



Handouts for Conversation Partners: Grammar

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A “Cheat Sheet” on the Tenses and Voices in English

Tense	Examples	When to use
Simple Present	I run every day. The bus arrives at 11.	To describe a habit; Schedules
Present Continuous	I’m working today.	To describe an action you’re doing right now
Simple Past	I studied for the test for 5 hours last night. I went to the movies on Thursday.	To describe something you did in the past that had a specific beginning or end, or that you only did once
Past Continuous	I was studying yesterday.	To describe something you did that doesn’t have a specific beginning or end
Future	I’m going to go running later. I’ll have my Master’s degree at the end of this year.	Future plans Going to is usually for short term plans, and “will” is usually for long-term plans (there are exceptions, of course)
Present Perfect	I’ve never been to Brazil. Have you ever eaten alligator? She hasn’t eaten yet.	To describe something you have done at some point in your life, or something you’ve never done in your life (usually it is over a long period of time); use with ever, never, and yet
Present Perfect continuous	What have you been doing lately? I’ve been taking night classes at Temple.	Something that started in the past and continued until now
Past Perfect (Continuous)	I had been his roommate for nine months when he disappeared.	Something that started in the past and continued until another moment in the past
Conditional	If I were you, I wouldn’t smoke so much. If I had a million dollars, I’d buy a mansion.	See conditionals explanation on next page
Subjunctive Tense (often used as part of conditionals)	The President demands that the National Guard be called in.	Other examples: Long live the king! Come what may God Bless America!
Active Voice	The National Guard protected the border.	
Passive Voice	The National Guard was called in to protect the border.	

Conditionals

The **Present Real Conditional** is used to talk about what you normally do in real-life situations.

Examples:

- If I **go** to a friend's house for dinner, I usually **take** a bottle of wine or some flowers.
- When I **have** a day off from work, I often **go** to the beach.
- If the weather **is** nice, she **walks** to work.

The **Past Real Conditional** describes what you used to do in particular real-life situations. It suggests that your habits have changed and you do not usually do these things today.

Examples:

- If I **went** to a friend's house for dinner, I usually **took** a bottle of wine or some flowers. I don't do that anymore.
- When I **had** a day off from work, I often **went** to the beach. Now, I never get time off.
- If the weather **was** nice, she often **walked** to work. Now, she usually drives.

The **Future Real Conditional** (also called Conditional 1) describes what you think you will do in a specific situation in the future. It is different from other real conditional forms because, unlike the present or the past, you do not know what will happen in the future.

Examples:

- If I **go** to my friend's house for dinner tonight, I **will take** a bottle of wine or some flowers.
I am still not sure if I will go to his house or not.
- When I **have** a day off from work, I **am going to go** to the beach.
I have to wait until I have a day off.

Both "if" and "when" are used in the Future Real Conditional, but the use is different from other Real Conditional forms. In the Future Real Conditional, "if" suggests that you do not know if something will happen or not. "When" suggests that something will definitely happen at some point; we are simply waiting for it to occur. Notice also that the [Simple Future](#) is not used in [if clauses](#) or [when-clauses](#)

Examples:

- **When** you call me, I will give you the address.
 - *You are going to call me later, and at that time, I will give you the address.*
- **If** you call me, I will give you the address.
 - *If you want the address, you can call me.*

The Future Unreal Conditional is used to talk about imaginary situations in the future. It is not as common as the Future Real Conditional because English speakers often leave open the possibility that anything MIGHT happen in the future. It is only used when a speaker needs to emphasize that something is impossible. Because this form looks like Present Unreal Conditional, many native speakers prefer Form 2 described below.

Examples:

- If I **had** a day off from work next week, I **would go** to the beach.
 - *I don't have a day off from work.*
- I am busy next week. If I **had** time, I **would come** to your party.
 - *I can't come.*
- Jerry **would help** me with my homework tomorrow if he **didn't have** to work.
 - *He does have to work tomorrow.*

Form 2 of the Future Unreal Conditional is also used to talk about imaginary situations in the future. Native speakers often prefer this form over Form 1 to emphasize that the conditional form is in the future rather than the present. Also notice in the examples below that this form can be used in the if-clause, the result, or both parts of the sentence.

Examples:

- If I **were going** to Fiji next week, I **would be taking** my scuba diving gear with me.
In if-clause and result
I am not going to go to Fiji and I am not going to take my scuba gear with me.
- If I **were not visiting** my grandmother tomorrow, I **would help** you study. *In if-clause*
I am going to visit my grandmother tomorrow.
- I am busy next week. If I **had** time, I **would be coming** to your party. *In result*
I am not going to come to your party.

Adapted from: Englishpage.com

Past Participles

Past participles are used with the present perfect, past perfect, and present and past perfect continuous tenses.

A general rule to follow: Verbs that are irregular in the past are often irregular in the past participle. Usually (but not always!), these verbs take on the present tense root followed by “en”.

- I eat cereal every day.
- I ate a bagel yesterday.
- **I have eaten** sushi before.

Eat + “en” → eaten

Examples:

Present	Simple Past	Past Participle
Drive	Drove	driven
Get	Got	Gotten
Write	Wrote	Written
Take	Took	Taken
Fall	Fell	Fallen

Some irregular verbs do not change. They are the same in the past and past participle.

Examples:

Present	Simple Past	Past Participle
Buy	Bought	Bought
Teach	Taught	Taught
Sleep	Slept	Slept
Cut	Cut	Cut*

*Words like cut, put, and quit never change verb form.

Verbs that are regular “-ed” in the past are usually “-ed” in the past participle.

Present	Simple Past	Past Participle
Walk	Walked	Walked
Talk	Talked	Talked
Call	Called	called
Try	Tried	Tried

Present Perfect Tense

Americans use the present perfect tense almost every day.

It describes:

An action we just completed, or an action we completed already today

- I've eaten already.

An action we completed sometime in our lives

- Have you ever been to Japan?
- Yes, I have.

An action we plan to complete (using yet):

- I haven't written my paper yet.
- She still hasn't gone to the doctor.

Present Perfect Continuous

This form is used to talk about something you started doing in the past and continue to do in the present. It usually used to answer questions such as:

- What have you been doing lately/what have you been up to lately?
- I've been studying a lot.
- Where've you been?
- I've been working all day.

Past Perfect Tense

Think of this tense as the "past of the past." For example, if we are describing something that hadn't happened until a certain point in the past:

I had never seen an elephant until I went to the zoo last year.

He had seen the movie three times already when he went to the theater last week.

Had you ever learned English before coming to the U.S. in 2008?

Yes, I'd learned some English in 2002.

Past Continuous vs. Simple Past

The **simple past** and **past continuous** are often used together to describe one action being interrupted by another action.

We use “**when**” to show an interruption. We use “**while**” to show two actions happening at the same time.

- I was sleeping when the doorbell rang. (the doorbell is the interruption)
- I was skiing when I broke my leg.

You can also invert the order, as long as both clauses have a subject and a verb.

- The doorbell rang when I was sleeping.
- I broke my leg when I was skiing.

Examples with “while”:

I was watching a movie while she was sleeping.

Danielle was working while she was getting her degree.

Future Perfect Continuous with “when”

One of the most difficult forms to master in English is the future perfect continuous. It is similar to the present perfect continuous, with the addition of will:

Subject	will have been	verb	ing
You	will have been	work	ing

We use this form to predict an action that we will do in the future and continue doing until another moment in the future.

Example: When I turn 30, **I will have been working** here for 5 years.

“When I turn 30” is a moment in the future. The act of working starts either in the present or future and continues until that moment when the person turns 30.

Other examples:

By this time tomorrow, **he will have been working** for 16 hours. When she arrives, **she will have been driving** all night.

Gerunds and Infinitives

Gerunds are verbs that act as nouns by adding “ing.”

Gerunds are the only verbs that can follow prepositions. They can also act as the subject of a sentence.

- Swimming is his favorite sport. (Swimming acts as the subject here)
- She talks a lot about shopping. (Shopping is a gerund that follows the preposition “about”)

You can also make gerunds negative:

- **Not caring** about your grades can cause big problems.

Infinitives are verbs used in their original form: to + verb

- I like **to go** to the movies.
- I want **to take** this class.

Some verbs always need the infinitive: *hope, choose, want, and need* are examples

I need ~~saving money~~. I need **to save** money.

Sometimes, you can use a gerund or an infinitive after the verb:

- She remembered **visiting** him (she recalls the time when she visited him)
- She remembered **to visit** him. (She didn’t forget to visit him)

However, you cannot mix the infinitive and gerund together.

She started ~~to reading~~. She started reading OR She started to read.

Phrasal Verbs

A **phrasal verb** is a verb that has a verb and a particle.

Verb	Particle	Meaning
Call	in	To report something
Get	up	To wake up or sit up
Some phrasal verbs have three parts and some have two parts:		
Look	down on	To criticize or view someone negatively
Come	up	To appear or be mentioned (sometimes at random)
Come	up with	To create or invent

Phrasal verbs can be transitive or intransitive.

Transitive means that you can separate the phrasal verb and particle with a direct object.

(figure out: fix or solve)

- She **figured out** the problem.
- She **figured** the problem **out**.

Intransitive phrasal verbs cannot be separated.

- The team **came up with** a new marketing concept.

Other rules:

If the direct object is a pronoun, put it between the verb and the particle:

- I called her back.
- I put it away.

Some phrasal verbs are identical in form, but have different meanings depending on the context.

Example:

Take off

I **took** my coat **off**. (I **removed** my coat.)

This idea really **took off**. (This idea became popular or successful very quickly)

Some common phrasal verbs with multiple meanings:

Break out: to happen suddenly

The war broke out after the street protests.

Break out: to escape

The men broke out of the prison in the middle of the night.

Bring up: to raise (in childhood)

My parents brought me up in a small town.

Bring up: to mention or start talking about something (similar to “come up”)

She didn’t bring up her divorce.

Go on: to continue

First, she got her Master’s degree. Then, she went on to get a PhD.

Go on: to urge someone to do something

Go on! Try it.

Go on: to happen

What’s going on?

Look up: to find something in a reference book or source

I looked it up in the dictionary.

Look up: to improve

Things are finally looking up for him.

Put off: to delay

She put her project off until the night before the deadline.

Put off: to discourage or cause dislike

The teacher really put me off with her unfriendly attitude.

Put down: to place on a surface

Please put your pencils down.

Put down: to give money as a first payment

We put down \$3,000 for a new car.

Put down: to write or record something, usually on paper

He put down his ideas on his notebook.

Turn down: to lower the volume

Please turn down your music.

Turn down: to reject

They turned me down for the job.

Work out: to resolve or fix something

How did your problem with your roommate work out?

Work out: to exercise

I work out every day (at the gym).

Adapted from: Fuchs, M., & Bonner, M. (2006). *Focus on grammar: an integrated skills approach*. (3rd ed.). White Plains: Pearson Longman.