

Past and Present Tense

Whether we like it or not, people are creatures who exist within the fabric of time—so it makes sense that our writing also reflects time. Two key things to know about tenses are:

- Verbs themselves are only affected by **past** and **present** tense.
- Other English tenses are indicated using “helping” or “auxiliary” words that precede verbs.

The six basic English tenses are:



Present Perfect and Past Tense

As you might have guessed, *present tense* reflects action happening now. *Present perfect* conveys action and/or the residual effects of an action that happened in the past but is still happening....

Example

A. The Martian space shuttle **landed** in Detroit (simple past).

B. The Martian space shuttle **has landed** in Detroit for twelve years (present perfect).

In sentence A, the verb “landed” indicates a single action that happened once in the past and implies the action has since stopped. In contrast, sentence B says Martian shuttles have landed in an ongoing manner and suggests they will continue to land.

Past and Past Perfect

Past tense, also referred to as *simple past*, reflects action that happened before now. Past perfect reports about action that happened before another action and emphasizes that the action was completed.

Example

A. The Martians **invaded** Hollywood and then **established** control. (simple past)

B. The Martians established control of Hollywood after they **had invaded**. (past perfect)

Sentence A describes actions that happened in the past; sentence B describes action that took place before another action.

