FEELING TENSE ABOUT TENSES?

HOW TO USE PAST AND PRESENT TENSES IN ACADEMIC WRITING
• Many thanks to the ACT Learning Support and ESL staff for providing the space for this workshop

• The example sentences used in this presentation are taken from *Grammar Sense 2 (1st ed.)*, *Fundamentals of English Grammar (3rd edition)*, as well as the *Purdue University Online Writing Lab* (“OWL”), available at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl)

• As usual, check ung.edu and the campus announcement boards for additional upcoming Writing Center workshops!
OVERVIEW

1. What are tenses, anyway?
2. Simple present and simple past
3. Present perfect
4. Simple past vs. present perfect
5. Past perfect
6. The Progressive aspect
7. Action vs. non-action verbs
WHAT ARE TENSES, ANYWAY?

- **Time** – past, present, and future – and **aspect** – simple, progressive, and perfect – combine to form the English tenses (12 of them!).

- To make time and aspect more visible, we use diagrams like this one:

  "He spent all his money yesterday."
WHAT ARE TENSES, ANYWAY?

1. **Tense** simply give information about when in time something happened.

2. **Aspect** adds additional time-related meaning: “Is the event **continuing** (progressive), or has it been **completed** (perfect)?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Aspect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>Progressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- *He ate.*  ... *eats.*  ... *will eat.*
- *She is eating.*  ... *has eaten.*
  - *(continuing action)*
  - *(completed action)*
I. "SIMPLE" TENSES
THE "SIMPLE" TENSES

Simple past:  I was at the doctor’s office yesterday.
The students left their desks and studied.

Simple present: The bus leaves at 4:20pm every day.
Dogs often prefer meat over dog food.
Water boils at 100°C.

The simple present is usually used for expressing regular, habitual, or pre-scheduled events, or to explain how often something happens – NOT FOR ONGOING ACTIONS!

Simple future: I think everybody will sign the card.
Are they going to eat together?
THE “SIMPLE” TENSES

Simple Past
The festival happened last year.

Simple Present
The cafeteria food is usually bad.

Simple future
The prices will rise in June.
II. PRESENT PERFECT
THE PRESENT PERFECT

To form the present perfect:

**have/has** + **past participle form of the verb**

Past participle of regular verbs: **add “-ed”**
Past participle of irregular verbs: **look up in a list** (see handout)

Try it:

He ____________ (to eat) lunch already.
The children all ______________ (to leave).
The movie ______________ (to be) over for 20 minutes.
______________ (you, to buy) this vegetable before?
None of the students _________ (to do) their homework.
The family _______________ (to live) here since January.
THE PRESENT PERFECT

have/has + past participle form of the verb
(Regular verbs: add “-ed”; irregular verbs: look up in a list)

He has eaten lunch already.
The children all have left.
The movie has been over for 20 minutes.
Have you bought this vegetable before?
None of the students have done their homework.
The family has lived here since January.
WHEN TO USE THE PRESENT PERFECT

In academic writing, the present perfect is used to...

1. ...describe a past event at some unspecified time (often with relevance to the present):

Jim has already eaten lunch.
Have you ever eaten at that restaurant?

2. ...describe repeated past events at unspecified times in the past, or events that have never happened:

Peter has walked by this house many times.
I have met him twice before.
She has never seen this movie!
WHEN TO USE THE PRESENT PERFECT

3. ...describe a situation that **began in the past and continues to the present** when combined with **for** and **since**:

- We **have been** in this workshop **since** 4pm this afternoon.
- I **have known** Ben **for** ten years.
- They **have lived** in New York **for** a long time.
- He **has worked** at this company **since** 2001.
Both simple past and present perfect can be used to talk about past events, but they have specific differences!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple Past</th>
<th>Present Perfect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past event at a <strong>specific</strong> time:</td>
<td>Past event at an <strong>unspecific</strong> time, or relevant NOW:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I <strong>finished</strong> my work 2 hours ago.</td>
<td>I <strong>have already finished</strong> my work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple past events at <strong>specific</strong> times:</td>
<td>Multiple past events at <strong>unspecific</strong> times:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I <strong>was</strong> in Europe in April and June.</td>
<td>I <strong>have been</strong> to Europe several times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using <strong>for</strong> to describe events that began and ended in the past:</td>
<td>Using <strong>for</strong> and <strong>since</strong> to describe events that began in the past and continue to the present:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann <strong>was</strong> in Miami for two weeks.</td>
<td>Ann <strong>has been</strong> in Miami for 2 weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She <strong>has been</strong> there since May.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Choose either simple past or present perfect.

- The students ___________ (to hear) this lecture last year. However, they ___________ (never, to see) this teacher!
- It’s true, she _______________ (to be) in this store at least three times over the past month. But she _______________ (not, to be) there for at least 12 months. I think Mark just _______________ (to go) there last week.
- The candidate will not discuss the issue with them; he _______________ (to address) it already and now he will remain quiet. Last night, however, he _______________ (to mention) it himself.
• The students heard this lecture last year. However, they have never seen this teacher!

• It’s true, she has been in this store at least three times over the past month. But she has not been there for at least 12 months. I think Mark just went there last week.

• The candidate will not discuss the issue with them; he has addressed it already and now he will remain quiet. Last night, however, he mentioned it himself.
III. PAST PERFECT
THE PAST PERFECT

The form of the past perfect is very similar to the present perfect:

had + past participle form of the verb

When his friends arrived, he had already eaten lunch.

Jane finally found the store, but they had sold all of the talking dolls.

Use for two events at two different times in the past! one event ended before the other began.

Also: the past perfect is not often used in academic essay!
Again: **use the past perfect the first of two past events!** (And simple past for the second event after the first one!)

*At 10am, John came home; however, his friends had trashed the apartment the night before.*
THE PROGRESSIVE TENSES

Use the progressive to say that something was, is, or will be done for a duration or period of time, either in the past, present, or future.

To form the progressive:

**to be** (past or present) + **verb** + **-ing**.

- He **was driving** yesterday.
- He **is driving** now.
- He **will be driving** soon.
THE PROGRESSIVE TENSES

He was driving yesterday. He is driving now. He will be driving soon.

Past prog.: I called him, but he _________ (to listen) to music.
Present prog.: The Smiths ___________ (to hike) in the forest.
Future prog.: The police _____________ (collect) evidence later.
THE PROGRESSIVE TENSES

Past prog.:  I called him, but he was listening to music.
Present prog.: The Smiths are hiking in the forest.
Future prog.: The police will be collecting evidence later.
But be careful: **we can only use the progressive for action verbs!** Non-action verbs (for example love, want, believe, have or hear) require the simple present.

**NO:** The writer is knowing important information.

**YES:** The writer knows important information.

I think that grammar is easy. ("think" = believe = progressive is not possible: "I am thinking that grammar is easy."")

I am thinking about grammar right now. ("think about" = actively focusing on = progressive is possible)
PROGRESSIVE TENSES + NON-ACTION VERBS

In other words:

Only “real actions” can be done for a stretch of time!

Which non-action verbs do you know?
ACTIONS VS. NON-ACTION VERBS

Complete the dialog below; use simple present for non-action verbs and the present progressive for action verbs.

A: “__________ (you, to believe) in UFOs?”
B: “What ____________ (you, to talk) about?”
A: “You know, spaceships from outer space, with aliens!”
B: “In my opinion, UFOs ________ (to exist) only in people’s imagination. I __________ (to know) that they can’t be real. Now leave me alone, I ____________ (to try) to read a book right now.”
A: “Okay, but remember, if you _________ (to have) questions about aliens, you can always ask me!”
PRACTICE ACTIONS VS. NON-ACTION VERBS

A: Do you believe in UFOs?” (non-action)
B: “What are you talking about?” (action)
A: “You know, spaceships from outer space, with aliens!”
B: “In my opinion, UFOs exist only in people’s imagination. (non-action) I know that they can’t be real. (non-action) Now leave me alone, I am trying to read a book.” (action)
A: “Okay, but remember, if you have questions about aliens, you can always ask me!” (non-action)
PRACTICE

Use the correct form of the verb; choose between **simple present**, **present progressive**, or **present perfect**

1. My friend Omar _______ (to own) his own car now. It _______ (to be) brand new. Today, he _______ (to drive) to a small town to visit his aunt. He _______ (to love) to listen to music, so the CD player _______ (to play) his favorite CD right now.

2. Harry usually _______ (to visit) his aunt once a week. He _______ (to do) this for 4 years now. He generally _______ (to stay) for a few hours, then _______ (to go) home. But today, he _______ (to stay) longer than usual - he _______ (not, to leave) her house since this morning.
1. My friend Omar *owns* his own car now. It *is* brand new. Today, he *is driving* to a small town to visit his aunt. He *loves* to listen to music, so the CD player *is playing* his favorite CD right now.

2. Harry usually *visits* his aunt once a week. He *has done* this for 4 years now. He generally *stays* for a few hours, then *goes* home. But today, he *is staying* longer than usual - he *has not left* her house since this morning.
THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!

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