



Verb Tenses

Verbs come in three tenses: past, present, and future. The past is used to describe things that have already happened (e.g., *earlier in the day, yesterday, last week, three years ago*). The present tense is used to describe things that are happening right now, or things that are continuous. The future tense describes things that have yet to happen (e.g., *later, tomorrow, next week, next year, three years from now*).

The following table illustrates the proper use of verb tenses:

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Simple Present | Simple Past | Simple Future |
| I <i>read</i> nearly every day. | Last night, I <i>read</i> an entire novel. | I <i>will read</i> as much as I can this year. |
| Present Continuous | Past Continuous | Future Continuous |
| I <i>am reading</i> Shakespeare at the moment. | I <i>was reading</i> Edgar Allan Poe last night. | I <i>will be reading</i> Nathaniel Hawthorne soon. |
| Present Perfect | Past Perfect | Future Perfect |
| I <i>have read</i> so many books I can't keep count. | I <i>had read</i> at least 100 books by the time I was twelve. | I <i>will have read</i> at least 500 books by the end of the year. |
| Present Perfect Continuous | Past Perfect Continuous | Future Perfect Continuous |
| I <i>have been reading</i> since I was four years old. | I <i>had been reading</i> for at least a year before my sister learned to read. | I <i>will have been reading</i> for at least two hours before dinner tonight. |

The key is to be consistent with tense – to not jump back and forth between tenses - within a scene, paragraph or perhaps a whole chapter so you don't confuse the reader.

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