# A “Cheat Sheet” on the Tenses and Voices in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>When to use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simple Present</strong></td>
<td>I run every day.</td>
<td>To describe a habit;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The bus arrives at 11.</td>
<td>Schedules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present Continuous</strong></td>
<td>I’m working today.</td>
<td>To describe an action you’re doing right now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simple Past</strong></td>
<td>I studied for the test for 5 hours last night.</td>
<td>To describe something you did in the past that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I went to the movies on Thursday.</td>
<td>had a specific beginning or end, or that you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>only did once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Continuous</strong></td>
<td>I was studying yesterday.</td>
<td>To describe something you did that doesn’t have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a specific beginning or end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future</strong></td>
<td>I’m going to go running later.</td>
<td>Future plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’ll have my Master’s degree at the end of this year.</td>
<td>Going to is usually for short term plans, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“will” is usually for long-term plans (there are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>exceptions, of course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present Perfect</strong></td>
<td>I’ve never been to Brazil.</td>
<td>To describe something you have done at some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have you ever eaten alligator?</td>
<td>point in your life, or something you’ve never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She hasn’t eaten yet.</td>
<td>done in your life (usually it is over a long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>period of time); use with ever, never, and yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present Perfect continuous</strong></td>
<td>What have you been doing lately?</td>
<td>Something that started in the past and continued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’ve been taking night classes at Temple.</td>
<td>until now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Perfect (Continuous)</strong></td>
<td>I had been his roommate for nine months when he disappeared.</td>
<td>Something that started in the past and continued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>until another moment in the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conditional</strong></td>
<td>If I were you, I wouldn’t smoke so much.</td>
<td>See conditionals explanation on next page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If I had a million dollars, I’d buy a mansion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subjunctive Tense (often used as part of conditionals)</strong></td>
<td>The President demands that the National Guard be called in.</td>
<td>Other examples: Long live the king!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Come what may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>God Bless America!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active Voice</strong></td>
<td>The National Guard protected the border.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passive Voice</strong></td>
<td>The National Guard was called in to protect the border.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conditionals

The **Present Real Conditional** is used to talk about what you normally do in real-life situations. Examples:

- If I go to a friend’s house for dinner, I usually take a bottle of wine or some flowers.
- When I have a day off from work, I often go to the beach.
- If the weather is nice, she walks to work.

The **Past Real Conditional** describes what you used to do in particular real-life situations. It suggests that your habits have changed and you do not usually do these things today.

- If I went to a friend’s house for dinner, I usually took a bottle of wine or some flowers. I don’t do that anymore.
- When I had a day off from work, I often went to the beach. Now, I never get time off.
- If the weather was nice, she often walked to work. Now, she usually drives.

Both "if" and "when" are used in the **Future Real Conditional**, but the use is different from other Real Conditional forms. In the Future Real Conditional, "if" suggests that you do not know if something will happen or not. "When" suggests that something will definitely happen at some point; we are simply waiting for it to occur. Notice also that the **Simple Future** is not used in if-clauses or when-clauses.

Examples:

- **When** you call me, I will give you the address.
  
  *You are going to call me later, and at that time, I will give you the address.*

- **If** you call me, I will give you the address.
  
  *If you want the address, you can call me.*

The **Future Unreal Conditional** is used to talk about imaginary situations in the future. It is not as common as the Future Real Conditional because English speakers often leave open the possibility that anything MIGHT happen in the future. It is only used when a speaker needs to emphasize that something is impossible. Because this form looks like Present Unreal Conditional, many native speakers prefer Form 2 described below.

Examples:

- If I had a day off from work next week, I would go to the beach.
  
  *I don’t have a day off from work.*

- I am busy next week. If I had time, I would come to your party.
  
  *I can’t come.*

- Jerry would help me with my homework tomorrow if he didn’t have to work.
  
  *He does have to work tomorrow.*

**Form 2 of the Future Unreal Conditional** is also used to talk about imaginary situations in the future. Native speakers often prefer this form over Form 1 to emphasize that the conditional
form is in the future rather than the present. Also notice in the examples below that this form can be used in the if-clause, the result, or both parts of the sentence.

Examples:

- If I **were going** to Fiji next week, I **would be taking** my scuba diving gear with me.  
  *In if-clause and result* 
  I am not going to go to Fiji and I am not going to take my scuba gear with me.
- If I **were not visiting** my grandmother tomorrow, I **would help** you study. *In if-clause* 
  I am going to visit my grandmother tomorrow.
- I am busy next week. If I **had** time, I **would be coming** to your party. *In result* 
  I am not going to come to your party.

Adapted from: Englishpage.com
Past Participles

Past participles are used with the present perfect, past perfect, and present and past perfect continuous tenses.

A general rule to follow: Verbs that are irregular in the past are often irregular in the past participle. Usually (but not always!), these verbs take on the present tense root followed by “en”.

- I eat cereal every day.
- I ate a bagel yesterday.
- I have eaten sushi before.

Eat + “en” → eaten

Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Simple Past</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drive</td>
<td>Drove</td>
<td>driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get</td>
<td>Got</td>
<td>Gotten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write</td>
<td>Wrote</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take</td>
<td>Took</td>
<td>Taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Fell</td>
<td>Fallen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some irregular verbs do not change. They are the same in the past and past participle.

Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Simple Past</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buy</td>
<td>Bought</td>
<td>Bought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Taught</td>
<td>Taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>Slept</td>
<td>Slept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut</td>
<td>Cut</td>
<td>Cut*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Words like cut, put, and quit never change verb form.

Verbs that are regular “-ed” in the past are usually “-ed” in the past participle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Simple Past</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>Walked</td>
<td>Walked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk</td>
<td>Talked</td>
<td>Talked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call</td>
<td>Called</td>
<td>called</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Tried</td>
<td>Tried</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Present Perfect Tense**

Americans use the present perfect tense almost every day.

It describes:

An action we just completed, or an action we completed already today

- I’ve eaten already.

An action we completed sometime in our lives

- Have you ever been to Japan?
- Yes, I have.

An action we plan to complete (using yet):

- I haven’t written my paper yet.
- She still hasn’t gone to the doctor.

**Present Perfect Continuous**

This form is used to talk about something you started doing in the past and continue to do in the present. It usually used to answer questions such as:

- What have you been doing lately/what have you been up to lately?
- I’ve been studying a lot.
- Where’ve you been?
- I’ve been working all day.

**Past Perfect Tense**

Think of this tense as the “past of the past.” For example, if we are describing something that hadn’t happened until a certain point in the past:

I had never seen an elephant until I went to the zoo last year.

He had seen the movie three times already when he went to the theater last week.

Had you ever learned English before coming to the U.S. in 2008?

Yes, I’d learned some English in 2002.
Past Continuous vs. Simple Past

The simple past and past continuous are often used together to describe one action being interrupted by another action.

We use “when” to show an interruption. We use “while” to show two actions happening at the same time.

- I was sleeping when the doorbell rang. (the doorbell is the interruption)
- I was skiing when I broke my leg.

You can also invert the order, as long as both clauses have a subject and a verb.

- The doorbell rang when I was sleeping.
- I broke my leg when I was skiing.

Examples with “while”:
I was watching a movie while she was sleeping.
Danielle was working while she was getting her degree.

Future Perfect Continuous with “when”

One of the most difficult forms to master in English is the future perfect continuous. It is similar to the present perfect continuous, with the addition of will:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>will have been</th>
<th>verb</th>
<th>ing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>will have been</td>
<td>work</td>
<td>ing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We use this form to predict an action that we will do in the future and continue doing until another moment in the future.

Example: When I turn 30, I will have been working here for 5 years.

“When I turn 30” is a moment in the future. The act of working starts either in the present or future and continues until that moment when the person turns 30.

Other examples:

By this time tomorrow, he will have been working for 16 hours.

When she arrives, she will have been driving all night.
Gerunds and Infinitives

Gerunds are verbs that act as nouns by adding “ing.”

Gerunds are the only verbs that can follow prepositions. They can also act as the subject of a sentence.

- Swimming is his favorite sport. (Swimming acts as the subject here)
- She talks a lot about shopping. (Shopping is a gerund that follows the preposition “about”)

You can also make gerunds negative:

- Not caring about your grades can cause big problems.

Infinitives are verbs used in their original form: to + verb

- I like to go to the movies.
- I want to take this class.

Some verbs always need the infinitive: hope, choose, want, and need are examples

I need saving money. I need to save money.

Sometimes, you can use a gerund or an infinitive after the verb:

- She remembered visiting him (she recalls the time when she visited him)
- She remembered to visit him. (She didn’t forget to visit him)

However, you cannot mix the infinitive and gerund together.

She started to reading. She started reading OR She started to read.
Phrasal Verbs

A phrasal verb is a verb that has a verb and a particle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Particle</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call</td>
<td>in</td>
<td>To report something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>To wake up or sit up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some phrasal verbs have three parts and some have two parts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Particle</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look</td>
<td>down on</td>
<td>To criticize or view someone negatively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>To appear or be mentioned (sometimes at random)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come</td>
<td>up with</td>
<td>To create or invent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phrasal verbs can be transitive or intransitive.

Transitive means that you can separate the phrasal verb and particle with a direct object.

(figure out: fix or solve)

- She figured out the problem.
- She figured the problem out.

Intransitive phrasal verbs cannot be separated.

- The team came up with a new marketing concept.

Other rules:

If the direct object is a pronoun, put it between the verb and the particle:

- I called her back.
- I put it away.

Some phrasal verbs are identical in form, but have different meanings depending on the context.

Example:

Take off

I took my coat off. (I removed my coat.)

This idea really took off. (This idea became popular or successful very quickly)
Some common phrasal verbs with multiple meanings:

**Break out:** to happen suddenly

The war broke out after the street protests.

**Break out:** to escape

The men broke out of the prison in the middle of the night.

**Bring up:** to raise (in childhood)

My parents brought me up in a small town.

**Bring up:** to mention or start talking about something (similar to “come up”)

She didn’t bring up her divorce.

**Go on:** to continue

First, she got her Master’s degree. Then, she went on to get a PhD.

**Go on:** to urge someone to do something

Go on! Try it.

**Go on:** to happen

What’s going on?

**Look up:** to find something in a reference book or source

I looked it up in the dictionary.

**Look up:** to improve

Things are finally looking up for him.
Put off: to delay
She put her project off until the night before the deadline.

Put off: to discourage or cause dislike
The teacher really put me off with her unfriendly attitude.

Put down: to place on a surface
Please put your pencils down.

Put down: to give money as a first payment
We put down $3,000 for a new car.

Put down: to write or record something, usually on paper
He put down his ideas on his notebook.

Turn down: to lower the volume
Please turn down your music.

Turn down: to reject
They turned me down for the job.

Work out: to resolve or fix something
How did your problem with your roommate work out?

Work out: to exercise
I work out every day (at the gym).