

TENSE AND ASPECT

What Is Tense?

We use different verb tenses to place actions and states in different time periods: past, present, and future. In the following examples, the verb is in bold and the expression of time, underlined:

I am in my third year at college <u>now</u> .	(present simple tense for present time)
I passed all my courses <u>last term</u> .	(past simple tense for past time)
I'm going to graduate <u>next year</u> .	(future with <i>going to</i> for future time)

What Is Aspect?

Aspect refers to how actions and states relate to different time ideas. There are two kinds of aspect: perfect and continuous. Perfect aspect indicates a relationship between two time periods, for example, past and present, past and past, present and future, or future and future. Continuous aspect indicates that an action is, was, or will be in progress at a certain time.

Simple tenses are normally defined as tenses with no auxiliary verbs. However, the term *simple* is used in this book with perfect tenses (which do have auxiliary verbs) to differentiate them from continuous forms, for example, present perfect simple as opposed to present perfect continuous.

Perfect Aspect

I've **lived** on campus for two years. (present perfect simple tense)

In the example above, the present perfect simple tense is used to explain a relationship between the past and the present. The speaker began living on campus two years ago and is still living there at the time of speaking. The perfect aspect in this sentence is the relationship between then and now—in this case, an unfinished period of time. The perfect aspect is formed with the auxiliary verb *have* followed by the past participle of the main verb: *I've lived*.

Continuous Aspect

I'm **studying** now. Please call later. (present continuous tense)

In the example above, the present continuous tense is used to explain that an action is in progress at the time of speaking. The speaker cannot talk now because he or she is busy studying. The continuous aspect is formed with the auxiliary verb *be* followed by the main verb + *ing*: *I'm studying*.

Perfect and Continuous Aspect Together

I've **been studying** all day. (present perfect continuous tense)
That's why I'm tired.

In the example above, the present perfect continuous tense is used to describe a continuous action in unfinished time. The studying is continuous, and the time

is unfinished (the day has not ended). The emphasis is on the present result of the continuous past action: “that’s why I’m tired.” This sentence has perfect and continuous aspect.

TASK 1

Read the sentences below and answer the concept questions that follow. Refer to the summary at the end of the unit if you need help answering the questions.

Talking about the Past

- a) I’ve lived on campus for two years.
- b) I’ve been living on campus for two years.

1. Is the time idea in sentences a) and b) finished or unfinished?

Unfinished

2. Which sentence could give the impression that the speaker intends to stay there permanently?

Sentence a). In contrast, the present perfect continuous can convey the idea of a more temporary action or state.

- c) I used to spend hours in the library during my first year.
- d) I used to live on campus during my first year.
- e) I would spend hours in the library during my first year.
- f) I would live on campus during my first year.

3. Which of sentences c) to f) is not correct when talking about past habits, and why?

Sentence f). Would cannot be used for past states (live is a state verb).

4. If you change the time idea to present and future for sentence f), what is the concept?

If the time idea were present and future, sentence f) would be possible if the speaker were referring to living on campus at the time of speaking or in the future. The concept is hypothetical.

Talking about the Present

- g) This month, I’m working as a research assistant (RA).
- h) Sorry, I can’t talk. I’m doing my RA job in the lab now.
- i) If only I had time to work as an RA and earn some money.

5. In which sentence does it seem that the speaker does not have a job as an RA?

Sentence i). The speaker does not have time to work as an RA: the past-tense form *had* refers to an unreal present.

6. In which sentence might the speaker have a job as an RA but might not be doing the job at the time of speaking?

Sentence g). It refers to a temporary continuous action that is not necessarily taking place at the time of speaking.

7. In which sentence is the speaker definitely working as an RA at the moment of speaking?

Sentence h). This use of the present continuous refers to a continuous action that is taking place at the time of speaking.

Talking about the Future

- j) Wow! You got an A on the mock exam. I don't think you're going to fail!
k) I think I'll get good grades this year.

8. Which of sentences j) and k) is a general prediction, and which is a prediction based on present evidence? What is the evidence?

Sentence k) is a general prediction, and sentence j) is a prediction based on present evidence. The present evidence is the speaker just finding out that the other student got an A on his or her mock exam.

- l) I'm going to take four courses next term.
m) I'll help you with your lab report if you like.

9. Which of sentences l) and m) is an intention, and which is an offer?

Sentence l) is an intention. Sentence m) is an offer.

10. When did the speaker in sentence l) make the decision to take four courses next term: at the time of speaking or before?

Before the time of speaking, in the past

11. When did the speaker in sentence m) make the decision to help: at the time of speaking or before?

At the time of speaking: it is a spontaneous decision.

TASK 2

Look again at the example sentences in Task 1. Underline any examples you find of perfect aspect and **highlight** any examples of continuous aspect. You will need to underline *and* highlight examples that represent both perfect and continuous aspect.

Alternative verb forms
are in parentheses;
however, these forms lack
the precision of the
suggested answers.

TASK 3

Read the paragraph below and fill in the blanks with appropriate verb forms. Use the verbs in brackets. There may be more than one correct answer for some blanks.

I used to live (lived) [live] in Korea when I was [be] a young child; then my parents decided [decide] to move the family to California. I was watching (had been watching) [watch] TV one afternoon when they told [tell] me, "We 're moving (going to move) [move] to the United States." I remember [remember] the day we arrived [arrive] like it was [be] yesterday. We had been flying (had flown) [fly] for 13 hours when the plane touched down [touch down] at Los Angeles airport. I had visited [visit] several other countries before, but the United States was [be] different. I 've been living ('ve lived) [live] in Los Angeles for 10 years now. During these 10 years, we 've moved (moved) [move] house three times. At the moment, I 'm [be] really busy because I 'm preparing [prepare] for my Grade 12 exams. If only I had [have] more time! My next exam is [be] only one week away. I think I 'm going to do (will do) [do] OK as I 've prepared ('ve been preparing) [prepare] well for this one. In fact, I think I 'll pass ('m going to pass) [pass] all of my exams. Once I 've finished (finish) [finish], I 'm visiting (going to visit) [visit] Florida with my family to celebrate. We 've been planning ('ve planned) [plan] the trip for months. Hopefully, this time next month, I 'll be lying [lie] on Miami Beach, and in one year, I 'll have passed (will pass) [pass] all my first-year college exams. My childhood in Korea seems [seem] so far off now. I remember (can remember) [remember] how I would spend / used to spend [spend] hours playing with my cousins during the summer holidays. Now I spend ('m spending) [spend] most of my time studying!



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TASK 4

Write a paragraph about the following:

- your past experience studying English
- your present living conditions
- your future study plans

Use as many of the tenses and verb forms described in this unit as you can.

Sample answer: If only I had more time to study English! I started studying English in elementary school and am still studying it today. In fact, while I was studying at secondary school, I would spend an hour a week with a private tutor to improve my pronunciation. My parents wanted me to sound like a native speaker. In total, I've been studying English for 16 years. I can't believe it. My end-of term exams start next week and I will have to write five exam essays. It's a bit noisy where I'm living, so I'm doing most of my revision in the library. I did well on my mock exams so I think I'm going to get good grades, at least for the language part. It's a bit stressful, though. Hopefully, this time next year, I'll have improved and will be more relaxed. I'm going to study Business at graduate level, so I need good grades.

SUMMARY

TENSES: PRESENT, PAST, AND FUTURE TIME

Tense/Form	Example	Concept
Talking about the Present		
Present simple	a) I study every day. b) Phnom Penh is the capital of Cambodia. c) Nurses have a demanding job. d) I agree with you.	a) A habit b) A fact c) A general truth d) A state
Present continuous	a) I 'm studying now. Please call later. b) I can't go tonight. I 'm studying this week. c) You 're always interrupting me!	a) Ongoing activity, happening now b) Ongoing activity, maybe happening now c) A habit, often annoying
Past tense for unreal present	a) It's time you studied harder. b) If only I had more money.	a) You're not studying hard. (action verb) b) I don't have enough money. (state verb)

Tense/Form	Example	Concept
Talking about the Past		
Past simple	a) I studied too much last week. b) I had no time to relax.	a) Finished past, time idea stated b) Finished past, time idea understood
Past continuous	I was studying when you phoned me.	Action in progress at a specific past time
Present perfect simple	a) I 've lived in Spain for 10 years. b) I 've attended three different colleges. c) I 've passed the exam!	a) Unfinished past: I still live there. b) Life experience c) One action, with focus on the present result: I'm happy!
Present perfect continuous	a) I 've been living here for two years. b) Sorry I'm late. I 've been driving for an hour. c) I 've been studying all day.	a) Unfinished past: I still live here. (can seem temporary) b) Continued action, recently finished c) Continued action, with focus on the present result: I'm tired.
Past perfect simple	When I got to the station, the train had just left .	One past action happened before another.
Past perfect continuous	I had been studying all day when you arrived.	One continuous past action happened before another.
Used to for past habit	a) I used to study all day during exam time. b) I used to have a lot of free time at college.	a) I don't do it any more. (action verb) b) I don't have free time now. (state verb)
Would for past habit	I would study all day during the exam period.	I don't do it any more. (action verb) *Do not use <i>would</i> for past states.
Talking about the Future		
Future with <i>will</i>	a) I think you 'll do well on the exam. b) Don't worry. I 'll check your essay.	a) A general prediction b) An offer, a spontaneous decision
Future with <i>going to</i>	a) I think I 'm going to do well on the exam. I just got an A on the practice paper. b) I 'm going to major in Computer Science.	a) A prediction based on present evidence b) A future intention, decision made in the past
Present simple for future	The next class begins in 20 minutes.	Timetable future: it's scheduled.
Present continuous for future	I 'm staying with my cousins next week.	Arranged future
Future continuous	This time tomorrow, I 'll be taking my English exam.	A temporary continuous action at a specific future time
Future perfect	This time next week, I 'll have finished all my exams.	An action finished before a specific future time
Future perfect continuous	I expect I 'll have been studying for 10 hours when you get here.	A continuous action finished before a specific future time

ARTICLES, NOUNS, AND NOUN PHRASES

When you describe things in English, you often have to use articles such as *a/an* and *the* in front of the noun.

I need to borrow **a dictionary**.

The chairs in Room 3 are uncomfortable.

Other times, there is no article in front of the noun. Instead, the noun is in plural or uncountable form with no article.

Online dictionaries are convenient.

I love doing **research**.

You need to follow two stages to understand how to use articles correctly when forming noun phrases in English, and to understand how meanings can change with the different uses.

STAGE 1

GENERAL OR SPECIFIC?

The first question to ask when you use a noun phrase to describe something in English is the following: “Is the concept general or specific?”

General means that you are using a noun phrase to refer to all members of a group or category. For example, if you write “Online dictionaries are convenient,” you are referring to all online dictionaries, that is, all members of the group “online dictionaries.” This is a general noun phrase.

Specific means that you are referring to a specific thing, or specific things. If, for example, you write “The chairs in Room 3 are uncomfortable,” you are referring to those specific chairs, the ones in Room 3, not all chairs. This is a specific noun phrase.

TASK 1

Indicate whether the noun or noun phrase in bold is general or specific.

		General	Specific
1	I often get lost in libraries .	✓	
2	I often get lost in the library .		✓
3	You should drink green tea when you study.	✓	
4	The green tea I bought last week is caffeine-free.		✓
5	I need to find a roommate .	✓	
6	The roommate I used to share with has moved out.		✓

The second question to ask when you use a noun phrase to describe something in English is the following: "Is the noun countable or uncountable?"

Countable Nouns

Countable nouns can be used in plural form and with the articles *a/an* and *the*.

Online dictionaries are convenient.

I need to borrow **a dictionary**.

The chairs in Room 3 are uncomfortable.

Uncountable Nouns

Uncountable nouns have no plural form. They can be used with or without the article *the*, but not with the article *a/an*.

I love doing **research**.

The drinking water on campus is filtered.

TASK 2

Indicate whether the noun or noun phrase in bold is countable or uncountable.

		Countable	Uncountable
1	I often get lost in libraries .	✓	
2	I often get lost in the library .	✓	
3	You should drink green tea when you study.		✓
4	The green tea I bought last week is caffeine-free.		✓
5	I need to find a roommate .	✓	
6	The roommate I used to share with has moved out.	✓	

How to Form General Noun Phrases

A general noun phrase refers to all members of a group. The rules for forming general noun phrases depend on whether the noun being described is countable or uncountable. Below you will learn three common types of general noun phrase (G1, G2, and G3) and one less common type (G4). (G stands for *general*.)

Remember this rule of thumb: you should not normally use *the* in general noun phrases.

G1. Use *a/an* + the singular noun.

I need to borrow **a dictionary**.

This is general because *a dictionary* means *any dictionary*.

G2. Use the plural noun with no article.

Online dictionaries are convenient.

This is general because *online dictionaries* means *all* online dictionaries.

G3. Use an uncountable noun with no article.

I love doing **research**.

This is general because *research* means all types of research.

G4. Use *the* + the singular countable noun.

For species and inventions, and in academic analysis

G4a. A recent study found **the black rhino** to be in critical danger of extinction.

This is general because *the black rhino* means the species.

G4b. **The digital textbook** has changed how students learn.

This is general because *the digital textbook* means the invention. This form is also used with musical instruments, for example, *the piano*.

G4c. **The Vice-President Research** leads research in most universities.

This is general because *the Vice-President Research* means all VPRs when analyzing their role.

Note that the three sentences above could also be written using the G2 form and have exactly the same meaning:

A recent study found **black rhinos** to be in critical danger of extinction.

Digital textbooks have changed how students learn.

Vice-Presidents Research lead research in most universities.

However, in academic writing, the G4 form can seem more formal and analytical than the G2 form.

How to Form Specific Noun Phrases

A specific noun phrase refers to a specific thing or things. The rules for forming specific noun phrases also relate to whether the noun being described is countable or uncountable. Below you will learn three common types of specific noun phrase (S1, S2, and S3) and one less common type (S4). (S stands for *specific*.)

Remember this rule of thumb: you should normally use *the* in specific noun phrases.

S1. Use *the* + the singular noun.

The projector in Room 3 isn't working.

This is specific because *the projector in Room 3* means the specific projector in that room.

S2. Use *the* + the plural noun.

The chairs in Room 3 are uncomfortable.

This is specific because *the chairs in Room 3* means the specific chairs in that room.

S3. Use *the* + the uncountable noun.

The drinking water on campus is filtered.

This is specific because *the drinking water on campus* refers specifically to the drinking water available on campus.

S4. Use *a/an* + the singular countable noun.

There is **a writing course** on Tuesdays.

This is specific because *a writing course* means a specific writing course being held on Tuesdays. When you introduce new information like this for the first time, use *a/an*. After the first mention, you should switch to *the* + the singular countable noun (S1):

The course starts next week.

It is clear from the context that *the course* is the same specific course—the writing course on Tuesdays.

TASK 3

Indicate whether the noun or noun phrase in bold is countable or uncountable, and general or specific. Then label each noun phrase according to the categories above, for example, G2 or S4. The first question has been done as an example. Refer to the summary at the end of the unit if necessary.

1. **Smart phones** can be used to help learning.

☒ countable ☐ uncountable ☒ general ☐ specific Type: G2

2. If students have **a smart phone**, they can access a lot of information.

☒ countable ☐ uncountable ☒ general ☐ specific Type: G1

3. After I bought **a smart phone**, I changed how I studied.

☒ countable ☐ uncountable ☐ general ☒ specific Type: S4

4. **The smart phone** has changed how students learn.

☒ countable ☐ uncountable ☒ general ☐ specific Type: G4

5. We're meeting in **the classroom next to the lab**.

☒ countable ☐ uncountable ☐ general ☒ specific Type: S1

6. **The classrooms in the South Campus** are equipped for video-conferencing.

☒ countable ☐ uncountable ☐ general ☒ specific Type: S2

7. **The classrooms** are also air-conditioned.

☒ countable ☐ uncountable ☐ general ☒ specific Type: S2

8. We donated **the money we collected last month** to a local children's charity.
☐ countable ☒ uncountable ☐ general ☒ specific Type: S3
9. **Money** can't solve every problem, but it can help.
☐ countable ☒ uncountable ☒ general ☐ specific Type: G3

Shared Knowledge in Specific Noun Phrases

When you use specific noun phrases, you share knowledge with your listener or reader. Shared knowledge can be *explicitly stated* or *implicitly understood* in specific noun phrases.

Explicitly stated means that the shared knowledge is included in the noun phrase in the form of specifying information so that the listener or reader can understand which specific thing you are describing. *Implicitly understood* means that the specifying information is not included in the noun phrase because it is not necessary: the listener or reader can understand which specific thing you are describing from the context.

The following examples from Task 3 illustrate this difference.

The classrooms in the South Campus are equipped for video-conferencing.
 (shared knowledge explicitly stated)

The writer has added *in the South Campus* as specifying information to make it clear to the reader which classrooms are being described. Without this information, the reader would not understand the specific reference, i.e., which classrooms.

The classrooms are also air-conditioned. (shared knowledge implicitly understood)

The writer has not added any specifying information because the context can be implicitly understood from the previous sentence. The reader understands that *the classrooms* refers to the classrooms in the South Campus, so it is not necessary to repeat this information. Where the context is clear and can be implicitly understood, writers (and speakers) tend to avoid specifying information.

TASK 4

Indicate whether the shared knowledge is stated explicitly or understood implicitly in the noun phrases in bold. Underline any specifying information.

		Explicit	Implicit
1	The increase in college tuition fees came into effect last month.	✓	
2	The increase was not popular with the students.		✓
3	TEACHER: "Can someone pass by? The video-conferencing machine isn't working." TECHNICIAN: "Which one are you talking about?"		✓
4	TEACHER: "Oh, sorry. I meant the video-conferencing machine in EDF25 isn't working." TECHNICIAN: "I'll send someone over to help you in the next 10 minutes."	✓	

TASK 5

Read the following paragraph. The nouns and noun phrases in bold are incorrect. Fix the errors by writing the correct forms above the noun phrases. Then label each noun phrase according to the categories described on pages 8 to 10, for example, G2 or S4.

The Hubble Telescope

The telescope (G4)

Telescope has revolutionized astronomy since its invention in the 17th century.

astronomers (G2)

Since then, **the astronomers** have spent years studying the universe through tele-

a large telescope (S4)

scopic lenses. In 1990, **large telescope** was sent into orbit to study the universe:

The telescope (S1)

the Hubble Telescope. **Telescope** was named Hubble after the astronomer Edwin

Hubble. The images it has sent back to Earth have given us new insight into **star**

the stars and planets in our galaxy (S2)

a personal computer (G1)

and planet in our galaxy. Anyone can use **personal computer** to look at its images

research (G3)

via the Internet. Anyone wanting to do **the research** can apply to use the Hubble

Telescope. If someone sends a research proposal, a panel of leading astronomers

the research (S3)

the field of astronomy (S1)

will review **research** and its potential impact on **field of astronomy**.



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TASK 6

Read the excerpts below from the introduction (titled “Background”) to the following article: Beghi, G. M., & Morselli-Labate, A. M. (2016). Does homeopathic medicine have a preventive effect on respiratory tract infections? A real life observational study. Multidisciplinary respiratory medicine, 11(1), 12.

Selected noun phrases are in bold. Analyze how and why the authors use general and specific noun phrases in this section. Label the noun phrases G for general or S for specific in the left margin. Do you notice any patterns of usage?

Background

G [1] Integrative medicine (IM) refers to all those treatments that are not part of **conventional healthcare**. **Homeopathy** is a system of IM that was developed in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century employing **medicines** prepared according to a well-defined procedure starting from mineral, herbal or animal substances. ...

G [2] According to the 2012 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) approximately 5 million adults and 1 million children in the United States used **homeopathy** in 2011. According to the 2014 Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT)

G survey, **homeopathic products** have been used by approximately 2.5 million people in Italy in the years 2010–2013 and they have been prescribed by over 20,000 physicians. ...

S [3] An observational longitudinal study conducted in Italy between 1998
S–S and 2008 analysed the socio-demographic features and the outcomes of a
S paediatric population treated with homeopathic medicine. The results
S were promising and indicated a positive therapeutic response, especially in children affected by respiratory diseases (Rossi et al., 2010). ...

S [4] This paper presents the results of a retrospective controlled observational
S study designed to examine health changes, expressed as the reduction in the
S average number of RTI episodes per year, of a cohort of patients undergoing homeopathic treatment versus a control group of untreated patients, in a real-world setting.

See the answer
key for the sources
cited in the excerpts.

Patterns of usage: Sample answer: The most notable pattern is a shift from general to specific, a common feature in introductions to academic journal articles. In the excerpts, the authors signal this shift from general background information to the specific aspects of the study by using general noun phrases (excerpts 1 and 2) and then specific noun phrases (excerpts 3 and 4).

TASK 7

Write four sentences containing general or specific noun phrases. In each sentence, use at least two nouns from each of the following lists of vocabulary related to experimental research.

Countable Nouns

- control group
- double-blind control trial
- experiment
- expert
- participant
- patient
- result

Uncountable Nouns

- bias
- homeopathy
- medicine
- placebo effect
- popularity
- research

Sample answers

1. The **participants** who took part in the **experiment** may have shown **bias** against **homeopathy**.
2. The **research** suggests that the **patients** in the **control group** could have experienced the **placebo effect**.
3. **Experts** today still use **double-blind control trials** in **research** on the effectiveness of **medicine**.
4. The **results** of scientific **experiments** in **homeopathy** are inconsistent, but they have not led to a reduction in the **popularity** of homeopathic treatments.

Category: General or Specific? Countable or Uncountable?			Form	Example	Concept
G1	General	Countable	<i>a/an</i> + singular noun	I need to borrow a dictionary .	Any dictionary
G2	General	Countable	Plural noun (no article)	Online dictionaries are convenient.	All online dictionaries
G3	General	Uncountable	Uncountable noun (no article)	I love doing research .	All types of research
G4	General	Countable	<i>the</i> + singular noun	a) The black rhino is in critical danger of extinction. b) The digital textbook has changed how students learn. c) The Vice-President Research (VPR) leads research in most universities.	a) The species: all black rhinos b) The invention: all digital textbooks c) All VPRs (analysis of their role)
S1	Specific	Countable	<i>the</i> + singular noun	The projector in Room 3 isn't working.	The specific projector in that room
S2	Specific	Countable	<i>the</i> + plural noun	The chairs in Room 3 are uncomfortable.	The specific chairs in that room
S3	Specific	Uncountable	<i>the</i> + uncountable noun	The drinking water on campus is filtered.	Specifically, the drinking water available on campus
S4	Specific	Countable	<i>a/an</i> + singular noun	There is a writing course on Tuesdays. * The course starts next week.	New information: first mention *After the first mention, use <i>the</i> + singular noun (S1).
Shared Knowledge in Specific Noun Phrases		Example		Concept	
Explicitly stated		The projector in Room 3 isn't working.		The specifying information <i>in Room 3</i> makes it clear which projector.	
Implicitly understood		Can someone come and fix the projector ?		No specifying information: the previous sentence makes it clear which projector.	