English tenses

Grammatik · Englisch · Klasse 7 bis 12

The tenses

Tense	Form	Example	Use
simple present	V / V + s	He works.	habits, facts, timetables
present progressive	am/is/are + V-ing	He is working.	now; temporary; fixed plans
present perfect	have/has + past participle	He has worked.	past action with a result now; unfinished time
present perfect progressive	have/has been + V-ing	He has been working.	from the past until now, focus on duration
simple past	V-ed / 2nd form	He worked.	finished action at a past time
past progressive	was/were + V-ing	He was working.	in progress at a moment in the past
past perfect	had + past participle	He had worked.	before another past action
past perfect progressive	had been + V-ing	He had been working.	duration up to a moment in the past
will-future	will + V	He will work.	predictions, spontaneous decisions, promises
going to-future	am/is/are going to + V	He is going to work.	plans; something you can already see coming
future progressive	will be + V-ing	He will be working.	in progress at a moment in the future
future perfect	will have + past participle	He will have worked.	finished before a moment in the future
future perfect progressive	will have been + V-ing	He will have been working.	duration up to a moment in the future

Signal words

Tense	Signal words
simple present	always, usually, often, sometimes, never, every day
present progressive	now, at the moment, currently, Look!, Listen!
present perfect	already, just, yet, ever, never, so far, since, for
present perfect progressive	all day, how long, since, for
simple past	yesterday, ago, last year, in 2019, when
past progressive	while, when, at 8 o’clock yesterday
past perfect	before, after, already, by the time
future	tomorrow, next week, soon, probably, I think; by then (future perfect)

Present perfect or simple past?

present perfect	simple past
no time given, result matters: I have lost my key.	time given: I lost my key yesterday.
unfinished time: this week, today	finished time: last week, in 2020
up to now: I have lived here for five years.	ago: I moved here five years ago.
Have you ever been to Scotland?	When did you go to Scotland?

Watch out

- Stative verbs (know, like, want, believe, belong, own, understand) are not normally used in the progressive: I know (not: I am knowing).
- German Präsens + seit becomes present perfect (progressive): Ich wohne seit 2020 hier. = I have lived here since 2020.
- since + point in time (since Monday), for + period of time (for three days).
- No will after if, when, as soon as, before: When I arrive, I’ll call you.
- Every tense has a passive: be in that tense + past participle. The house is / was / has been / will be built.