

English tenses

Present simple and continuous: grammar rules

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Present simple tense

Form

Positive statement: *I play, He plays*

Negative statement: *I do not play (I don't play), He does not play (He doesn't play)*

Question form: *Do you play? Does he play?*

Negative question: *Do you not play? (Don't you play?) Does he not play? (Doesn't he play?)*

The passive voice: *The game is played. The letters are written.* (See more at Active and passive voice.)

Spelling

We only use -s ending (plays) in the third person singular.

We add -es to the verbs that end in ss, sh, ch, x and o: *misses, finishes, watches, mixes, goes.*

If the verb ends in a consonant and -y, we change -y into -i and use the -es ending: *carry - carries, try - tries.*

But: *play - plays*, because this verb ends with a vowel and -y.

The auxiliary verb *do* is not used to make questions and negative statements with modal verbs and the verb *to be*.

Are you a student? Is he in London? I am not at home. He is not happy. Can you sing? Must I come? I cannot swim. He mustn't stay.

If the *wh-* pronoun introducing the question (*who, which*) is the subject of the question, we do not use the auxiliary verb *do*. Compare the following sentences.

Who knows you? (who is the subject)

Which cars belong to you? (which cars is the subject)

But: *Who do you know? (who is the object)*

The negative question normally expresses a surprise.

Doesn't he work?

Use

1. We use the **present simple tense** for activities that happen again and again (everyday, sometimes, ever, never).

I sometimes go to school by bike. You don't speak Greek. Do they get up early?

He often travels. She doesn't work. Does she ever help you?

2. We use it for facts that are always true.

Our planet moves round the sun.

Lions eat meat.

3. With a future time expression (tomorrow, next week) the present simple is used for planned future actions (timetables).

The train leaves at 8.15.

They return tonight.

Present continuous tense

Form

Positive statement: *I am playing, You are playing, He is playing*

Negative statement: *I am not playing (I'm not playing), You are not playing (You aren't playing), He is not playing (He isn't playing)*

Question: *Are you playing? Is he playing?*

Negative question: *Are you not playing? (Aren't you playing?) Is he not playing? (Isn't he playing?)*

The present continuous tense is formed with the verb to be and the present participle (-ing ending).

The negative question normally expresses a surprise: *Isn't he working?*

Use

The **present continuous tense** is used:

1. If we want to say that something is happening at the time of speaking. We often use it with time expressions such as *now* or *at the moment*.

I am doing housework at the moment.

You aren't listening to me now!

Look at him! What is he doing?

2. For temporary activities that are true now, but maybe not happening at the time of speaking. Time expressions such as *today*, *this week* or *these days* are typical of this use.

I am in London. I am learning English here.

She can't go out today. She is preparing for an exam.

You can't meet him this week. He is working in Bath.

3. For planned future arrangements. The time of the action must be given in the sentence (*soon*, *tomorrow*, *on Monday*, *next week*), otherwise it is not clear that we talk about future.

I am coming soon.

We are leaving on Monday.

She is starting next week.

4. With *always* to express the idea that something happens too often and it annoys the speaker.

I am always forgetting my keys.

He is always smoking in the living room!

We do not normally use in the continuous the following groups of verbs (so called state verbs):

1. Of senses: *feel, hear, see, smell, taste*. On the other hand, *look, watch* or *listen* are action verbs and can be used in the continuous:

I can hear you. - I am listening to you.

Can you see the bird? - Are you looking at the bird?

2. Of liking and disliking: *like, love, hate, fear, detest, want, wish...*

I like animals.

I hate snakes.

3. Of mental states: *agree, believe, forget, know, remember, suppose, think...*

I agree with you.

I suppose you are right.

4. Of permanent states: *be, have, belong, contain, owe, own, possess...*

This pen belongs to me.

I have a new pet.

5. Of appearance: *seem, appear, look, sound...*

It seems that it will rain.

Your new haircut looks really good.

If some of these verbs are used in the present continuous, they have a different meaning. In such a case they become action verbs.

I think he is my best friend. (mental state) - *I'm thinking of giving him a present.* (mental activity)

He has a new bathroom. (possess) - *He is having a bath.* (take a bath)

I see what you mean. (know) - *I am seeing a doctor. I am ill.* (visit)

The flower smells beautiful. (scent) - *The dog is smelling the sausage.* (sniff)

This wine tastes sour. (It has a sour taste.) - *She is tasting the soup if it is warm enough.*