

THE PARENT-FRIENDLY GUIDE TO ENGLISH TENSES

Simple explanations, clear examples and practical ways
to help an upper-primary child.

PAST - NOW - FUTURE

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Understand

Six high-value tense forms

2

Notice

Common mistakes in writing

3

Practise

A short parent-and-child check

For parents and children in P4-P6 / ages approximately 9-12

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How to use this guide

A calm, practical routine for helping at home

You do not need to be a grammar expert to help your child. The most useful support is often a short conversation: notice the time, identify whether the action is finished, and choose a verb form that matches the meaning.

A simple three-step routine

1 READ	Read one tense page together. Do not try to memorise every rule at once.
2 NOTICE	Find the verb in each example and ask why that tense was chosen.
3 TRY	Complete the mini activity, then use the same tense in a sentence about real life.

What this free guide covers

- Present Simple and Present Continuous
- Past Simple and Past Continuous
- Present Perfect
- Three practical ways to talk about the future
- A decision guide, common-error clinic and short skills check

WHY ONLY THESE FORMS?

These are among the most useful forms for upper-primary speaking and writing. Keeping the first guide focused makes it easier for families to use. A later paid Grammar Expansion can add all twelve tense forms, mixed-tense passages, graded worksheets, editing practice, progress tracking and fuller answer guidance.

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What does a tense tell us?

03

Start with meaning before memorising a rule

A tense helps us place an action or situation in time. English also uses verb patterns to show whether something is usual, happening now, completed, continuing or connected to the present.

THE PARENT-FRIENDLY QUESTION

Before correcting a verb, ask: "What is the writer trying to show about time?" A correct choice depends on meaning, not only on a time word.

The three questions that solve many tense problems

1. When does it happen: in the past, now or the future?
2. Is it a routine, a fact, a completed event or an action in progress?
3. Does the past action still matter now, or is it tied to a finished past time?

A quick time map

PAST	NOW	FUTURE
yesterday / last week / in 2025	usually / at the moment / so far	tomorrow / next week / later

Verb patterns you will see

Pattern	Example
base verb	read / walk / enjoy
verb + s	reads / walks / enjoys
be + -ing	is reading / were walking
have + participle	has finished / have seen
helper + base	did not go / will arrive

Time words are clues - not automatic answers

Words such as yesterday, now, already and tomorrow can guide the reader, but the sentence meaning still decides the tense. For example, "this week" may describe an unfinished period: We have completed two chapters this week.

PARENT TIP

Ask your child to underline the verb and circle any time clue. Then ask them to explain the choice aloud. Explaining is often more valuable than guessing another worksheet answer.

Present Simple

Routines, facts and repeated actions

The Present Simple describes what is generally true or what happens regularly. It is also common with state verbs such as know, like, need and believe.

Use it for

- routines and habits: I read before bed.
- facts and general truths: Water freezes at 0°C.
- states and opinions: She likes adventure stories.

Build the form

Sentence type	Form
positive	I/you/we/they read. He/she/it reads.
negative	do not / does not + base verb
question	Do / Does + subject + base verb?

Clear examples

USUAL	Maya reads for twenty minutes every evening.
FACT	The school library closes at five o'clock.
STATE	I understand the instructions.

Common mistakes to notice

Not: She walk to school.	Better: She walks to school.
Not: Does he plays chess?	Better: Does he play chess?
Not: I am know the answer.	Better: I know the answer.

TRY IT TOGETHER

1. Maya _____ (read) before bed every night.
2. The library _____ (close) at five o'clock.
3. Do they _____ (enjoy) mystery stories?

PARENT TIP

Use a "routine reporter" game. Take turns saying one true sentence about a weekday routine. Listen especially for the -s ending after he, she or it.

Present Continuous

Actions happening now and temporary situations

The Present Continuous shows that an action is in progress around now. It can describe the exact moment or a temporary situation that is not the usual routine.

Use it for

- actions happening now: She is speaking to her teacher.
- temporary situations: We are reading a new novel this month.
- changing situations: His writing is becoming clearer.

Build the form

Sentence type	Form
positive	am / is / are + verb-ing
negative	am not / is not / are not + verb-ing
question	Am / Is / Are + subject + verb-ing?

Clear examples

NOW	Listen! Someone is knocking at the door.
TEMPORARY	This month, we are studying myths.
COMPARE	He reads nightly. / He is reading now.

Common mistakes to notice

Not: She is play outside.	Better: She is playing outside.
Not: They watching a film.	Better: They are watching a film.
Not: I am knowing the answer.	Better: I know the answer.

TRY IT TOGETHER

1. Look! The dog _____ (run) after the ball.
2. This month, we _____ (learn) about space.
3. Amir usually cycles, but today he _____ (walk).

PARENT TIP

Choose a photograph or look out of a window. Ask your child to describe three actions they can see using am, is or are + verb-ing.

Past Simple

Completed events at a finished past time

The Past Simple tells us that an action or situation is finished. It is especially useful for recounts, narratives and sequences of events.

Use it for

- a completed event: We visited the museum yesterday.
- a sequence: She opened the box, looked inside and smiled.
- a past state: The room was quiet.

Build the form

Sentence type	Form
regular verbs	base verb + -ed: walk → walked
irregular verbs	go → went, see → saw, write → wrote
negative/question	did not / Did ... ? + base verb

Clear examples

FINISHED	We watched the performance last Friday.
SEQUENCE	Ben packed his bag and left the house.
QUESTION	Did you finish the chapter?

Common mistakes to notice

Not: We goed home early.	Better: We went home early.
Not: Did she wrote a letter?	Better: Did she write a letter?
Not: I did not saw him.	Better: I did not see him.

TRY IT TOGETHER

1. We _____ (visit) the science centre last Saturday.
2. Lina _____ (take) a photograph of the model.
3. Did your team _____ (win) the match?

PARENT TIP

Ask for a five-sentence "yesterday report". Encourage clear time order and check that did is followed by the base verb.

Past Continuous

Background actions and actions in progress

The Past Continuous shows that an action was already in progress at a particular past moment. It often provides the background when another event occurs.

Use it for

- an action in progress at a past time: At eight, I was reading.
- background in a story: Rain was falling and cars were moving slowly.
- an interrupted action: We were eating when the lights went out.

Build the form

Sentence type	Form
positive	was / were + verb-ing
negative	was not / were not + verb-ing
question	Was / Were + subject + verb-ing?

Clear examples

MOMENT	At 8 p.m., I was completing my homework.
BACKGROUND	The wind was blowing through the trees.
INTERRUPTED	While we were walking, it started to rain.

Common mistakes to notice

Not: They was playing.	Better: They were playing.
Not: I were waiting.	Better: I was waiting.
Not: She was cook when I arrived.	Better: She was cooking when I arrived.

TRY IT TOGETHER

1. At nine last night, I _____ (read).
2. The children _____ (play) when the rain began.
3. While Dad was cooking, I _____ (set) the table.

PARENT TIP

Pause a familiar story at a dramatic moment. Ask, "What was happening just before the next event?" This naturally practises background description.

Present Perfect

Past actions connected to now

The Present Perfect connects the past to the present. It is useful when the exact finished time is not stated, when a period is unfinished, or when a recent result matters now.

Use it for

- life experience without a finished time: I have visited Japan twice.
- an unfinished period: We have read two chapters this week.
- a recent result: She has lost her key, so she cannot enter.

Build the form

Sentence type	Form
positive	have / has + past participle
negative	have not / has not + past participle
question	Have / Has + subject + past participle?

Clear examples

EXPERIENCE	Have you ever written a poem?
UNFINISHED	I have completed three tasks today.
RESULT	He has broken his glasses, so he cannot read.

Common mistakes to notice

Not: I have saw that film.	Better: I have seen that film.
Not: She have finished.	Better: She has finished.
Not: I have met him yesterday.	Better: I met him yesterday.

TRY IT TOGETHER

1. Mia _____ already _____ (finish) her project.
2. _____ you ever _____ (read) a graphic novel?
3. I _____ (see) that play last year.

PARENT TIP

Contrast two questions: "What did you read last week?" and "What books have you read this year?" The finished time versus unfinished period helps the difference feel logical.

Three useful ways to talk about the future

09

Choose the form that matches the intention

English does not rely on one single “future tense” in everyday use. Upper-primary students benefit from learning three practical patterns and the meaning each one usually carries.

Form	Common use	Example	Parent question
will + base	prediction, instant decision or promise	I think it will rain.	Is this a prediction or a decision now?
be going to + base	plan or clear evidence	We are going to practise tonight.	Was this planned, or can we see evidence?
Present Continuous	fixed personal arrangement	I am meeting my tutor on Saturday.	Has the arrangement been organised?

One situation, three meanings

Compare the intention

WILL	The phone is ringing - I will answer it. (decision now)
GOING TO	I am going to call Grandma tonight. (existing plan)
FIXED	I am calling my teacher at four. (fixed arrangement)

Common mistakes to notice

Not: I will going to study.	Better: I will study. / I am going to study.
Not: She going to visit us.	Better: She is going to visit us.
Not: We are meet them tomorrow.	Better: We are meeting them tomorrow.

TRY IT TOGETHER

- Look at those dark clouds! It _____ rain. (evidence)
- I think our team _____ win. (prediction)
- We _____ our cousins at two tomorrow. (fixed arrangement)

PARENT TIP

Ask what is behind the sentence: a prediction, a plan, evidence or a fixed arrangement. The reason for the choice matters more than memorising a list of time words.

Choose the tense that matches the meaning

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A decision path and common-error clinic

Six quick decisions

1	Routine, fact or state?	Present Simple
2	Happening now or temporary?	Present Continuous
3	Finished past event with a finished time?	Past Simple
4	In progress at a past moment or background?	Past Continuous
5	Past action connected to now; no finished time?	Present Perfect
6	Prediction, plan or arrangement?	will / going to / Present Continuous

Common-error clinic

Problem	Correction	Why?
He walk to school.	He walks to school.	he/she/it needs -s
She is read now.	She is reading now.	be + verb-ing
Did you went?	Did you go?	did + base verb
They was waiting.	They were waiting.	were with they
I have saw it.	I have seen it.	past participle needed
I have seen it yesterday.	I saw it yesterday.	finished past time

A USEFUL EDITING ROUTINE

1) Underline the complete verb phrase. 2) Circle the time clue. 3) Ask whether the action is usual, in progress, finished or connected to now. 4) Read the corrected sentence aloud.

PARENT TIP

Correct one meaningful pattern at a time. If every error is marked at once, a child may focus on the number of corrections rather than the grammar idea.

Parent-and-child tense check

A short check - not a full diagnostic assessment

Complete the questions without looking back first. Then discuss the answers together. The check is worth 12 marks and samples the forms introduced in this guide.

A. Complete each sentence (6 marks)

1. My brother usually _____ (wake) at seven.
2. Listen! Someone _____ (knock) at the door.
3. We _____ (visit) the museum last Saturday.
4. At eight last night, I _____ (complete) my homework.
5. Mia _____ already _____ (finish) her project.
6. Look at those clouds! It _____ rain.

B. Correct the tense error (2 marks)

7. Does Aaron plays football after school?

Correction: _____

8. I have seen that film yesterday.

Correction: _____

C. Build the meaning (4 marks)

9. Combine the ideas using when or while: We were doing our homework. The lights went out. (2 marks)

10. Write one sentence about a fixed future arrangement using the Present Continuous. (2 marks)

BEFORE MARKING

Ask your child to explain one choice they feel confident about and one that felt difficult. This conversation helps reveal whether an answer was understood or guessed.

Answers, score guide and next steps

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Use the result as a starting point, not a final judgement

Mini-activity answers

Page 4 reads closes enjoy	Page 5 is running are learning is walking	Page 6 visited took win
Page 7 was reading were playing was setting	Page 8 has already finished Have...read saw	Page 9 is going to will are meeting

Skills check answers

1-2	1 wakes 2 is knocking
3-4	3 visited 4 was completing
5-6	5 has already finished 6 is going to
7-8	7 Does Aaron play football after school? 8 I saw that film yesterday.
9-10	9 We were doing our homework when the lights went out. / While we were doing our homework, the lights went out. 10 Accept a correct personal arrangement, e.g. I am meeting my tutor on Saturday.

A cautious score guide

10-12	Secure in this short check	Continue applying the forms in reading and writing.
7-9	Developing	Revisit the pages linked to missed questions.
0-6	Targeted support may help	Use a fuller skills check to identify priorities.

This ten-question check is not a complete assessment. A child may understand a tense in isolation but still struggle to use it consistently in editing, comprehension or extended writing.

The next step in the learning cycle

ASSESS	DIAGNOSE	LEARN	PRACTISE	REVIEW	IMPROVE
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Would you like more English support?

PERSONAL GUIDANCE

Message Teacher Chris

Every child has different strengths and areas for improvement.

Ask about suitable P5/P6 English resources, personalised marking and feedback, or 1-to-1 tutoring.

Please include your child's year level and the English area they find most difficult.

CHOOSE A CONTACT METHOD

WHATSAPP



LINE



Scan either code to message directly.

RESERVED FOR THE PAID GRAMMAR EXPANSION

All twelve tense forms • graded practice sets • mixed-tense editing passages • writing transfer tasks • progress tracker • separate student and tutor files • full answer guidance