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1

Tenses

Simple and continuous tenses; perfect tenses; present perfect continuous and past perfect continuous

Context listening

1.1 You are going to hear part of a radio phone-in programme. Before you listen, look at the photos. What do you think the topic of the phone-in is?



1.2 **02** Listen and check whether you were right. As you listen, answer the questions.

Which of the callers, Karen, Liam, Sahar or Luka ...

- ... lost something on the train one day? Sahar
- ... travels to work by bus? _____
- ... works at home permanently? _____
- ... may buy a motorbike? _____
- ... has always liked travelling by train? _____
- ... used to catch the train at a quarter past seven in the morning? _____
- ... is working at home temporarily? _____
- ... has never owned a car? _____

1.3 **02** Listen again and fill in the gaps.

- I commuted to London for over ten years.
- I _____ over an hour when they announced that the train was cancelled.
- I _____ of buying a motorbike.
- I _____ at home while our office block is being renovated.
- I _____ to her only a couple of times before then.
- I _____ travelling by train ever since I was young.
- I _____ to phone in to your programme for the last half hour.
- Yesterday, I _____ all my work by 2.30 pm.

1.4 Identify the tenses you used in 1.3.

- 1 - past simple

Grammar

2.1 Simple and continuous tenses

START POINT

Present continuous

I'm working at home while our office block is being renovated. (= temporary state)

I'm phoning from the train. (= action in progress)

Present simple

Public transport has a number of advantages over driving. (= permanent state)

I catch the train at 7.05 at the station near my home every morning. (= habit or regular event)

Past continuous

I was travelling home when the train broke down. (= action in progress at past point)

Past simple

I sold my car last week. (= completed past action)

I drove to work for a couple of years. (= past situation that doesn't exist now)

I caught the train every morning at 7.15. (= repeated past action)

We usually use simple tenses with verbs that describe an unchanging state rather than an action:

I love trains.

We can use continuous tenses with state verbs to suggest that a situation is temporary or untypical:

I'm appreciating being able to get up later than usual. (= suggests a temporary arrangement)

Now that I work at home I appreciate being able to get up late. (= suggests a more permanent arrangement)

With some verbs that describe mental states (e.g. *consider, understand*) and attitudes (e.g. *hope, regret*), continuous tenses suggest a process going on at the time of speaking, or emphasise that the process continues to develop:

I'm regretting selling my car already. (= suggests that I have started to regret it and that this regret may grow)

I regret selling my car. (= describes an attitude that is unlikely to change)

Some verbs have different meanings when talking about states and describing actions:

I'm now thinking of buying a motorbike. (*think of* (action) = consider)

Do you think that's a good idea? (*think* (state) = asking about an opinion)

We usually use the present simple with verbs that describe what we are doing as we speak:

I admit that it can be frustrating at times. (= I agree that it is true when I say 'I admit')

I predict that increasing numbers of people will start working at home.

We often use the past simple in a narrative (e.g. a report or a story) to talk about a single completed past action, and the past continuous to describe the situation that existed at the time:

I dropped my purse while I was getting off the train.

When we talk about two or more past completed actions that followed one another, we use the past simple for both:

She woke me up and offered me a lift.

When we talk about two actions that went on over the same period of past time, we can often use the past continuous or the past simple for both:

I was listening to music while I was driving here. or *I listened to music while I drove here.*

We can use continuous tenses with the adverbs *always, constantly, continually* and *forever* to emphasise that something is typical of a person, group or thing because they do it so often:

I was forever arriving late for work.

1 Tenses

We can use either the present continuous or present simple to describe something we regularly do at a certain time:

*At 8 o'clock I'm usually **having** a leisurely breakfast.* or *At 8 o'clock I usually **have** ...*

We often use the present continuous or past continuous:

- to make an enquiry or a statement less certain because we don't know if we're right:
*I'm **hoping** we've got Dave Jones on the line.* (= suggests that the speaker is not sure whether Dave Jones is there)
- to make a request or an offer more polite:
*Karen, **were** you **wanting** to say something?*

2.2 Perfect tenses

START POINT

Present perfect

*I've **lived** in Spain, and the trains are so much more reliable there.* (past situation relevant to the present)

*I've just **sold** my car and so now I go to work by bus.* (recent action with consequences for the present)

*I've **enjoyed** travelling by train ever since I was young.* (situation continuing until the present)

Past perfect

*This morning I'd **read** a couple of reports before I got off the train.* (past event before another past event)

We use the present perfect to talk about a situation that existed in the past and still exists now, and the past simple when the situation no longer exists:

*I've **commuted** to London every weekday for over ten years, and I actually enjoy it.*

*I **commuted** to London every weekday for over ten years before I started working at home.*

We use the present perfect to talk about a repeated action that might happen again:

*I've **arrived** late for work twice this week so far.*

and the past simple for a repeated action that won't happen again:

*I **arrived** late for work twice this week.* (= the working week is over; I won't arrive late again this week)

When we give news or information, we often introduce a topic with the present perfect and then give details with other past tenses:

*The new high speed rail link between the north of England and the Channel Tunnel **has opened**.*

*It **took** 15 years to build and **cost** nearly ten billion pounds.*

When we use a time expression (e.g. *after, as soon as, before, when*) to say that one event happened after another, we can use either the past simple or past perfect for the first event:

*I'd **read** a couple of reports **before** I even got to work.* or *I **read** a couple of reports **before** I even got to work.*

2.3 Present perfect continuous and past perfect continuous

We use the present perfect continuous (*have been + -ing*) to talk about an action in progress in the past for a period until now, and which is either still in progress or recently finished:

*I've **been working** at home for the last five years.* (= action still in progress)

*Sorry I'm late. I've **been trying** to find a parking place.* (= action recently finished)

We often prefer the present perfect continuous to say how long an action has been in progress:

*I've **been trying** to phone in to your programme for the last half hour.*

We use the present perfect to talk about a completed action or series of actions when we are interested in the result:

*I've **called** the bus company a number of times to complain.*

*They've **bought** new trains and have really improved the service.*

We use the past perfect continuous (*had been + -ing*) to talk about an action in progress over a period up to a particular past point in time:

I'd been waiting over an hour when they announced that the train had been cancelled.

If we are not interested in how long the action went on, we often use the past continuous rather than the past perfect continuous:

I was waiting on the platform when they announced that the train had been cancelled. rather than
I'd been waiting on the platform when ... (= there is no mention of how long the person was waiting.)

We use the past perfect when we say how many times something happened in a period up to a particular past time:

I'd spoken to her only a couple of times before then.

We don't usually use the present perfect continuous or the past perfect continuous to describe states:

I'd owned a car ever since I left college. (not ~~*I'd been owning ...*~~)

Grammar exercises

3.1 Choose the correct or more natural answer in this radio news report.

Emergency services were bombarded with phone calls from all over the north of the country last night by people who (1) *are reporting / reported* seeing blue objects shoot across the sky. Mrs Sophia Olsen (2) *drove / was driving* along the main road at the time.

'I (3) *'m usually coming / usually came* along that bit of road at about ten. As I (4) *was going / go* past the old barn, I (5) *was seeing / saw* a single bright blue light going across the road in front of my car. I (6) *stopped / stop* the car and (7) *was watching / am watching* it for about fifteen minutes. It (8) *was travelling / travels* quite slowly from east to west and then it (9) *'s suddenly disappearing / suddenly disappeared*. Until now I (10) *wasn't believing / didn't believe* in UFOs, although my son (11) *is forever trying / forever tries* to persuade me that they (12) *are existing / exist*. But now I (13) *thought / 'm thinking* that maybe he (14) *was being / was right*.'

Dr Maria Walker, a lecturer in astronomy at Trumpton University, (15) *offers / is offering* a simple explanation. 'The reports that (16) *were coming / come* in last night (17) *are suggesting / suggest* that it (18) *was / is* a meteor shower. This (19) *is / was* not unusual on a small scale, but last night's shower (20) *is seeming / seems* to have been very large. In fact, we (21) *were getting / are getting* an increasing number of meteor showers, and my department (22) *is currently researching / currently researches* possible reasons for this.'

But many witnesses to the events (23) *believe / are believing* that they (24) *are observing / were observing* more than a meteor shower, and that last night the Earth was actually visited by beings from outer space.

1 Tenses

3.2 Complete the sentences using the verbs in the box. Use the same verb in each pair of sentences. Use the present simple, present continuous, past simple or past continuous.

attract expect imagine measure see think

- 1 a I 'm thinking about taking a gap year before I go to university and going travelling around South America.
 b A: Why's Yusuf having a party?
 B: I think it's his birthday.
- 2 a A: How did the cat get up into the tree?
 B: I he was chasing a bird.
 b A: Let me know when the post arrives.
 B: Why, you something important?
- 3 a A: What happened to your wrist?
 B: I the window for some new curtains and I fell off the ladder.
 b I was given this pedometer for my birthday. You just hook it on your belt and it how far you walk during the day.
- 4 a This month's special exhibition of South African art over 5,000 visitors a day to the museum, whereas we normally only get about 2,000.
 b As the home of William Shakespeare, Stratford tourists from all over the world.
- 5 a you that big house over there? It's my uncle's.
 b I split up with Alex when I found out that he someone else.
- 6 a I Giulia's under a lot of stress at the moment with moving house and starting a new job.
 b The baby's smiling in her sleep. I wonder what things she in her dreams.

3.3 Complete the sentences with an appropriate form of the verb given. Use the past simple, present perfect, past perfect and past perfect continuous tenses. Use each tense only once in each group of four sentences.

- 1 *play*
 a We have played 35 matches so far this season, so we're all feeling pretty tired.
 b After the match, she admitted that she badly.
 c you rugby or football at the school you went to?
 d Ireland really well all year, so it came as a big surprise when they were beaten by Wales last December.
- 2 *make*
 a We the right decision in emigrating to Canada in the mid-1990s.
 b Henson never thought about retirement. In fact, he a documentary film about the indigenous people of Chile when he died.
 c A: When did you realise that you a mistake in joining the army?
 B: When I was posted to a boiling hot jungle.

d Korean scientists believe that they _____ a breakthrough in the fight against cancer by developing a technique for containing the disease. They reported their findings at the AAL conference in New York this week.

3 run

a Over the last year I _____ workshops on creative writing in twelve colleges and universities.

b She was breathing hard as if she _____.

c She _____ only two marathons before breaking the world record in the Pan-African Games.

d I was late for work so I _____ most of the way.

3.4 Complete the sentences using either the present perfect or present perfect continuous form of the verb given. Where both are possible, choose the more likely tense.

1 Alice has competed (*compete*) in the Athens Marathon twice before, but hopes to achieve her best time this year.

2 Income from manufacturing exports still provides the largest proportion of the country's export earnings, but the proportion _____ (*drop*) for many years.

3 The house _____ (*belong*) to the Beecham family for over 250 years, but the present owner, Donald Beecham, is selling it.

4 Melnik _____ (*serve*) a life sentence for murder since 1990, but his lawyers are arguing for an early release.

5 A: I'd like a career where I can travel and meet people.

B: _____ (*consider*) becoming a tour guide?

6 A: _____ (*swim*)? You look really exhausted.

B: I am. I did 50 lengths of the pool.

7 A: Did you manage to get in touch with Chloe?

B: No, I _____ (*try*) three times in the last hour, but she's always engaged.

3.5 Choose the correct tense.

A: Good morning, Mr Nilsson. What can I do for you?

B: Well, doctor, (1) *I've been getting* / *I've got* some really bad headaches.

A: Okay. Can you tell me exactly when these headaches (2) *were starting* / *started*?

B: Oh, yes, I (3) *have remembered* / *remember* it vividly – it was on a Friday three weeks ago. I (4) *had been working* / *worked* in front of my computer all week because I (5) *did* / *was doing* a job for an important client – (6) *I was working* / *I've been working* as a website designer for the last few years, you see. I (7) *had just finished* / *had just been finishing* when the pain started, and by the end of that day I (8) *was feeling* / *have felt* really bad.

A: Okay. And how (9) *have you slept* / *have you been sleeping*?

B: Not very well, actually. Usually I'm asleep as soon as my head (10) *hits* / *is hitting* the pillow, but recently (11) *I've been having* / *I'm having* difficulty getting to sleep.

A: I see. Now, (12) *I'm noticing* / *I notice* that you wear glasses. (13) *Have you had* / *Were you having* your eyes tested recently?

B: No, I (14) *haven't had* / *didn't have* them tested for a couple of years, I suppose.

A: Okay, what (15) *I suggest* / *I'm suggesting* is that first you get your eyes tested. Then when you (16) *are working* / *have worked* at your computer, take frequent breaks to rest your eyes. If that (17) *hasn't solved* / *doesn't solve* the problem, come back and see me again.

Exam practice

Reading and Use of English Part 2

For questions **1 – 8**, read the text below and think of the word which best fits each gap. Use only **one** word in each gap. There is an example at the beginning **(0)**.

Planets beyond our solar system

Throughout history we have wondered about the possibility **(0)** of life beyond the Earth. It is only in recent years, however, that advances in technology **(1)** _____ revealed the existence of extrasolar planets (or 'exoplanets'); **(2)** _____ is to say, planets which orbit not our own Sun, but other stars in the universe. So **(3)** _____, astronomers have identified a few thousand exoplanets, but believe that billions more exist.

Although many astronomers believe that a large number of planets in the universe are capable of supporting **(4)** _____ kind of living organism, whether or not life has developed on any of them **(5)** _____ not yet known. An essential requirement for life is liquid water. **(6)** _____ a planet is to have liquid water on its surface, its temperature must be **(7)** _____ too hot nor too cold. However, **(8)** _____ a planet, other than the Earth, has yet to be discovered.