

BEsig - VIENNA 2004



An Introduction

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Lydbury English Centre

The 'Deconstructed' Approach: Truths and Half Truths

1. Present Simple Tense versus Present Continuous Tense

Conventional rule: The present simple tense is used to indicate habitual action, i.e. not happening now - whereas the present continuous form indicates action in progress, often continuing into the future.

E.g.

John Smith **drives** to work every day. Now it is evening and he **is** at home. He **is not driving** now; he **is watching** television.

2. Continuous tenses are used to indicate continuing / unfinished activity. Simple tenses indicate completed / finished activity.

E.g.

It was raining
when I **arrived**.

Explanation: *The rain had started before I arrived and continued beyond my arrival. We don't know when it finished.*

3. Stative verbs do not represent actions; they therefore do not have process and do not take 'ing' forms.

E.g.

What **do** you **think**?

Explanation: *This means 'What do you believe?' or 'What is your opinion?'*

What **are** you **thinking**?

This means, 'What is going on in your mind?'

4. The present perfect tenses indicate that the outcome of a past action is apparent, or has some relevance to 'now'.

E.g.

I have broken my leg.

Explanation: *This means my leg is still broken now.*

5. We express the future in English with 'will'.

6. If a reporting verb is in the past, the tense of the original verb must change.

E.g.

'I **will** be there tomorrow' - 'He **said** he **would** be there tomorrow'.

7. You cannot use 'will' after 'if' in conditional sentences.

1. In the light of the 'rule' (1) above, is the following sentence 'correct'?
'He **is playing** tennis five hours a day.' (Yes / no)

Does the following contextualised example make any difference to your answer?

'Sven has always played a lot of tennis, but now that he has entered for the tournament , he's **playing** five hours a day.'

2. How would you explain the difference between:
'It **rained** all day yesterday' and 'It **was raining** all day yesterday'?
3. 'I couldn't believe my ears - I thought I **was hearing** things!'

'Hear' is often given as an example of stative verb. Why is it used in a continuous form in this expression?

4. 'I **have broken** my leg three times.' Does this mean 'my leg is broken now'?

5. I **will go** there next week.
I **will be going** there next week.
I **go** there next week.
I **am going** there next week.
I'm **going to go** there next week.
I'm **to go** there next week.

Are any of these sentences incorrect / improbable?
How would you explain the differences?

6. He said he **will** go there tomorrow.
He said he **would** go there tomorrow.

Is there any grammatical / communicative difference between these two sentences?

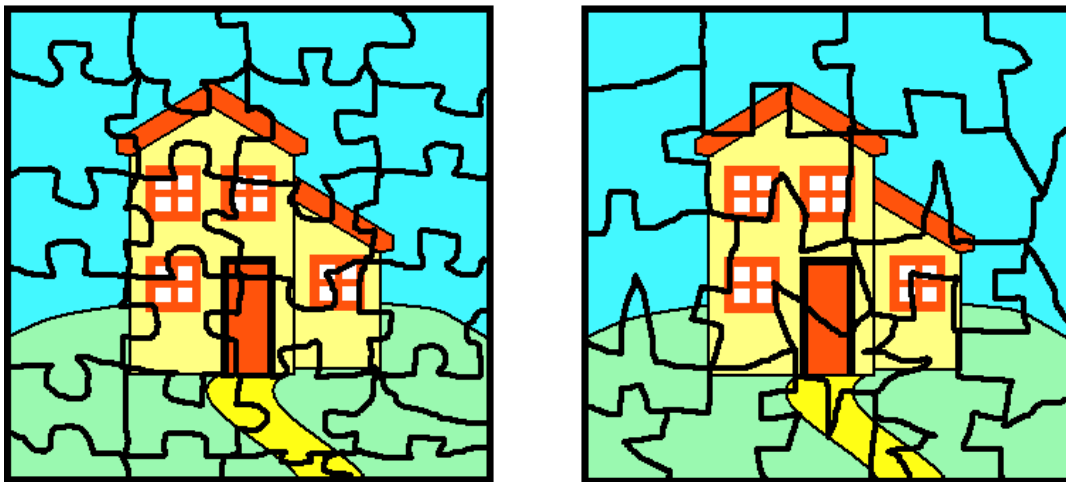
7. Comment on the following:

'If you **will** eat so much chocolate, don't moan to me about being overweight.'

'I don't know **if** he **will** be able to help or not'.

Grammar 'rules' arise from a 'deconstructed' view of a language. Languages have patterns. We are programmed to perceive patterns. Linguistically, culturally, politically, corporately and in a host of other ways we operate through paradigms but in an attempt to deliver language in digestible bites, we dissect and obliterate patterns. The chunks that are left are presented descriptively and prescriptively as 'rules'. We create examples to illustrate these rules. When we come across authentic exponents which do not fit the 'rules', we describe them as 'exceptions'. If we present patterns rather than 'rules' we can avoid these kinds of dilemmas.

A deconstructed approach to language learning invites learners to create false correspondences with their own languages. The global approach lays bare the underlying systems.



The jigsaws above both reveal the same big picture but they are divided up differently so that there is no direct correspondence between the individual pieces. This provides a visual metaphor for differences between languages. Overall systems make more sense than discrete components.



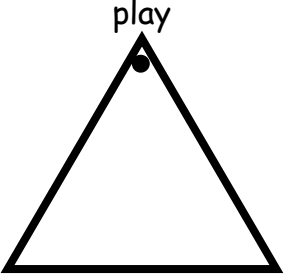
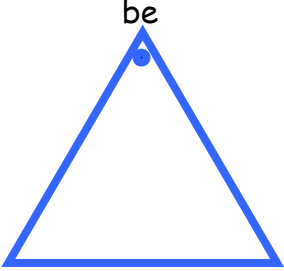
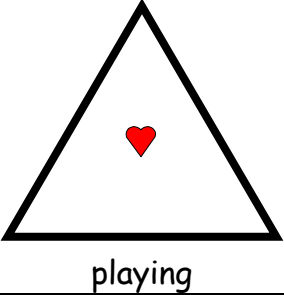
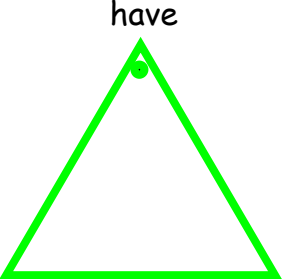
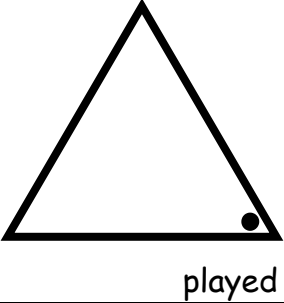
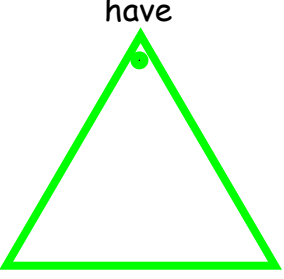
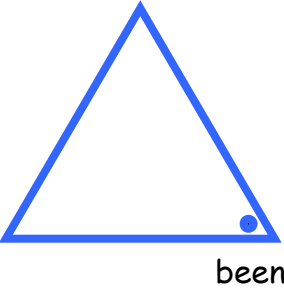
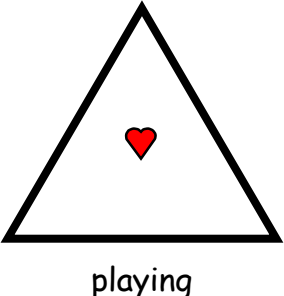
(The 'deconstructed' approach).

TENSE AS SYSTEM

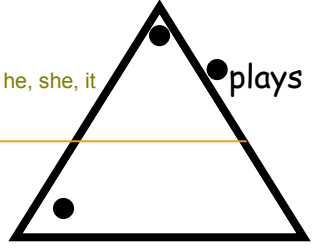
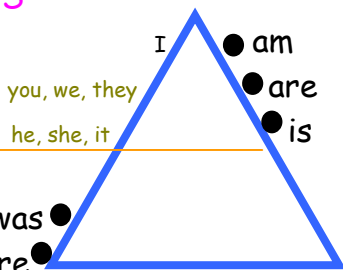
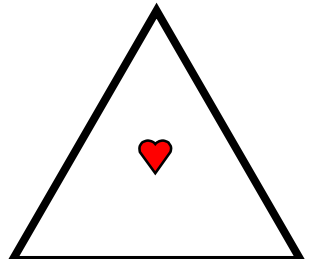
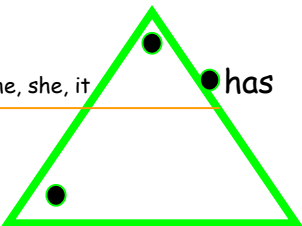
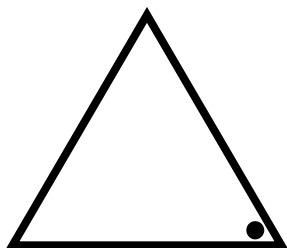
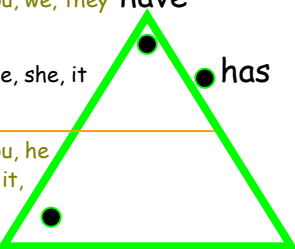
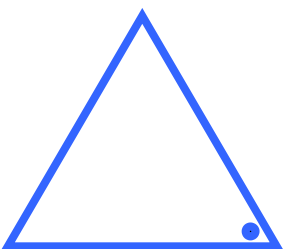
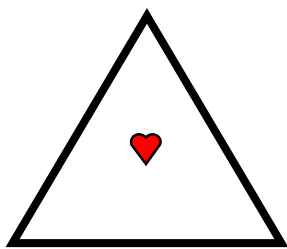
The Global Approach applies to all areas of language teaching, but a good starting point is the system of tenses in English.

The tenses form a matrix which is simple and obvious when presented visually. It comprises a blueprint (or what some might call 'infinitive') form with variations.

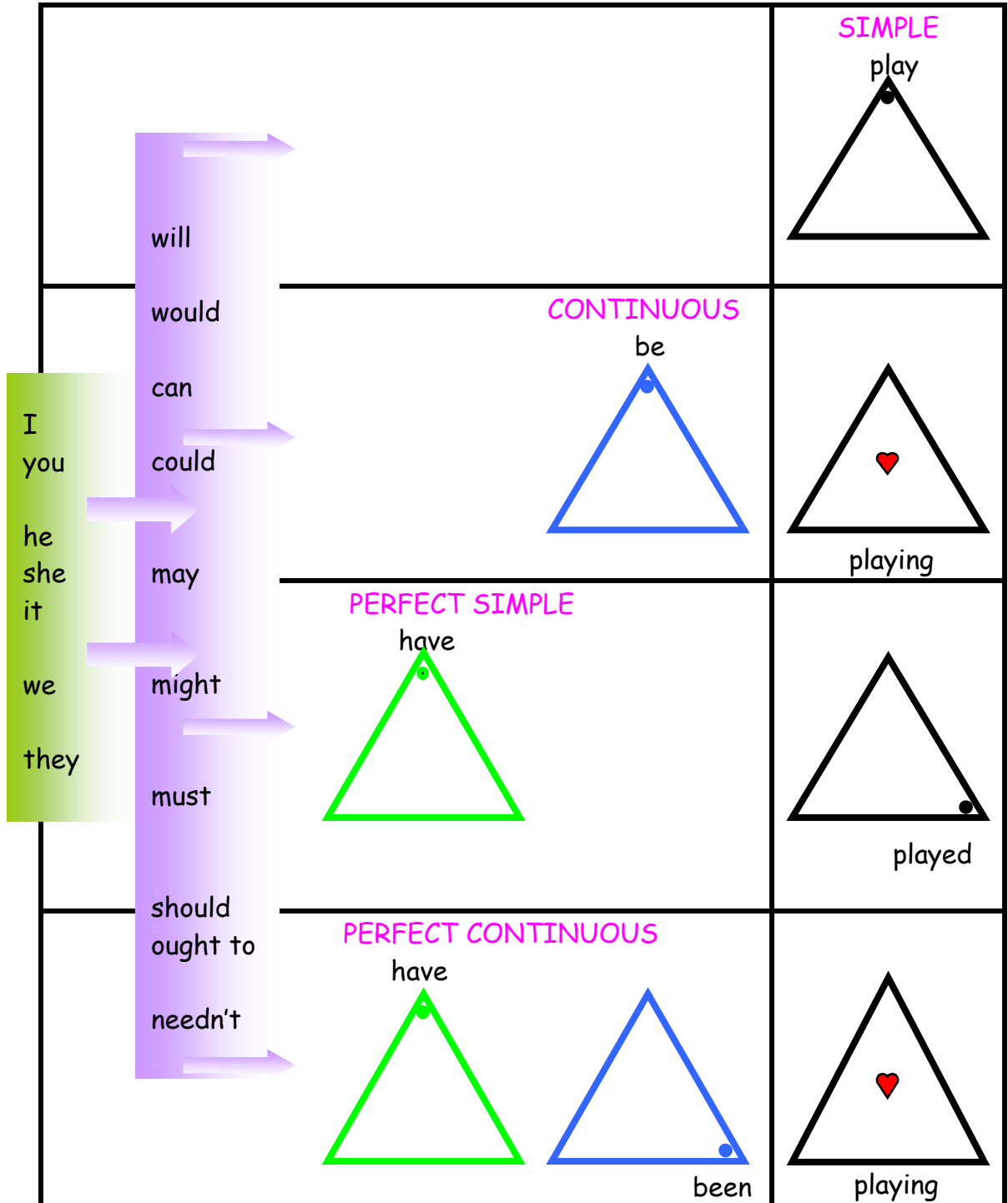
The Tenses Matrix Blueprint

SIMPLE	
CONTINUOUS	 
PERFECT SIMPLE	 
PERFECT CONTINUOUS	  

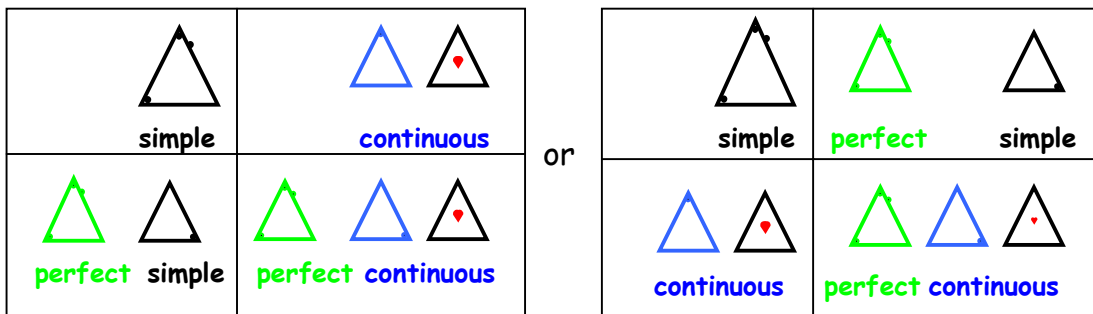
Structural Overview of Present and Past Tenses Matrix in Statement Form

<p>PRESENT SIMPLE</p>	<p>I, you, we, they play</p> 
<p>PAST SIMPLE</p> <p style="text-align: right;">I, you, he, she, it, we, you, they</p>	<p>played</p>
<p>PRESENT CONTINUOUS</p> 	 <p style="text-align: center;">playing</p>
<p>PAST CONTINUOUS</p> <p style="text-align: right;">I, he, she, it was we, you, they were</p>	<p>playing</p>
<p>PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE</p> <p>I, you, we, they have</p>  <p>I, you, he, she, it, we, they had</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">played</p>
<p>PAST PERFECT SIMPLE</p>	
<p>PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS</p> <p>I, you, we, they have</p>  <p>I, you, he, she, it, we, they had</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">been</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">playing</p>
<p>PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS</p>	

The Pattern of Modal Auxiliary Verbs with the Tenses Matrix Blueprint



We can summarise the tenses matrix as follows:



What is the significance of this matrix?

Imagine that you are an astronaut viewing the Earth from outer space. You can see the whole of it at a glance; this great globe slowly revolving in space. As you circle it, in what feels like motionless detachment, you can pick out whole continents, whole oceans, whole mountain ranges, whole swathes of forest, whole deserts and whole seas. But no matter what is happening on the planet, you are not part of it.

Your view of it is static and detached.



Now you're zooming in towards the planet; your focus is on the point where you plan to land. As you re-enter the earth's atmosphere your sense of overall perspective begins to shrink, and with it, your feeling of detachment. Your attention is directed more and more

towards the landing spot which seems to loom larger and larger like print

viewed through a magnifying glass.  (Zooming in on the action - dynamic focus)

With a final rush you crash into the sea. You are immersed in water. As you rise to the surface you become aware of the motion of the waves all around you.

There is a bustle of activity as the recovery craft arrives to pick you up.

You no longer have a detached view. You are involved in the action.



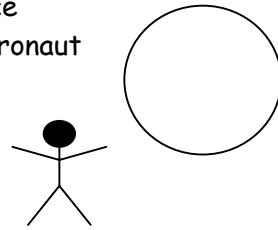
A few days later, you are taken to a hotel somewhere in the heart of a bustling city. The planet hasn't changed, but your view of it is dramatically different. You no longer see a globe; you no longer see whole continents; you probably can't even see the whole city unless you have a room at the top of a skyscraper. Perhaps you can't even see the next street. At ground level you are aware of all the dynamic activity around you. To a lesser or greater extent, you become engaged in that activity, because by being here you are involved in the process of it: here at the heart of things.



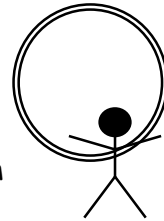
You decide to go to the theatre; there is a new production that you want to see. The acting is excellent. You are only a member of the audience; you are not actually playing a part on stage, and yet, your attention is so drawn to it that you feel, effectively, engaged in the play.

Simple tenses represent the global view. Only from a distance can we have a complete overview of anything, as when the astronaut has a global view of the earth from outer space.

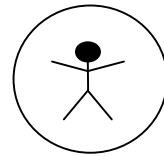
The view from a distance is therefore detached, objective, static and whole. Simple tenses can reflect overall outcome presented as fact and express permanence, formality and emotional detachment.



Continuous (or progressive tenses) represent the view we have of an object if we hold it directly in front of our nose; we cannot see the whole of it in perspective. This is similar to the view of the astronaut connecting with the earth on coming in to land. The global perspective disappears as the landing point comes into focus. Far from being detached, the astronaut takes a very personal interest in the proceedings, zooming in on the target and filtering out anything peripheral.



Once the astronaut has landed, he becomes involved in the activity around him, either by taking part in it, or by having his interest engaged in it. Again, there is no global perspective. Instead of looking from the outside-in, he's viewing from the inside-out.



The view in the scenarios above is from close up; it is therefore engaged, subjective, dynamic and partial. Continuous tenses emphasise action in progress. They can also communicate subjectivity, transience, informality and emotional engagement. We can use 'ing' to highlight process and indicate causative connections and feelings.

If the distinction between **simple** and **continuous / progressive** is one of focus, the distinction between **perfect** and **'not-perfect'**, is a question perspective - how we carve up 'time'.

Perfect tenses give a view of time between two parameters, whereas 'not - perfect' tenses centre round points in time.

Perception of 'time' is subjective. What do we mean by the term? Where does the 'past' end and the 'future' begin? When is 'now'? The most common way of explaining temporal relationships is to transpose them into spatial relationships, expressed as time lines. The difficulty with lines is that they tend to suggest that time is fixed, and they are only two-dimensional. An onion provides a good metaphor.

An onion quarter.

Cut horizontally, the layers of the onion appear as concentric circles.

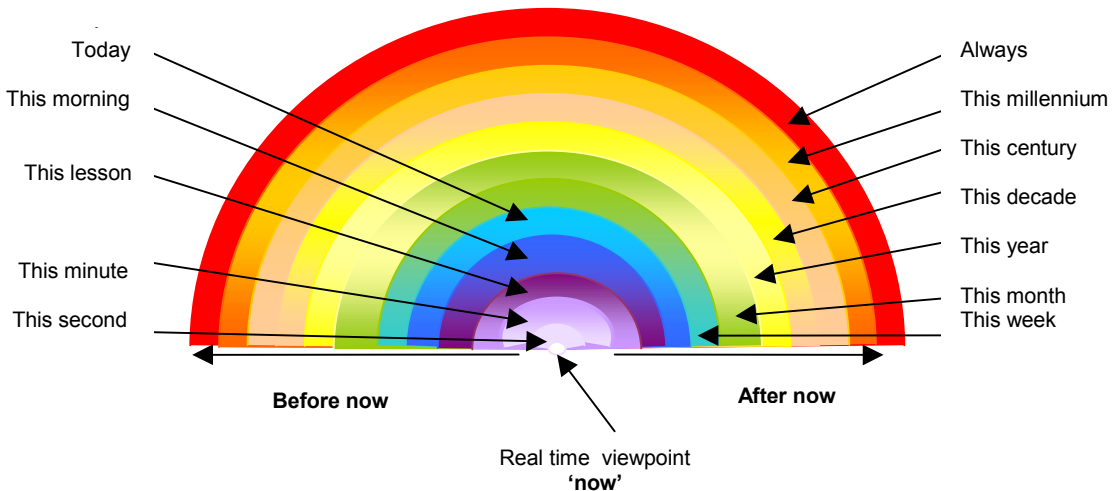


Cut vertically, the layers of the onion appear as strips.

We can think of 'now' as the nano-second viewpoint in real time from which we view / are viewing what is happening 'around' us - somewhere in the centre of the onion.

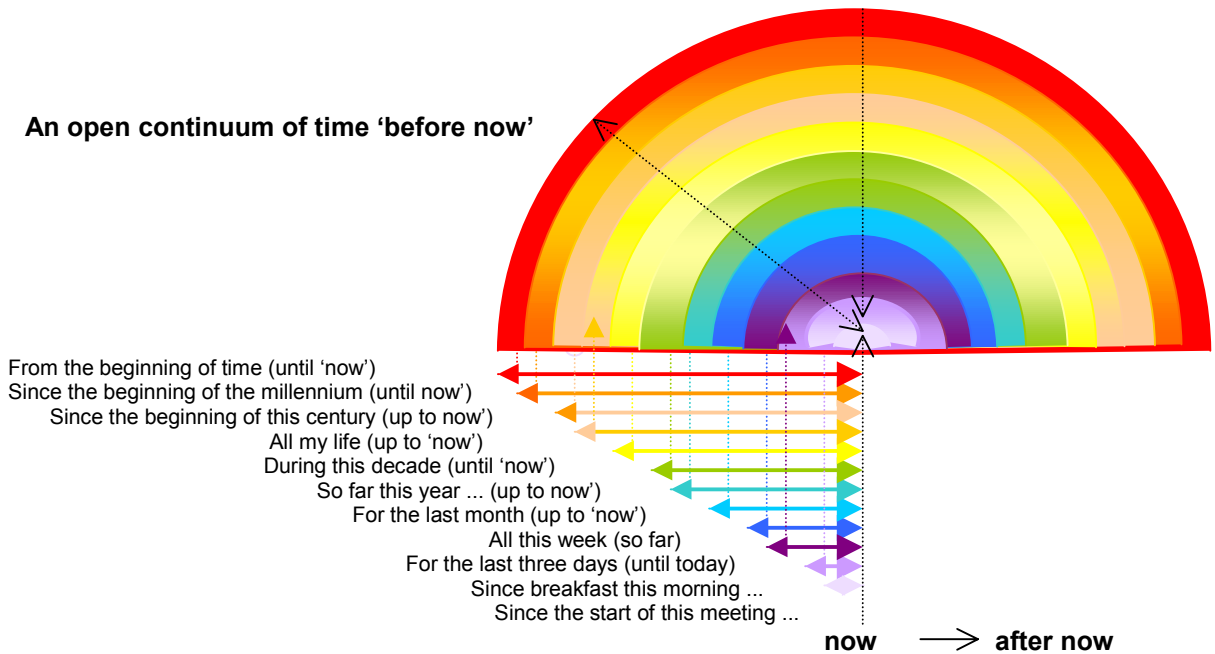
A Dissected Temporal Overview of Present Tenses in English

Both the present **simple** and present **continuous** tenses represent a view of any period of time centring around 'now' – a sort of 'universal present' or 'timeless zone', embracing both 'before now' and 'after now'. The perspective can be from a distance (**simple**) indicating state or habitual activity, or from close up (**continuous**) indicating engagement in the process of activity. The different dimensions of time can be represented like the layers of the onion, with each parameter representing the speaker (or writer's) relative horizon.

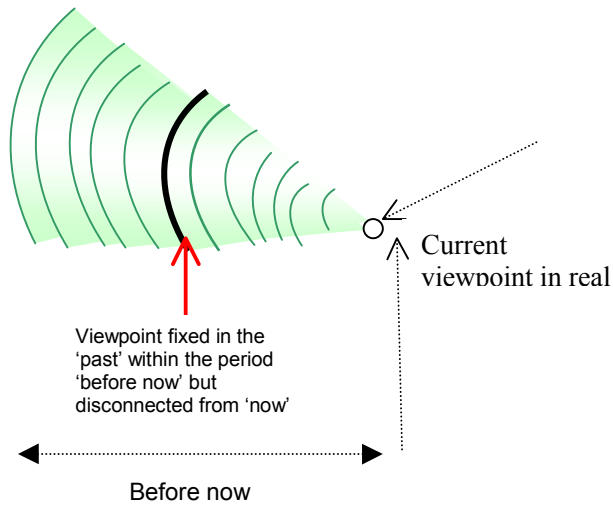


Both the present **perfect simple** and the present **perfect continuous** tenses represent any open section of time spanning a period from a point 'before now' to 'now', (i.e. two parameters) viewed respectively from a distance (**simple**) or from close up (**continuous**). Each layer represents a relative 'past' horizon.

An open continuum of time 'before now'



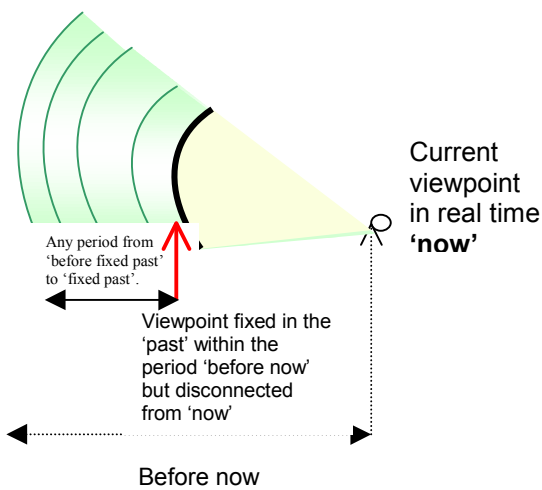
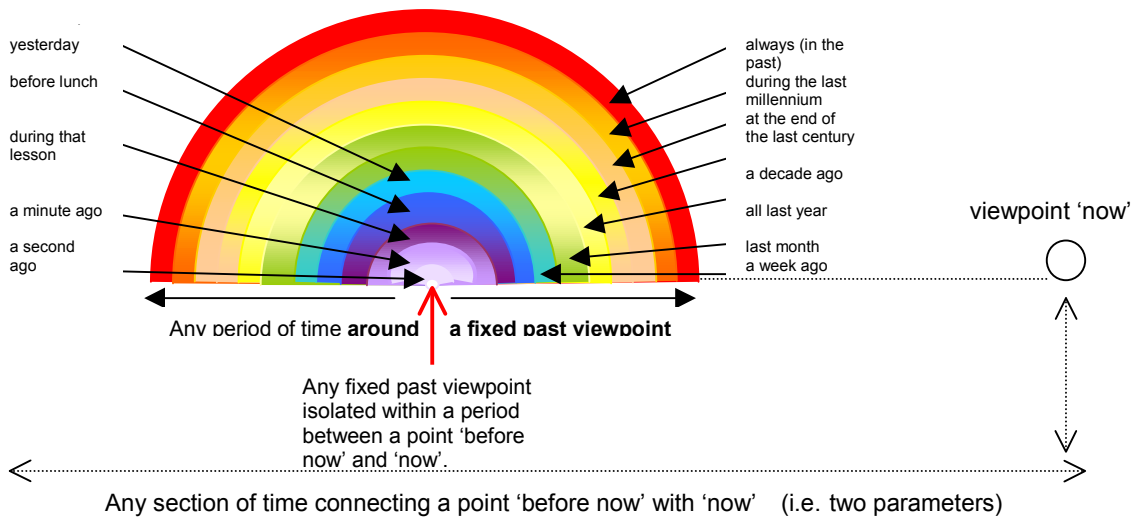
A Dissected Temporal Overview of Past Tenses in English



Any layer in the period 'before' now can be **isolated** and **disconnected** from the viewpoint 'now'. This disconnection is indicated by the use of the past **simple** or past **continuous** tenses instead of the present **perfect simple** and the present **perfect continuous** tenses.

Any layer thus isolated can act as a **focus around which** other dimensions of time can be centred; e.g.

at that very moment
during the whole of that century
a few days later



Any period or section of time before a fixed past viewpoint is indicated by either the past **perfect simple** or past **perfect continuous** depending on whether it is viewed from a distant perspective or from close up.

EXAMPLES:

Sven has always played a lot of tennis, but now that he has entered for the tournament, he's **playing** five hours a day.

The function of the present continuous tense in this example is to highlight the activity of **playing**, implying a contrast with the number of hours that Sven normally **plays** when he is not preparing for a tournament. It does not mean that he is actually engaged in playing tennis at the time that the statement is being made. The choice of tense is therefore made for notional and not temporal reasons.

Q. What **was** the weather like yesterday?

A. It **rained**.
(*The response is factual.*)

Q. **Did** you **play** tennis?

A. No; it **was raining**.
(*The response can be interpreted as emotional – frustrated, annoyed – or as highlighting the reason why the second speaker didn't play tennis. The response, 'it **rained**' would have been equally acceptable but would have had less impact.*)

You always **criticise** me and it **gets** on my nerves!
(*An irritated, generalised observation*)

You **are** always **criticising** me and it **gets** on my nerves.
(*A much stronger complaint*)

You always **criticise** / **are** always **criticising** / me, and it's **getting** on my nerves
(*Expressing more feeling, implying perhaps that the situation has reached a limit and the speaker is not going to stand for it any longer.*)

Q. What **did** you **do** yesterday evening?

A. I **worked**. (*Objective statement of fact*)

Q. Why **didn't** you **join** us for a drink yesterday evening?

A. I **was working**.
(*My reason for not joining the others for a drink.*)

I **look** forward to meeting you tomorrow.
(*An objective, formal statement – typically in a business context*)

I'm **looking** forward to getting home.
(*Betrays more informal, personal feeling*)

I feel **tired** this evening.

This statement describes my general state around 'now'. It is factual so the perspective is global and the present simple tense is used.

I always **feel** tired.

This statement describes my habitual state, but structurally it is represented in the same way as the example above because the perspective is global.

I **am feeling** tired this evening.

Notice that the communication in this sentence is basically the same as in the example above but the use of the present continuous tense indicates a more subjective attitude and a wish to highlight the tiredness. This could serve, for example, as an excuse, a reason for not wishing to do something; e.g. 'I would prefer to stay at home this evening. I'm **feeling** too tired to go out.'

Speak up please, the line is bad and I **can't hear** you very well.

Other so-called 'stative' verbs can similarly be used affectively. For example, 'hear' is usually used in a global (simple tense) way. The example on the left typically illustrates the 'rule' that we use simple tenses with 'stative' verbs. However, a listener who was feeling very frustrated could easily say:

Please speak up; I'm really not **hearing** you!

A similar example would be:

Many learners are astounded to notice how often L1 speakers use the continuous tenses in this way. Nevertheless, it is important for them to understand that they are not used indiscriminately; the communicative purpose is to highlight a state or activity, or to express subjectivity.

I couldn't believe my ears – I thought I **was hearing** things!

Compare the following:

- Don't forget to telephone your mother!

- Don't forget to telephone your mother!

- Thanks for reminding me, but in fact I already **have** (**telephoned her**).

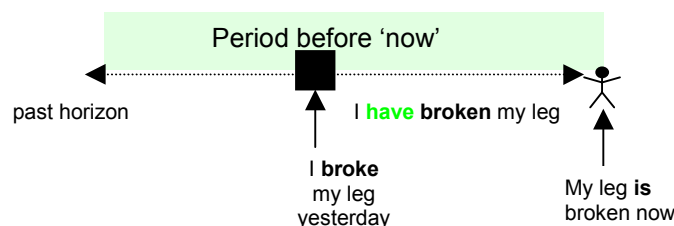
- Thanks for reminding me, but in fact I **did** it (i.e. I **telephoned her**) this morning.

Both responses have a bearing on 'now'.

So what is the core notional distinction between the present perfect and the fixed past tenses?

I think that the conventional explanation looks through the wrong end of the telescope. It's not that the 'present perfect' is connected to the 'present'; it's that the 'fixed past' tenses are specifically **disconnected** from the 'present'.

The main criterion for choosing between the fixed past tenses and the present perfect tenses then, is one of perspective. Present perfect tenses focus on an open period of time somewhere between a point 'before now' and 'now' whereas fixed past tenses focus on a period of time isolated within a present perfect period.



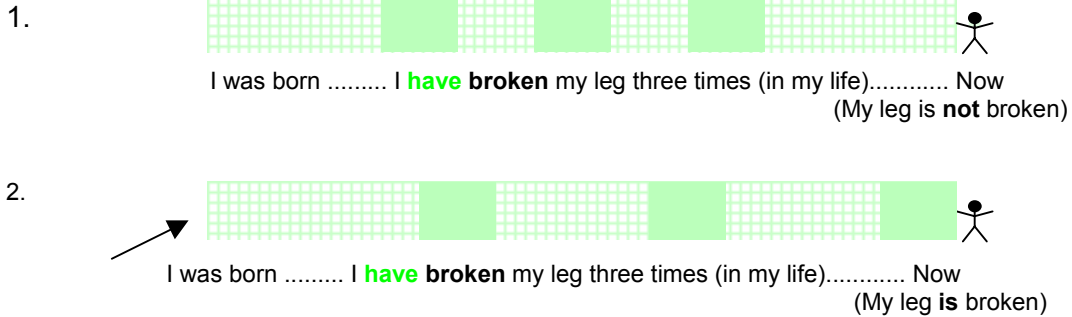
'I **have broken** my leg' indicates that the breaking has occurred sometime between a 'past horizon' and 'now'. If I say 'I **broke** my leg' I will add a fixed time reference – in this case 'yesterday', which effectively **disconnects** the action from 'now'.

It is very important to clarify that 'between a point before now' and 'now' refers to the **period of time** that spans the two points - not necessarily the period of the state or activity itself. We know that broken legs take a long time to mend so if I broke my leg

yesterday it is obviously still broken today. Compare this, however, with the following example:

I **have broken** my leg three times.

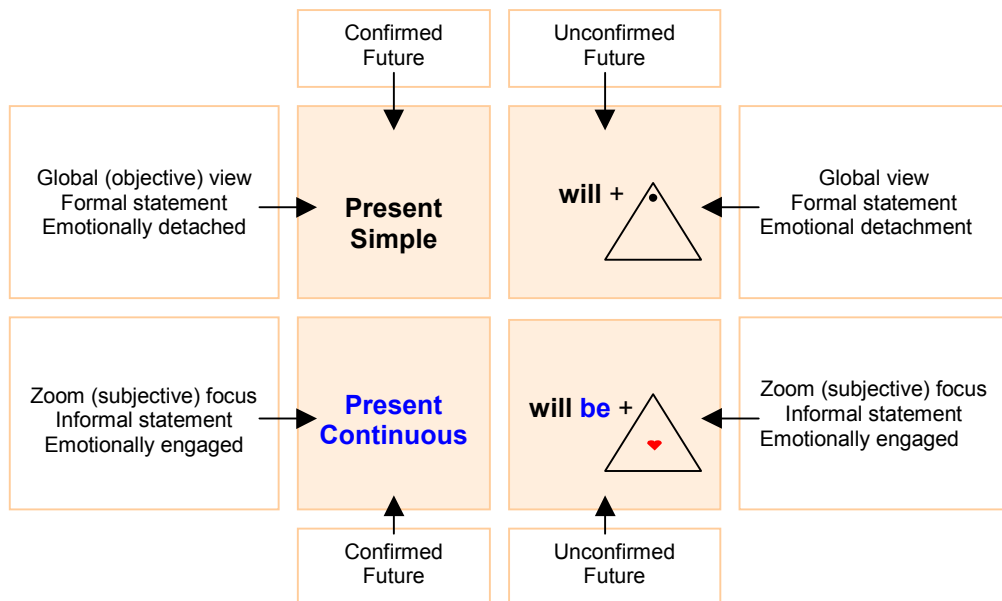
Here I am only communicating that the breakings occurred at some **unspecified** times in the **period before now**. Without additional context I am not indicating whether or not my leg is actually broken now – or even if I am referring to the same leg! There are two possible interpretations:



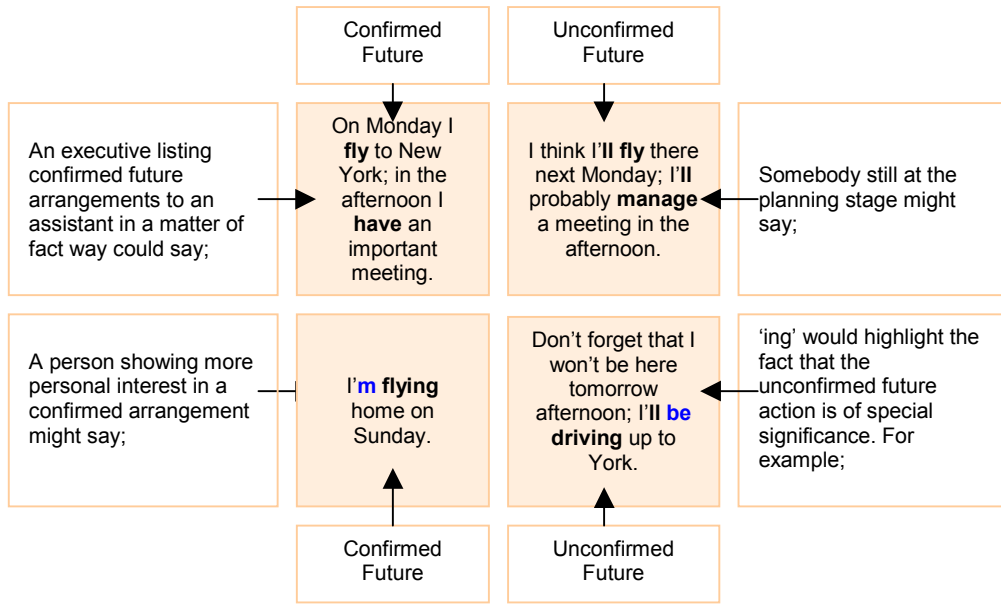
EXPRESSING THE ‘FUTURE’:

Learners often believe that ‘**will**’ represents the ‘**future tense**’. In fact ‘will’ is simply a modal auxiliary followed by an infinitive form. We have several ways of expressing the future. The chief notions are:

whether the future is ‘confirmed’ or ‘unconfirmed’
and
whether we are using a ‘global’ or ‘zoom’ focus.

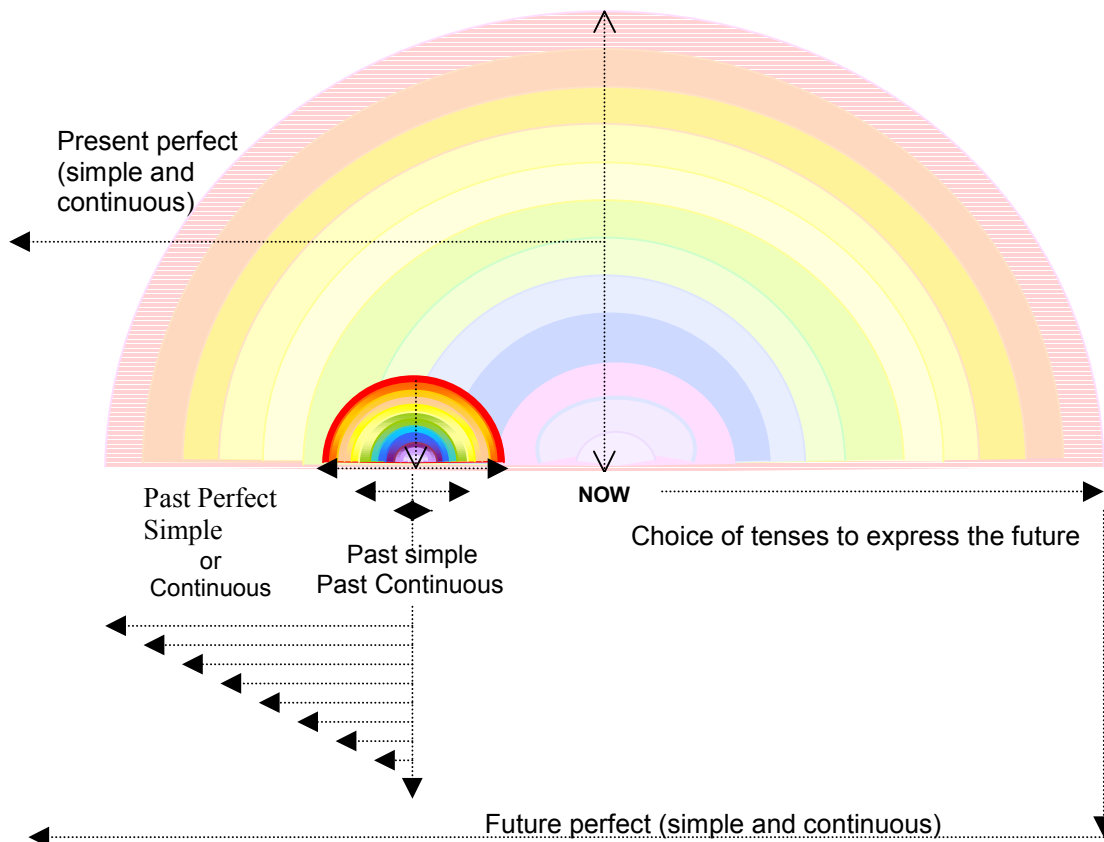


The matrix above illustrates some of the choices that can be made in expressing the future. As always, appropriate choice is governed by context.



Conventional grammars often list the uses of 'will' as including: plans, forecasts, projects, promises, predictions, doubts, and hopes. These concepts all fall within the broad category of 'unconfirmed' future.

An overview of the divided onion



Summary of Tenses Matrix

<p>Simple tenses represent a global view of events around a given viewpoint where the focus is on overall outcome.</p> <p>The present simple represents a global view of time around the viewpoint 'now', or of a confirmed future, and the past simple focuses around a fixed viewpoint before now.</p>	<p>Continuous tenses represent a close-up partial view of events around a given viewpoint where the focus is on process.</p> <p>The present continuous represents a close up focus of time around the viewpoint 'now' or of a confirmed future and the past continuous represents a close up focus of time around a fixed viewpoint before now.</p>
<p>Perfect simple tenses represent a global view of periods of time between given parameters.</p> <p>The past perfect looks back over any period starting from the fixed past, the present perfect simple looks back over any period starting from 'now', and the future perfect looks back over any given period starting from a future viewpoint.</p>	<p>Perfect continuous tenses represent a close-up partial view of time between the same parameters as with perfect simple tenses.</p>

Which tense we use is not a question of following rigid rules but of making informed choices within the constraints of this matrix.

The Global Approach has been developed to accelerate the understanding and application of:

- Verbs, Tense and Aspect (including modality, conditionals etc.)
- Gerund - infinitive distinction.
- Prepositions and Phrasal Verbs
- Articles and Determiners
- Features of Pronunciation
- Relatives and Linking Devices.
- Register (directness, indirectness etc.)

It complements the Lexical Approach and works especially well with task-based and 'dogme' type teaching.

For further information, contact rita@lydbury.co.uk
Full details will also be posted on www.lydbury.co.uk