Present tense

There are two tenses in English: past and present.

The present tense is used to talk about the [**present**](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1388) and to talk about the [**future**](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1406).

There are four present tense forms:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Present simple | *I work* |
| Present continuous | *I am working* |
| Present perfect | *I have worked* |
| Present perfect continuous | *I have been working* |

We can use all these forms:

* to talk about the **present**:

*London****is****the capital of Britain.  
He****works****at McDonald’s.  
He****is working****at McDonald's.  
He****has worked****there for three months now.  
He****has been working****there for three months now.*

* to talk about the **future**:

*The next train****leaves****this evening at 17.00.  
I'll phone you when I****get****home.  
He****is meeting****Peter in town this afternoon.  
I'll come home as soon as I****have finished****work.  
You will be tired out after you****have been working****all night.*

We can use present forms to talk about the **past**:

* when we are telling a story:

*Well, it****'s****a lovely day and I****'m****just****walking****down the street when I****see****this funny guy walking towards me. Obviously he****'s been drinking****, because he****'s moving****from side to side …*

* when we are **summarising** something we have read, heard or seen:

*I love Ian Rankin's novels. He writes about this detective called Rebus. Rebus****lives****in Edinburgh and he****'s****a brilliant detective, but he****'s****always****getting****into trouble. In one book, he****gets suspended****and they****tell****him to stop working on this case. But he****takes****no notice …*

Present simple

The present tense is the **base form** of the verb:

*I****work****in London.*

But with the third person singular (*she*/*he*/*it*), we add an ***–s***:

*She****works****in London.*

Present simple questions

Look at these questions:

***Do****you****play****the piano?  
Where****do****you****live****?*  
***Does****Jack****play****football?  
Where****does****he****come from****?*  
***Do****Rita and Angela****live****in Manchester?  
Where****do****they****work****?*

We use *do* and *does* to make [questions](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1363) with the present simple. We use *does* for the third person singular (*she*/*he*/*it*) and *do* for the others.

We use *do* and *does* with question words like *where*, *what* and *when*:

***Where do****Angela and Rita****live****?*  
***What does****Angela****do****?*  
***When does****Rita usually****get up****?*

But questions with *who* often don't use *do* or *does*:

***Who lives****in London?*  
***Who plays****football at the weekend?*  
***Who works****at Liverpool City Hospital?*

Here are some useful questions. Try to remember them:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Where do you come from? Do you come from …? Where do you live? Do you live in ...?* | *What work do you do? Do you like …? Do you know …?* |

Present simple negatives

Look at these sentences:

*I like tennis but I****don't like****football.*(don't = do not)  
*I****don't live****in London now.  
I****don't play****the piano but I play the guitar.  
They****don't work****at the weekend.  
John****doesn't live****in Manchester.*(doesn't = does not)  
*Angela****doesn't drive****to work. She goes by bus.*

We use *do* and *does* to make negatives with the present simple. We use *doesn't* for the third person singular (*she*/*he*/*it*) and *don't* for the others.

Present simple and present time

We use the present simple to talk about:

* something that is **true** in the present:

*I****'m****nineteen years old.  
I****'m****a student.  
He****lives****in London.*

* something that **happens regularly** in the present:

*I****play****football every weekend.*

* something that is always true:

*The human body****contains****206 bones.  
Light****travels****at almost 300,000 kilometres per second.*

We often use [adverbs of frequency](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/11091) like *sometimes*, *always* and *never* with the present simple:

*I****sometimes****go to the cinema.  
She****never****plays football.*

Here are some useful sentences. Complete them so that they are true for you and try to remember them:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *My name is … . I'm … years old. I come from … . I live in … .* | *I'm a(n) … . I … at the weekend. I often … . I never … .* |

Complete these sentences so that they are true for a friend and try to remember them:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Her/His name is … . She's/He's … years old. She/He comes from … . She/He lives in … .* | *She's/He's a(n) … . She/He … at the weekend. She/He often … . She/He never … .* |

Present simple and future time

We also use the present simple to talk about:

* something that is **fixed** in the future:

*The school term****starts****next week.  
The train****leaves****at 19.45 this evening.  
We****fly****to Paris next week.*

* something in the future **after time words** like *when*, *after* and *before* and **after** *if* and *unless*:

*I'll talk to John****when****I****see****him.  
You must finish your work****before****you****go****home.*  
***If****it****rains****we'll get wet.  
He won't come****unless****you****ask****him.*

**Level: advanced**

We sometimes use the present simple to talk about the past when we are:

* telling a story:

*I was walking down the street the other day when suddenly this man****comes up****to me and****tells****me he****has lost****his wallet and****asks****me to lend him some money. Well, he****looks****a bit dangerous so I****'m****not sure what to do and while we****are standing there****…*

* summarising a book, film or play:

*Harry Potter****goes****to Hogwarts School. He****has****two close friends, Hermione and …*

*Shakespeare's Hamlet****is****the Prince of Denmark. One night he****sees****his father's ghost. The ghost****tells him****he****has been murdered****…*

**Level: beginner**

The present continuous is made from the **present tense of the verb**[***be***](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1372) and the [***–ing* form**](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1384) of a verb:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *I****am*** | *worki****ng*** |
| *You****are*** | *play****ing*** |
| *He****is*** | *talk****ing*** |
| *She****is*** | *liv****ing*** |
| *It****is*** | *eat****ing*** |
| *We****are*** | *stay****ing*** |
| *They****are*** | *sleep****ing*** |

We use the present continuous to talk about:

* **activities at the moment of speaking**:

*I****'m****just****leaving****work. I'll be home in an hour.  
Please be quiet. The children****are sleeping****.*

* **future plans or arrangements:**

*Mary****is going****to a new school****next term****.  
What****are****you****doing******next week****?*

Present continuous questions

We make questions by putting ***am***, ***is*** or ***are*** in front of the **subject**:

## *Are you listening?* *Are they coming to your party? When is she going home? What am I doing here?*

## Present continuous negatives

We make negatives by putting ***not*** (or ***n't***) after ***am***, ***is*** or ***are***:

*I****'m not****doing that.  
You****aren't****listening.*(or *You****'re not****listening.*)  
*They****aren't****coming to the party.*(or *They****'re not****coming to the party.*)  
*She i****sn't****going home until Monday.*(or *She****'s not****going home until Monday.*)

Stative verbs

We do not normally use the continuous **with stative verbs**. Stative verbs include:

* verbs of **thinking and feeling**:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *believe dislike know like* | *love hate prefer realise* | *recognise remember suppose think*(= believe) | *understand want wish* |

* verbs of the senses:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *appear feel* | *look seem* | *smell sound* | *taste* |

* others:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *agree be* | *belong disagree* | *need owe* | *own possess* |

We normally use the simple instead:

*I understand you.*(NOT*I ~~am understanding~~ you.*)  
*This cake tastes wonderful.*(NOT*This cake ~~is tasting~~ wonderful.*)

We also use the present continuous to talk about:

* something which is happening **before** **and** **after** **a specific time**:

*At eight o'clock we****are****usually****having****breakfast.  
When I get home the children****are doing****their homework.*

* something which**we think is temporary**:

*Michael is at university. He****'s studying****history.  
I****'m working****in London for the next two weeks.*

* something which is **new** and **contrasts** with a previous state:

*These days most people****are using****email instead of writing letters.  
What sort of clothes****are****teenagers****wearing****nowadays?  
What sort of music****are****they****listening****to?*

* something which is changing, growing or developing:

*The children****are growing up****quickly.  
The climate****is changing****rapidly.  
Your English****is improving****.*

* something which happens **again and again**:

*It****'s always raining****in London.  
They****are always arguing****.  
George is great. He****'s always laughing****.*

Note that we normally use *always* with this use.

We can use the present continuous to talk about the [past](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1406) when we are:

* **telling a story**:

*The other day I****'m****just****walking****down the street when suddenly this man comes up to me and asks me to lend him some money. Well, he****'s carrying****a big stick and he looks a bit dangerous, so I****'m wondering****what to do …*

* **summarising** a book, film or play:

*Harry Potter is a pupil at Hogwarts school. One day when he****is playing****Quidditch he sees a strange object in the sky. He wonders what****is happening****…*

Present perfect

The **present perfect** is formed from the present tense of the verb ***have*** and the [past participle](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1352)of a verb.

We use the present perfect:

* for something that **started in the past**and **continues in the present**:

*They****'ve been married****for nearly fifty years.  
She****has lived****in Liverpool all her life.*

* when we are talking about our **experience up to the present**:

*I****'ve seen****that film before.  
I****'ve played****the guitar ever since I was a teenager.  
He****has written****three books and he is working on another one.*

We often use the adverb***ever***to talk about experience up to the present:

*My last birthday was the worst day I****have ever had****.*

and we use***never***for the [negative form](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1363):

***Have****you****ever met****George?  
Yes, but I****'ve never met****his wife.*

* for something that **happened in the past** but is **important in the present**:

*I can't get in the house. I****'ve lost****my keys.  
Teresa isn't at home. I think she****has gone****shopping.*

***have been* and *have gone***

We use***have/has been***when someone has***gone***to a place and***returned***:

*A: Where****have****you****been****?  
B: I****'ve****just****been****out****to****the supermarket.*

*A:****Have****you****ever been to****San Francisco?  
B: No, but I****'ve been to****Los Angeles.*

But when someone **has not returned**, we use***have/has gone***:

*A: Where's Maria? I haven't seen her for weeks.  
B: She****'s gone to****Paris for a week. She'll be back tomorrow.*

**Present perfect with time adverbials**

We often use the present perfect with [adverbials](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1311) **which refer to the recent past**:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *recently* | *just* | *only just* |

*Scientists****have******recently******discovered****a new breed of monkey.  
We****have******just******got****back from our holidays.*

or **adverbials which include the present**:

|  |
| --- |
| *so far     until now     up to now ever*(in questions) *yet*(in questions and negatives) |

***Have****you****ever******seen****a ghost?  
Where****have****you****been******up to now****?  
A:****Have****you****finished****your homework****yet****?  
B: No,****so far****I****'ve****only****done****my history.*

After a clause with the present perfect we often use **a clause with *since* to show when something started in the past**:

*I****'ve worked****here****since I left school****.  
I****'ve been watching****that programme every week****since it started****.*

| Be careful! |
| --- |
| We do not use the present perfect with [adverbials which refer to a finished past time](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1311): |
| |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | *yesterday* | *last week/month/year* | *in 2017* | *when I was younger* | etc. |   *I****have seen****that film****~~yesterday~~****. We****have****just****bought****a new car****~~last week~~****.* ***~~When we were children~~****we****have been****to California.* |
| but we can use the present perfect with **adverbials which refer to a time which is not yet finished**: |
| |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | *today* | *this week/month/year* | *now that I am 18* | etc. |   ***Have****you****seen****Helen****today****? We****have bought****a new car****this week****.* |

**Present perfect continuous**

The **present perfect continuous** is formed with ***have/has been*** and the [*-ing* form](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1384) of the verb.

We normally use the present perfect continuous to **emphasise that something is still continuing in the present**:

*She****has been living****in Liverpool all her life.  
It****'s been raining****for hours.  
I'm tired out. I****'ve been working****all day.  
They****have been staying****with us since last week.*

We do **not** normally use the present perfect continuous with **stative verbs**. We use the **present perfect simple** instead:

*I****'ve****always ~~been liking~~****liked****John.*

**Present perfect for future**

We normally use the [present simple](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1400) to talk about the [future](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/node/1406) in clauses with *before, after, until,*etc.:

*I'll keep looking****until I find****my book.  
We'll begin****when everyone arrives****.*

but we can also use the **present perfect**:

*I'll keep looking****until I have found****my book.  
We'll begin****when everyone has arrived****.*