

## Verbs: Tense and Aspect

**Tense** is about time—past, present, and future in most textbooks; past and non-past in some analyses.

- Past: I went there already; the cat ate the cheese; she watched too much television; you could see the goo; did they leave at intermission?
- Present: I brush my teeth every morning; the cat eats cheese whenever she gets a chance; Is there anything else I need to know? (note that simple present in English is used for habitual actions, and is therefore more aspectual than tense, but we need it to make other distinctions, so we keep it a tense for now, pun intended)
- Future: I will brush my teeth; the cat will eat the cheese; will there be any cookies left? (note that future has to be marked with an auxiliary tense marker, 'will')

**Aspect** is about where we are in a process: just starting, about to start, somewhere in the middle, near the end, dragging things out, finishing, just beyond finished, etc. Some languages make gazillions of aspectual distinctions, but English has only two: completed (perfect), and continuing (continuous); if there is no aspect marked, the term is 'simple', and the tenses are as given above. Each aspect can be used with each of the tenses and can be combined. Continuous always comes with an '-ing'; past perfects come with 'had', present perfects with 'have' or 'has', and future perfects with 'will have'

- Past perfect: I had already been there when she showed up (completed process before some point in the past); the cat had eaten the cheese before the dog had a chance to
- Past continuous: I was looking at the sky when a meteor flashed across the sky (ongoing process in the past); the cat was eating the cheese when they got back from the party.
- Past perfect continuous: I had been looking at the meteor; the cat had been eating the cheese (a completed continuation of a process).
- Present perfect: I have seen many meteors (completed as of now); the cat has eaten a lot of cheese and shows no signs of stopping; they have been late to every party this week.
- Present continuous: I am watching Netflix (ongoing at the moment); the cat is eating cheese; are you making yourself comfortable? (Note that present continuous is what English speakers usually use when they are talking about a current situation, which gives the parallel conflation between tense and aspect as indicated previously.)
- Present perfect continuous: I have been watching Netflix for a long time (a completed continuation of a process); the cat has been eating a lot of cheese.
- Future perfect: At this rate, I will have seen three meteors before going to bed (process completed at some time in the future—isn't language cool?!); the cat will have eaten a pound of cheese by the time we run out.
- Future continuous: the cat will be eating cheese until there is not more cheese to be eaten (continuing in the future); I will be writing grammar handouts for the rest of my life; the language will be changing more quickly than I can complete handouts.
- Future perfect continuous: the cat will have been eating cheese for ten minutes as of three minutes from now (completed continuation in the future); the pot will have been boiling over for a long time before I manage to cut up the rest of the onions.