Understanding the Tenses in English

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Tenses form an integral part of the English grammar. It is with tenses that you can get an idea of the time frame of the sentence. While tenses flow naturally in a sentence, many times you need to think twice about what tense to use where. Even people with a good command over the language are sometimes left fishing while using tenses fittingly. The basic tenses – past, present, future – are easy to learn, practice, and use. The problem arises when the other five tenses come into the picture:

Present perfect
Past perfect
Past progressive
Present perfect progressive
Past perfect progressive

These five tenses are extensions of the basic tenses and totally rule the sentence formation. Using the right tense according to the situation is vital as it defines whether you can speak fluent English or not. Remember, fluent English does not mean the speed at which you can speak English, it pertains to how well you can speak English – using the correct words and flawless as per all the grammar rules, and that includes tenses as well.

Tense/Aspect Chart

		Aspect			
		Simple	Perfect	Progressive	Perfect Progressive
		"tensed"	"tensed" **have** + Past Participle	"tensed" **be** + Present Participle	"tensed" **have** + PastP of *be* (been) + PresentP
Tense	**Present**	write/writes walk/walks	has/have written has/have walked	am/is/are writing am/is/are walking	has/have been writing has/have been walking
	Past	wrote walked	had written had walked	was/were writing was/were walking	had been writing had been walking
	Future	will write will walk	will have written will have walked	will be writing will be walking	will have been writing will have been walking

When you are reading a text, you totally depend on the tense used to judge the 'time' in the text. Similarly, when you are speaking or writing in English, you need to use the tenses fittingly to give your audience/ reader a clear idea of the time period you are referring to.

Now that you have understood the essentiality of tenses in the English language, let us learn a few tips that will give you the judgment of using the tenses suitably. Let us first understand the Present tense, Present Perfect, Past tense and Past Perfect:

Present and perfect tense:

There is a slight difference in these two sentences. Present tense refers to an action/ incident that

is taking place in present time. While present perfect refers to an action/ incident that has just been completed in the present time. A perfect example of the present tense will be – I am buying the sweets. On the other hand, 'I have bought the sweets' is a good example of Present perfect.

Past and past perfect tense:

Past tense pertains to an incident that has been completed – 'I bought the sweets yesterday.' Past perfect, on the other hand, refers to a past action that was completed before another past action. This example should explain it well – I invited your brother just before the party started. Here there are two past incidences, where the former was completed before the other.

Before progressing to the other tenses, you should first practice and master these basic ones. For the remaining tenses, watch this space for our upcoming blogs!

If you feel that understanding tenses is a mean task, it is better that you enroll in an online language course.The reason why online courses like eAgeTutor's Spoken English Programs are a better option is that they give you the flexibility and freedom to learn as per your schedule. If you wish to improve English skills, it is best that you study English online.

- By Chander Madan

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