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Tense and aspect

Part 1 · Events and reference points





Grammar at a glance

When you want to...	Form to use	Worked example
Look inside a past action	was/were + -ing	At nine, Noor was packing.
Link an event to now	has/have + past participle	Noor has packed. Her bag is ready.
Ask about experience	Have/Has + subject + ever + participle?	Has Noor ever camped here?
Look back from the past	had + past participle	She had packed before the bus arrived.

SELECT A ROW TO OPEN ITS LESSON

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TENSE AND ASPECT

Past continuous versus a whole past event



Yesterday, Lily watered from 8:55 to 9:05. The bell rang at 9:00 while she continued watering. One report views watering from inside the ongoing action; another reports the whole finished event. The bell did not necessarily stop her.

The past continuous looks inside an action in progress at a past time. The past simple can present a whole event.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Look inside the action	Lily was watering when the bell rang.	Was watering shows the ongoing background at 9:00; rang reports the bell event.
Report the whole event	Lily watered the plant yesterday.	Watered presents the finished past event as a whole, without focusing on its middle.
Reject a guessed stop	The bell rang during watering.	The log shows she continued until 9:05. A when clause does not automatically mean the action stopped.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Past subject + auxiliary	Action in progress	Reference event
Lily was	watering	when the bell rang

Does past continuous always describe an interrupted action that stops?

No. It can describe background, simultaneous actions or activity at a past point. Even when an event occurs during it, the ending must be established separately.

YOUR TURN

At 6:00 yesterday, a journey was in progress. Which sentence shows it in progress?

We were travelling at 6:00 yesterday. / We are travelling now.

> Answer • We were travelling at 6:00 yesterday.
> Were travelling looks inside a past activity.

TENSE AND ASPECT

Present perfect results versus finished past time



At the current inspection the soil is wet: Lily has watered the plant. A separate log says she watered a different plant yesterday. The first report connects an earlier action to the present situation; the second locates an event in a finished past period.

The present perfect connects a past event with now. For an event explicitly set at a finished time such as last Friday, use the past simple.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Explain the current result	Lily has watered the plant. The soil is wet now.	Has watered connects the earlier completion to the current inspection.
Give a finished date	Lily watered the other plant yesterday.	Yesterday is a finished period; past simple places the event there.
Do not mix the frames	Lily has watered it yesterday.	For the standard usage taught here, use watered with the explicit finished time yesterday.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Present viewpoint	Completed action	Current evidence
Lily has	watered the plant	the soil is wet now

Does present perfect mean the action is still happening?

Not necessarily. Has watered can describe a completed action with a current result. Other uses can describe continuing situations; read the whole context.

YOUR TURN

Use the explicit finished time last Friday.

Noor has visited last Friday. / Noor visited last Friday.

> Answer • Noor visited last Friday.
> The finished date calls for the past-simple pattern here.

TENSE AND ASPECT

Experience, open time windows, questions and negatives



Lily has visited the garden before, but no finished date is requested. Sam has not visited yet. At 10:00 this morning, the morning is still in progress and the team is counting visits so far.

For experience up to now, use have or has with the past participle. Move have or has before the subject to ask a question.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Ask about experience	Has Lily ever visited the garden?	The question ranges over experience up to now, without asking for a finished date.
Report not yet	Sam has not visited yet.	The visit has not happened up to now. Yet suggests it remains expected or possible, not guaranteed.
Locate a dated visit	Lily visited last Monday.	When the question changes to a finished date, past simple locates that event.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Question	Negative	Dated event
Has Lily ever visited?	Sam has not visited yet.	Lily visited last Monday.

Must every sentence with this morning use present perfect?

No. The period may be finished or still open, and speakers may focus on a finished event even within an open period. The lesson explicitly asks for a count so far when present perfect is the target.

YOUR TURN

Ask using the same words: “Noor has seen the film.”

> **Answer • Has Noor seen the film?**
> Invert has and Noor; keep seen.

TENSE AND ASPECT

Past perfect and an earlier past event



Yesterday the watering finished at 8:50. The visitors arrived at 9:00. From their arrival, look back to the already completed watering. Both events are before now; past perfect marks the earlier one relative to that past reference.

The past perfect uses had and a past participle to look back from one past point to an earlier event.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Look back from arrival	Lily had watered the plant before the visitors arrived.	Had watered is complete before the past arrival reference.
Tell the sequence directly	Lily watered the plant, and then the visitors arrived.	Past simple with then can tell this clear chronological sequence. Past perfect is not compulsory for every first event.
Change the order	Lily watered the plant after the visitors arrived.	This reverses the order and contradicts the 8:50/9:00 record.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Earlier past completion	Past reference	Present narration
Lily had watered	the visitors arrived	we tell the story now

Must the first of any two past actions always use past perfect?

No. Past simple can narrate clear sequences. Past perfect highlights an earlier situation relative to a past reference, especially when the narration looks back.

YOUR TURN

By the time Noor arrived, Sam had packed. Which happened earlier?
Noor arrived / Sam packed

> **Answer • Sam packed**
> Had packed looks back from arrival.

VERB FORM REFERENCE / 1 OF 2

Simple and continuous

Follow one writer through three time frames. Read across each row to see how a statement becomes a negative or a question.

FORM AND USE	STATEMENT	NEGATIVE	QUESTION
base verb; he/she/it adds -s • A regular activity			
Present simple	Noor writes every day.	Noor does not write every day.	Does Noor write every day?
am/is/are + -ing • An activity in progress now			
Present continuous	Noor is writing now.	Noor is not writing now.	Is Noor writing now?
past form; did + base in questions • A completed event at a finished time			
Past simple	Noor wrote yesterday.	Noor did not write yesterday.	Did Noor write yesterday?
was/were + -ing • An activity in progress at a past point			
Past continuous	Noor was writing at noon.	Noor was not writing at noon.	Was Noor writing at noon?
will + base verb • An expectation about a later event			
Future with will	Noor will write tomorrow.	Noor will not write tomorrow.	Will Noor write tomorrow?
will be + -ing • An activity in progress at a future point			
Future continuous	Noor will be writing at noon.	Noor will not be writing at noon.	Will Noor be writing at noon?

BUILD THE VERB GROUP

Simple statements use write, writes or wrote. In negatives and questions, do, does or did takes the tense and write stays in its base form. Continuous forms use be + writing.

VERB FORM REFERENCE / 2 OF 2

Perfect and perfect continuous

A perfect form looks back from a reference point. Compare a completed result with time spent on an activity.

FORM AND USE	STATEMENT	NEGATIVE	QUESTION
have/has + past participle • A result connected to now			
Present perfect	Noor has written the note.	Noor has not written the note.	Has Noor written the note?
have/has been + -ing • Activity over a period up to now			
Present perfect continuous	Noor has been writing since ten.	Noor has not been writing since ten.	Has Noor been writing since ten?
had + past participle • Completion before a past reference point			
Past perfect	Noor had written it by noon.	Noor had not written it by noon.	Had Noor written it by noon?
had been + -ing • Ongoing activity up to a past point			
Past perfect continuous	By noon, Noor had been writing for an hour.	By noon, Noor had not been writing for an hour.	Had Noor been writing for an hour by noon?
will have + past participle • Completion by a future reference point			
Future perfect	Noor will have written it by Friday.	Noor will not have written it by Friday.	Will Noor have written it by Friday?
will have been + -ing • Duration measured at a future point			
Future perfect continuous	By noon, Noor will have been writing for an hour.	By noon, Noor will not have been writing for an hour.	Will Noor have been writing for an hour by noon?

BUILD THE VERB GROUP

Perfect = have + written. Perfect continuous = have + been + writing. Change the first helper for the time frame. Put not after that helper to negate, or move it before the subject to ask.

ONE LAST CHALLENGE

What happened before the doors opened?

The team finished setting up at 8:45. The doors opened at 9:00. Look back from opening time using the past perfect.



A POSSIBLE ANSWER

By the time the doors opened, the team had finished setting up.

The opening is the past reference point. Had finished places the work earlier.

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