request or command:

*Will you have a cigarette? (See 210.)*

*Will you help me to lift the piano? (See 284.)*

*You will work in this room. (See 282.)*

The future continuous can have none of the above meanings:

*Will you please bring the piano in here? (request) ~ Yes sir/OK.*

But

*Will you be bringing the piano in here? (question only) ~ Yes, I think I will or No, I think I'll put it upstairs.*

*You will work in this office (command) but*

*You will be working here. (only a statement)*

As before, the present continuous could be used here instead of the future continuous, provided that a time expression was added.

## 215 Examples of various future forms

A Imagine that we ask five people about their plans for the following Saturday. We say:

### What are you doing/going to do on Saturday?

(a) Peter has arranged to play golf with George; so he will say:

*I'm playing/going to play golf with George.*

(b) Mary has decided to stay at home and make jam; so she will say:

*I'm staying/going to stay at home. I'm going to make jam.*

(c) Andrew's plans depend on the weather; so he may say:

*If it's fine I'll work/I'm going to work in the garden.*

(d) Ann hasn't made any plans, but she may say:

*Perhaps I'll take/I expect I'll take/I'll probably take/I suppose I'll take my children for a walk.*

(e) Bill always has to work on Saturdays; so he will say:

*Oh, I'll be working as usual. (No other form would give this exact meaning.)*

B Questions about intentions

These are usually expressed by the present continuous, the **be going to** form or the future continuous. This last tense is a particularly useful interrogative form as it is considered more polite than the others. So if we are continuing to ask our five people questions we may say:

(a) *Where are you playing/are you going to play/will you be playing golf?*

(b) *What kind of jam are you going to make/will you be making?*

**will you** + infinitive is less usual than the other forms and is rarely found at the beginning of a sentence. (This is to avoid confusion, because **will you** + infinitive at the beginning of a sentence usually introduces a request.) It is however used in conditional sentences and when the speaker is offering something or asking the other person to make a decision:

*What will you do if he is not on the plane?*

*Will you have a drink?*

*Will you have your meal now or later?*

More examples of questions based on the sentences in A above:

(c) If we are questioning Andrew we will probably say:

*What are you going to do/What will you be doing in the garden? (though What will you do? would be possible), and Are you going to cut/Will you be cutting the grass? (Will you cut the grass? would sound more like a request.)*

(d) To Ann we would probably say:

*I/you take them, where will you go? (though where will you be going? is possible)*

(e) To Bill we could say:

### Will you be working all day?

This is the only possible form if we wish to convey the idea that Bill works on Saturday because it is the routine, not from choice-Note that the future continuous must of course be used in questions of the type *What will you be doing this time next week?* regardless of whether the action is intentional or not (see 212).

## 216 The future perfect and the future perfect continuous

- A The future perfect  
Form  
**will/shall** + perfect infinitive for first persons, **will** + perfect infinitive for the other persons.  
Use  
It is normally used with a time expression beginning with **by**: *by then, by that time, by the 24th*:  
*By the end of next month he will have been here for ten years.*  
It is used for an action which at a given future time will be in the past, or will just have finished. Imagine that it is 3 December and David is very worried about an exam that he is taking on 13 December.  
Someone planning a party might say:  
*We'd better wait till 14 December. David will have had his exam by then, so he'll be able to enjoy himself.*
- Note also:  
*I save £50 a month and I started in January. So by the end of the year I will/shall have saved £600.*  
*BILL* (looking at Tom's cellar): *You've got over 400 bottles. How long will that last you? Two years?*  
*TOM*: *Not a hope. I drink eight bottles a week. I'll have drunk all these by the end of this year.*
- B The future perfect continuous  
Form  
**will/shall** have been + present participle for the first persons,  
**will have been** + present participle for the other persons.  
Use  
Like the future perfect, it is normally used with a time expression beginning with **by**:  
*By the end of this year he'll have been acting for thirty years.*  
The future perfect continuous bears the same relationship to the future perfect as the present perfect continuous bears to the present perfect, i.e. the future perfect continuous can be used instead of the future perfect:
- 1 When the action is continuous:  
*By the end of the month he will have been living/working/studying here for ten years.*
  - 2 When the action is expressed as a continuous action:  
*By the end of the month he will have been training horses/climbing mountains for twenty years.*  
But if we mention the number of horses or mountains, or divide this action in any way, we must use the future perfect;  
*By the end of the month he will have trained 600 horses/climbed 50 mountains.*

## 20 The sequence of tenses

### 217 Subordinate clauses

A sentence can contain a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses. A subordinate clause is a group of words containing a subject and verb and forming part of a sentence:

*We knew **that the bridge was unsafe.***

*He gave it to me **because he trusted me.***

*He ran faster **than we did.***

*This is the picture **that I bought in Rome.***

(In the examples above and in 218 the subordinate clauses are in bold type.)

For other examples see under conditional sentences, relative pronouns and clauses of purpose, comparison, time, result and concession. It is not necessary for the student to make a detailed study of clauses or even to be able to recognize the different kinds of clause, but it is necessary for him to learn to know which is the main verb of a sentence because of the important rule given below.

### 218 The sequence of tenses

When the main verb of a sentence is in a past tense, verbs in subordinate clauses are normally in a past tense also. See the starred sentences below.

<u>Tense of verb in main clause</u>		<u>Tense of verb in subordinate clause</u>
Present	<i>He thinks <b>that it will rain.</b></i>	Future simple
Past	<i>He thought <b>that it would rain.*</b></i>	Conditional
Present	<i>He sees <b>that he has made a mistake.</b></i>	Pres. perf.
Past	<i>He saw <b>that he had made a mistake.*</b></i>	Past perf.
Present	<i>I work so hard <b>that I am always tired.</b></i>	Present
Past	<i>I worked so hard <b>that I was always tired.*</b></i>	Past
Pres. perf.	<i>He has done all <b>that is necessary.</b></i>	Present
Past perf.	<i>He had done all <b>that was necessary.*</b></i>	Past
Present	<i>He says <b>that he is going to eat it.</b></i>	Pres. continuous
Past	<i>He said <b>that he was going to eat it.*</b></i>	Past continuous

Note that infinitive and gerunds are not affected by the above rule:

*He wants to go to Lyons.*

*He wanted to go to Lyons.*

*He likes riding.*

*He liked riding.*

The rule about sequence of tenses applies also to indirect speech when the introductory verb is in a past tense. (See chapter 31.)

## 21 The conditional

### The conditional tenses

#### 219 The present conditional tense

A This is formed with *would/should* + infinitive for the first person and *would* + infinitive for the other persons.

Affirmative	<i>I would/I'd work or / should work</i> <i>you would/you'd work etc.</i>
Negative	<i>I would not/wouldn't work or</i> <i>I should not/shouldn't work</i> <i>you would not/wouldn't work etc.</i>
Interrogative	<i>would/should I work?</i> <i>would you work? etc.</i>
Negative interrogative	<i>should I not/shouldn't I work?</i> <i>would you work/wouldn't you work? etc.</i>

B It is used:

(a) in conditional sentences (see 221-9).

(b) In special uses of **would** and **should** (see chapter 22).

(c) As a past equivalent of the future simple, *would/should* must be used instead of *will/shall* when the main verb of the sentence is in the past tense:

*I hope (that) I will/shall succeed.*

*I hoped (that) I would/should succeed.*

*I know (that) he will be in time.*

*I knew (that) he would be in time.*

*He thinks (that) they will give him a visa.*

*He thought (that) they would give him a visa.*

*I expect (that) the plane will be diverted.*

*I expected (that) the plane would be diverted.*

(For **will/shall**, **would/should** in indirect speech, see chapter 31.)

#### 220 The perfect conditional tense

A This is formed with *would/should* and the perfect infinitive:

Affirmative	<i>I would/should have worked</i> <i>you would have worked etc.</i>
Negative	<i>I would not/should not have worked etc.</i>
Interrogative	<i>would/should I have worked? etc.</i>
Negative interrogative	<i>should I not have/shouldn't I have worked?</i> <i>would you not have/wouldn't you</i> <i>have worked? etc.</i>

Other contractions as in 219,

B It is used:

(a) In conditional sentences (see 221-9).

(b) In special uses of *would* and *should* (see 230-7).

(c) As a past equivalent of the future perfect tense:

*I hope he will have finished before we get back.*

*I hoped he would have finished before we got back.*

## Conditional sentences

Conditional sentences have two parts: the **if**-clause and the main clause. In the sentence *If it rains I shall stay at home* 'If it rains' is the **if**-clause, and 'I shall stay at home' is the main clause. There are three kinds of conditional sentences. Each kind contains a different pair of tenses. With each type certain variations are possible but students who are studying the conditional for the first time should ignore these and concentrate on the basic forms.

### 221 Conditional sentences type 1: probable

- A The verb in the **if**-clause is in the present tense; the verb in the main clause is in the future simple. It doesn't matter which comes first.

*If he runs he'll get there in time.*

*The cat will scratch you if you pull her fail.*

This type of sentence implies that the action in the **if**-clause is quite probable.

Note that the meaning here is present or future, but the verb in the **if**-clause is in a present, not a future tense, **if** + **will/would** is only possible with certain special meanings. (See 224.)

Possible variations of the basic form

Variations of the main clause

Instead of **if** + present + future, we may have:

- (a) **if** + present + **may/might** (possibility)

*If the fog gets thicker the plane may/might be diverted.* (Perhaps the plane will be diverted.)

- (b) **if** + present + **may** (permission) or **can** (permission or ability)

*If your documents are in order you may/can leave at once.* (permission)

*If it stops snowing we can go out.* (permission or ability)

- (c) **if** + present + **must, should** or any expression of command, request or advice

*If you want to lose weight you must/should eat less bread.*

*If you want to lose weight you had better eat less bread.*

*If you want to lose weight eat less bread.*

*If you see Tom tomorrow could you ask him to ring me?*

- (d) **if** + present + another present tense

**if** + two present tenses is used to express automatic or habitual results:

*If you heat ice it turns to water.* (.will turn is also possible.)

*If there is a shortage of any product prices of that product go up.*

- (e) When **if** is used to mean **as/since** (see 338 A), a variety of tenses can be used in the main clause:

*Ann hates London. ~ I/she hates it why does she live there?/she ought to move out.* (If so could replace *If she hates it* here.)

This is not, of course, a true conditional clause.

### 2 Variations of the **if**-clause

Instead of **if** + present tense, we can have:

- (a) **if** + present continuous, to indicate a present action or a future arrangement

*If you are waiting for a bus (present action) you'd better join the queue.*

*If you are looking for Peter (present action) you'll find him upstairs.*

*If you are staying for another night (future arrangement) I'll ask the manager to give you a better room.*

- (b) **if** + present perfect

*If you have finished dinner I'll ask the waiter for the bill.*

*If he has written the letter I'll post it.*

*If they haven't seen the museum we'd better go there today.*

### 222 Conditional sentences type 2

- A The verb in the **if**-clause is in the past tense; the verb in the main clause is in the conditional tense:

*If I had a map I would lend it to you.* (But I haven't a map. The meaning here is present.)

*If someone tried to blackmail me I would tell the police.* (But I don't expect that anyone will try to blackmail me. The meaning here is future.)

There is no difference in time between the first and second types of conditional sentence. Type 2, like type 1, refers to the present or future, and the past tense in the if-clause is not a true past but a subjunctive, which indicates unreality (as in the first example above) or improbability (as in the second example above).

B Type 2 is used:

1 When the supposition is contrary to known facts:

*If I lived near my office I'd be in time for work.* (But I don't live near my office.)

*If I were you I'd plant some trees round the house.* (But I am not you.)

2 When we don't expect the action in the if-clause to take place:

*If a burglar came into my room at night I'd scream.* (But I don't expect a burglar to come in.)

*If I dyed my hair blue everyone would laugh at me.* (But I don't intend to dye it.)

Some if-clauses can have either of the above meanings:

*If he left his bicycle outside someone would steal it.*

'If he left his bicycle' could imply 'but he doesn't' (present meaning, as in 1 above) or 'but he doesn't intend to' (future meaning, as in 2). But the correct meaning is usually clear from the text. Ambiguity of this kind can be avoided by using **were/was** + infinitive instead of the past tense in type 2.

**if he/she/it were** can be used instead of **if he/she/it was**, and is considered the more correct form:

*If he were to resign . . . = If he resigned . . .*

*If I were to succeed . . . = If I succeeded . . .*

This construction with **were** is chiefly found in fairly formal sentences.

**if he/she/it was** + infinitive is possible in colloquial English, but the past tense, as shown above, is much more usual.

B Sometimes, rather confusingly, type 2 can be used as an alternative to type 1 for perfectly possible plans and suggestions:

*Will Mary be in time if she gets the ten o'clock bus? ~ No, but she'd be in time if she got the nine-thirty bus or No, but she'll be in time if she gets the nine-thirty bus.*

*We'll never save £100! ~ If we each saved £10 a week we'd do it in ten weeks or*

*If we each save £10 a week we'll do it in ten weeks.*

A suggestion in type 2 is a little more polite than a suggestion in type 1, just as **would you** is a more polite request form than **will you**. But the student needn't trouble too much over this use of type 2.

Possible variations of the basic form

Variations of the main clause

(a) might or could may be used instead of would:

*If you tried again you would succeed.* (certain result)

*If you tried again you might succeed.* (possible result)

*If I knew her number I could ring her up.* (ability)

*If he had a permit he could get a job.* (ability or permission)

(b) The continuous conditional form may be used instead of the simple conditional form:

*Peter is on holiday; he is touring Italy. ~ If I were on holiday*

*I would/might be touring Italy too.*

(c) if + past tense can be followed by another past tense when we wish to express automatic or habitual reactions in the past: compare **if** + two present tenses, 221 B1(d). Note that the past tenses here have a past meaning:

*If anyone interrupted him he got angry,* (whenever anyone interrupted him)

*If there was a scarcity of anything prices of that thing went up.*

(d) When **if** is used to mean 'as' or 'since', a variety of tenses is possible in the main clause, **if** + past tense here has a past meaning. The sentence is not a true conditional,

*The pills made him dizzy. All the same he bought/has bought/is buying some more. ~ If they made him dizzy why did he buy/has he bought/is he buying more?*

*I knew she was short of money. ~ If you knew she was short of money you should have lent her some./why didn't you lend her some?*

2 Variations of the **if**-clause

Instead of **if** + simple past we can have:

(a) **if** + past continuous

*(We're going by air and) I hate flying. If we were going by boat I'd feel much happier.*

*If my car was working I would/could drive you to the station.*

(b) **if** + past perfect

*If he had taken my advice he would be a rich man now.*

(This is a mixture of types 2 and 3. For more examples, see 223,) (For if + would, see 224.)

### 223 Conditional sentences type 3

- A The verb in the if-clause is in the past perfect tense; the verb in the main clause is in the perfect conditional. The time is past and the condition cannot be fulfilled because the action in the if-clause didn't happen.  
*If I had known that you were coming I would have met you at the airport.* (But I didn't know, so I didn't come.)  
*If he had tried to leave the country he would have been stopped at the frontier.* (But he didn't try.)
- B Possible variations of the basic form
- 1 could or might may be used instead of would:  
*If we had found him earlier we could have saved his life.* (ability)  
*If we had found him earlier we might have saved his life.* (possibility)  
*If our documents had been in order we could have left at once.* (ability or permission)
- 2 The continuous form of the perfect conditional may be used:  
*At the time of the accident I was sitting in the back of the car, because Tom's little boy was sitting beside him in front. If Tom's boy had not been there I would have been sitting in front.*
- 3 We can use the past perfect continuous in the if-clause:  
*I was wearing a seat belt. If I hadn't been wearing one I'd have been seriously injured.*
- 4 A combination of types 2 and 3 is possible:  
*The plane I intended to catch crashed and everyone was killed. If I had caught that plane I would be dead now or I would have been killed.* (type 3)  
*If I had worked harder at school I would be sitting in a comfortable office now; I wouldn't be sweeping the streets.* (But I didn't work hard at school and now I am sweeping the streets.)
- 5 **had** can be placed first and the if omitted:  
*I/you had obeyed orders this disaster would not have happened = Had you obeyed orders this disaster would not have happened.*

### 224 Special uses of **will/would** and **should** in if-clauses

Normally these auxiliaries are not used after if in conditional sentences. There are, however, certain exceptions.

- A **if you will/would** is often used in polite requests. **would** is the more polite form.  
*If you will/would wait a moment I'll see if Mr Jones is free.*  
(Please wait.)  
*I would be very grateful if you would make the arrangements for me.*
- if you would** + infinitive is often used alone when the request is one which would normally be made in the circumstances. The speaker assumes that the other person will comply as a matter of course.  
*If you'd fill up this form.*  
(in a hotel) *If you'd just sign the register.*  
(in a shop) *If you'd put your address on the back of the cheque.*  
(in a classroom) *If you'd open your books.*
- if + will/would** can be used with all persons to indicate willingness:  
*If he'll listen to me I'll be able to help him.* (If he is willing to listen . . .)  
*If Tom would tell me what he wants for his dinner I'd cook it for him.* (The speaker implies that Tom is unwilling to tell her.)
- won't** used in this way can mean 'refuse':  
*If he won't listen to me I can't help him.* (if he is unwilling to listen/If he refuses to listen . . .)  
*If they won't accept a cheque we'll have to pay cash.* (If they refuse to accept. . .)
- will** can be used to express obstinate insistence (230 B):  
*If you will play the drums all night no wonder the neighbours complain.* (If you insist on playing . . .)
- if + would like/care** can be used instead of if + want/wish and is more polite;  
*If you would like to come I'll get a ticket for you.*

*If you'd care to see the photographs I'll bring them round.*

*If he'd like to leave his car here he can.*

But if we rearrange such sentences so that **would like** has no object, we can drop the **would**:

*If you like I'll get a ticket for you but*

*If you'd like a ticket I'll get one for you.*

*If he likes he can leave his car here but*

*If he'd like to leave his car here he can or*

*He can learn it here if he'd like to.*

E **if + should** can be used in type 1 to indicate that the action, though possible, is not very likely. It is usually combined with an imperative and is chiefly used in written instructions:

*If you should have any difficulty in getting spare parts ring this number.*

*If these biscuits should arrive in a damaged condition please inform the factory at once.*

**should** can be placed first and the if omitted:

*Should these biscuits arrive . . .* (See 225 B.)

## 225 **if + were** and inversion of subject and auxiliary

A **if + were** instead of **if + was**

1 Usually either can be used, **were** being more likely in formal English:

*I/she was/were offered the job she'd take it.*

*If Tom was/were here he 'd know what to do.*

2 But **were** is a little more usual than **was** in the advice form *If I were/ was you I would/should . . .*

*If I were you I would wait a bit,' he said.* (See 287 C.)

**were** is also more usual in the infinitive construction:

*If Peter were/was to apply for the post he'd get it.* (See 222 B.)

3 **were**, not **was**, is used when the auxiliary is placed first:

*Were I Tom I would refuse.* (See B below.)

When **if** means 'since' (see 222 C) **was** cannot be replaced by **were**.

**were** can replace **was** after *if only* (see 228) and *wish* (see 300),

B **if + subject + auxiliary** can be replaced in formal English by inversion of auxiliary and subject with **if** omitted:

*If I were in his shoes . . . = Were I in his shoes . . .*

*If you should require anything . . . =*

*Should you require anything . . .*

*If he had known . . . = Had he known . . .*

## 226 **if, even if, whether, unless, but for, otherwise, provided, suppose**

A **even if** = **even though**

Compare:

*You must go tomorrow if you are ready and*

*You must go tomorrow even if you aren't ready.*

B **whether . . . or = if . . . or**

*You must go tomorrow whether you are ready or not.*

C **unless + affirmative verb = if + negative**

*Unless you start at once you 'll be late = If you don't start at once you 'll be late.*

*Unless you had a permit you couldn't get a job = If you hadn't a permit you couldn't get a job.*

Note the difference between:

(a) *Don't call me if you need help and*

(b) *Don't call me unless you need help.*

In (a) he won't help her even if she needs help. In (b) he will help her if she needs help but doesn't want non-urgent calls.

**unless + he'd/you'd like/prefer etc.** normally replaces **if he/you wouldn't like etc.**:

*I'll ask Tom, unless you 'd prefer me to ask/unless you 'd rather*

*I asked Bill.*

**but for** = 'if it were not for/if it hadn't been for'

*My father Rays my fees. But for that! wouldn't be here. The car broke down. But for that we would have been in time.*

otherwise = 'if this doesn't happen/didn't happen/hadn't happened' We must be back before midnight; otherwise we'll be locked out = I/we are not back by midnight we'll be locked out. Her father pays her fees; otherwise she wouldn't be here = If her father didn't pay her fees she wouldn't be here. I used my calculator; otherwise I'd have taken longer = If I hadn't used my calculator I'd have taken longer.

In colloquial English or (+ else) can often replace otherwise:

We must be early or (else) we won't get a seat.

provided (that) can replace if when there is a strong idea of limitation or restriction. It is chiefly used with permission. You can camp here provided you leave no mess.

suppose/supposing . . . ? = what if. . . ?

Suppose the plane is late? = What if/What will happen if the plane is late? Suppose no one had been there? = What if no one had been there? suppose can also introduce suggestions:

Suppose you ask him/Why don't you ask him?

## 227 if and in case

**in case** is followed by a present or past tense or by should (see 337). It appears similar to if and is often confused with it. But the two are completely different.

An in case clause gives a reason for the action in the main clause:

Some cyclists carry repair outfits in case they have a puncture == Some cyclists carry repair outfits because they may have/because if i;

possible they will have a puncture.

! always slept by the phone in case he rang during the night =

I always slept by the phone because (I knew) he might ring during the night.

An in case clause can be dropped without changing the meaning of the main clause. In a conditional sentence, however, the action in the main clause depends on the action in the if-clause, and if the if-clause is dropped the meaning of the main clause changes. Compare:

(a) BILL: I'll come tomorrow in case Ann wants me and

(b) TOM: I'll come tomorrow if Ann wants me. In (a) perhaps Ann will want Bill, perhaps she won't. But Bill will come anyway. His action doesn't depend on Ann's, in case Ann wants me could be omitted without changing the meaning of the main verb. In (b), a conditional sentence, Tom will only come if Ann asks him. His action depends on hers. We cannot remove if Ann wants me without changing the meaning of the main verb.

B An in case clause is normally placed after the main clause, not before it. Note, however, that in case of + noun = if there is a/an + noun:

In case of accident phone 999 = If there is an accident phone 999, This may have led to the confusion of if-clauses and in case clauses.

## 228 if only

**only** can be placed after if and indicates hope, a wish or regret, according to the tense used with it.

A **if only** + present tense/will expresses hope:

*If only he comes in time = We hope he will come in time.*

*If only he will listen to her = We hope he will be willing to listen to her.*

B **if only** + past/past perfect expresses regret (see also **wish** + past/past perfect, 300):

If only he didn't smoke! = We wish he didn't smoke or We are sorry he smokes.

If only (= I/We wish) Tom were here!

If only you hadn't said, 'Liar!' = We wish you hadn't said, 'Liar'/We are sorry you said, 'Liar'.

C **if only** + **would** can express regret about a present action as an alternative to if only 4- past tense (it has the same meaning as wish + would):

If only he would drive more slowly! == We are sorry that he isn't willing to drive more slowly or a not very hopeful wish concerning the future:

If only (= I/We wish) the rain would stop! (We don't really expect it to stop.)

(See also wish, 300-1.)

if only clauses can stand alone as above or form part of a full conditional sentence.

229 Conditional sentences in indirect speech

Type 1, basic form. The tenses here change in the usual way:

He said, 'If I catch the plane I'll be home by five' = He said that if he caught the plane he would be home by five.

Type 2, basic form. No tense changes:

'If I had a permit I could get a job,' he said = He said that if he had a permit he could get a job.

Type 3, basic form. No tense changes:

'If she had loved Tom, he said, 'she wouldn't have left him' = He said that if she had loved Tom she wouldn't have left him.

Examples of if-clauses + commands and requests in indirect speech (see also 320-1):

He said, 'if you have time wash the floor' or

He said, 'if you have time would you wash the floor?' =

He told/asked me to wash the floor if I had time (note change of order) or

He said that if I had time I was to wash the floor.

'If you see Ann ask her to ring me,' he said =

He said that if I saw Ann I was to ask her to ring him.

(The infinitive construction here would be clumsy and less clear.)

PETER (on phone): If you miss the last bus get a taxi =

Peter says that if we miss the last bus we are to get a taxi. (The infinitive construction would be much less usual here.)

(For if you would . . . requests, see 284 F.)

if-clauses + expressions of advice in indirect speech:

'If you feel ill,' she said, 'why don't you go to bed?' or

' . . . you'd better go to bed' =

She advised me to go to bed if I felt ill or

She said that if I felt ill I'd better/I should go to bed.

'If I were you I'd stop taking pills,' she said =

She advised me to stop taking pills.

if-clauses + questions are usually reported with the if-clause last:

'If the baby is a girl what will they call her?' he wondered = He wondered what they would call the baby if it was a girl, 'If the door is locked what shall I do?' she asked = She asked what she would do if the door was locked.