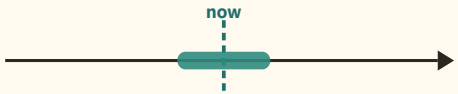
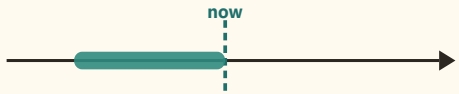
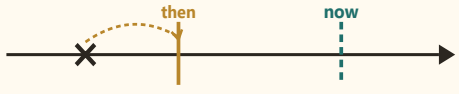
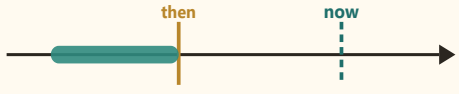
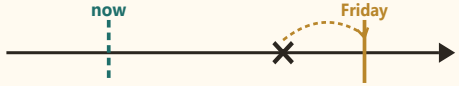
The Twelve Tenses

One verb, twelve ways to place it in time. Follow Sophia and her book through every tense.

A1–C2 · Philo & Sophia, Lessons 1–4

Time runs from left to right: past · now · future

	Simple	Continuous (progressive)	Perfect	Perfect continuous
Present	**Present simple** *habits, facts, timetables*  Sophia **reads** every evening. **I/you/we/they read · he/she reads** *always, usually, every day*	**Present continuous** *happening now; temporary*  Sophia **is reading** in the library. **am / is / are + -ing** *now, at the moment, this week*	**Present perfect** *past action, present result; experience*  She **has read** three chapters today. **have / has + past participle** *already, yet, ever, never, just*	**Present perfect continuous** *duration up to now*  She **has been reading** for two hours. **have / has been + -ing** *for, since, how long, all day*
Past	**Past simple** *finished action at a past time*  She **read** the book last summer. **verb + -ed · irregular forms** *yesterday, last..., ...ago, in 1990*	**Past continuous** *in progress at a past moment*  She **was reading** when the phone rang. **was / were + -ing** *when, while, at 8 last night*	**Past perfect** *completed before a past point*  She **had read** the chapter before class began. **had + past participle** *before, after, already, by then*	**Past perfect continuous** *duration up to a past point*  She **had been reading** for an hour when Philo arrived. **had been + -ing** *for, since, when, until*
Future	**Future simple** *predictions, offers, decisions*  She **will read** the new book tomorrow. **will + verb · (going to + verb)** *tomorrow, next..., soon, in 2030*	**Future continuous** *in progress at a future moment*  At 8 p.m. she **will be reading**. **will be + -ing** *at this time tomorrow, at 8*	**Future perfect** *completed before a future point*  She **will have read** the book by Friday. **will have + past participle** *by, by the time, before*	**Future perfect continuous** *duration up to a future point*  By June she **will have been reading** it for a year. **will have been + -ing** *by..., for...*

How to read the timelines

now · a point in the past or future · ✕ a completed action · an action in progress

Simple = the fact. **Continuous** = in the middle of it. **Perfect** = completed before a point. **Perfect continuous** = how long, up to a point.

Spanish speakers, watch out

- *Vivo aquí desde 2020* = I **have lived** (or **have been living**) here since 2020, not *I live here since 2020*.
- *Ya lo leí* = **I've** already **read** it (British English), or *I already read it* (American).
- Don't use *will* after *when, if, as soon as*: *when she **arrives***.

Want more?

Sophia explains every tense, with practice, in Philo & Sophia:
1 The Instant and the Standing Rule · **2** An Incident with a Shelf · **3** Two Points Joined · **4** A Wager
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