

# Copy Editing in Medical Journalism

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# English Tenses in a ▶ Glance

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# 1. Present Tense

**There are 4 types of present tense**

- ▶ Simple Present
- ▶ Present Perfect
- ▶ Present Continuous
- ▶ Present Perfect Continuous



# 1.1. Simple Present

The simple present is a verb tense with two main uses.

- ▶ when an action is happening right now, or when it happens regularly (or unceasingly, which is why it's sometimes called present indefinite).

Example:

I feel great!

Pauline loves pie.

I'm sorry to hear that you're sick.



# 1.1. Simple Present (cont)

- ▶ to talk about habitual actions or occurrences.

Example:

Pauline practices the piano every day.

Ms. Jackson travels during the summer.

Hamsters run all night.



# 1.1 Simple present (cont.)

**Note:** Typically, when we want to describe a temporary action that is currently in progress, we use the present continuous:

Example:

Pauline can't come to the phone right now because she **is brushing** her teeth.

**Note:** In the simple present, most regular verbs use the root form, except in the third-person singular (which ends in **-s**)



## 1.2. Present Perfect

- ▶ The present perfect tense refers to an action or state that either occurred at an indefinite time in the past (e.g., we have talked before) or began in the past and continued to the present time (e.g., he has grown impatient over the last hour). This tense is formed by **have/has + the past participle**.
- ▶ These examples show how the present perfect can describe something that occurred or was the state of things at an unspecified time in the past.

I have walked on this path before.

We have eaten the lasagna here.



## 1.2. Present Perfect (Cont.)

- ▶ The important thing to remember about the present perfect is that you can't use it when you are being specific about when it happened.

I have put away all the laundry.

I have put away all the laundry this morning.

- ▶ You can use the present perfect to talk about the duration of something that started in the past is still happening.

She has had the chickenpox since Tuesday.



# 1.2. Present Perfect (Cont.)

## Present perfect: key rules

- ▶ 3. Present perfect for an action, event, or scenario that began in the past and is still current today. This construction is often used to state the background situation as a basis for current research.
- ▶ 4. If there is no past-present reference, then use the present simple to indicate a habitual situation (and the present continuous for actions taking place now or in the current period of time).
- ▶ 5. Present perfect when *once* and *as soon as* mean ‘after something has been done’.



## 1.2. Present Perfect (Cont.)

- ▶ **3 Present perfect: Problem areas**
- ▶ **1. Present perfect** (not **present simple**) to state when, with
- ▶ reference to a present situation, you state how long (in days, years, months etc.) this situation has been operative.
- ▶ Note that *I have been here for a week* means that I arrived one week ago and I am still here. Instead, *I am here for a week* means that perhaps I arrived today (or recently) and that I will stay seven days.
- ▶ Note the difference between *since*, *for* and *from*.



## 1.2. Present Perfect (Cont.)

- ▶ 2. Present perfect (not present simple) to state that this is the first (second, third, etc) time that something has been done.
- ▶ 3. Present perfect (not past simple) in the Conclusions to summarize what you have done in the paper - the focus is on the writing and construction of the paper (typical verbs: *present, show, describe, explain, outline*).



# 1.3. Present Continuous

- ▶ The **present continuous** verb tense indicates that an action or condition is happening now, frequently, and may continue into the future.
- ▶ The Present Continuous Formula: **to be [am, is, are] + verb [present participle]**
- ▶ Aunt Christine **is warming** up the car while Scott looks for his new leather coat. They **are eating** at Scott's favorite restaurant today, Polly's Pancake Diner.



## 1.3. Present Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ The present continuous (present progressive) tense is a way to convey any action or condition that is happening *right now*, *frequently*, and may be *ongoing*. It adds energy and action to writing, and its effect helps readers understand *when* the action is happening. Imagine Aunt Christine has surprised her nephew Scott for his birthday and is going to take him out to his favorite restaurant, Polly's Pancake Diner. If I wanted to tell the story *after it happened*, I'd use the past tense:

They **waited** at the red light, and Scott **worried** they might miss their reservation. (Past tense)



## 1.3. Present Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ But what I really want to convey is how the event *unfolded*, showing the action *as it is happening*:
- ▶ They **are sitting** at Scott's favorite booth, the one with the sparkling red plastic seats. (For how long? We don't know, but we *do* know they are sitting there *now*.)
- ▶ The waiter **is standing** behind the counter right now with a notepad in his hand and pencil behind his ear. (Will he ever make it over to the booth? Probably, but not *now*.)



## 1.3. Present Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ “**Are you waiting** to open your presents after you eat your pancakes?” said Aunt Christine, taking a sip from her root beer. (Here the present continuous is being used in question form.)
- ▶ From this narrative point of view, the action is immediate and continuous; there’s momentum. Sometimes writers use this tense to add suspense or humor in fictional pieces. What kind of pancakes will Scott and his aunt order? The suspense **is killing** me!



## 1.3. Present Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ **Simple present vs. present continuous: Key rules**
- ▶ 1. The simple present indicates actions or situations
  - ▶ which happen repeatedly, all the time, or at any time,
  - ▶ including established scientific facts and findings,
  - ▶ theorems, definitions, lemmas, proofs etc.
- ▶ 2. The present continuous indicates trends and
  - ▶ situations that are evolving now, or
  - ▶ programmed future events.



# 1.4. Present Perfect Continuous

- ▶ The present perfect continuous tense (also known as the present perfect progressive tense) shows that something started in the past and is continuing at the present time. The present perfect continuous is formed using the construction **has/have been + the present participle (root + -ing)**.
- ▶ I have been reading War and Peace for a month now.



# 1.4. Present Perfect Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ In this sentence, using the present perfect continuous verb tense conveys that reading *War and Peace* is an activity that began sometime in the past and is not yet finished in the present (which is understandable in this case, given the length of Tolstoy's weighty tome).
- ▶ *Recently* and *lately* are words that we often find with verbs in the present perfect continuous tense.
- ▶ Mia has been competing in flute competitions recently. (And she will continue to do so.)
- ▶ I haven't been feeling well lately. (And I am still sick now.)
- ▶ Have you seen my wallet and keys recently? (Because I sure don't know where they are.)



## 1.4. Present Perfect Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ Of course, not all verbs are compatible with continuous action. Some examples of such verbs are to be, to arrive, and to own.
- ▶ I have been owning my Mazda since 2007.
- ▶ I have owned my Mazda since 2007. (present perfect tense)
- ▶ Gus has been being late for work recently.
- ▶ Gus has been late for work recently. (present perfect tense)



## 2. Past Tenses

- ▶ **There are 4 types of past tense**
- ▶ Simple Past
- ▶ Past Perfect
- ▶ Past Continuous
- ▶ Past Perfect Continuous



## 2.1. Simple past

- ▶ The **simple past** is a verb tense that is used to talk about things that happened or existed before now. Imagine someone asks what your brother Wolfgang did while he was in town last weekend.
- ▶ Wolfgang **entered** a hula hoop contest.
- ▶ He **won** the silver medal.



## 2.1. Simple past (cont)

### ▶ **4 Past simple: key rules**

- ▶ 1. Use the past simple when there a clear time reference (e.g. *in 2011, last month, three years ago*).
- ▶ 2. Use the past simple when the action is clearly past.
- ▶ 3. Avoid the present simple to describe actions that took place in the past. Instead use the past simple, particularly to avoid ambiguity (last example below).



## 2.1. Simple past (cont)

- ▶ **5 Present simple vs. past simple: specific rules**  
(aims and methods)
- ▶ 1. To outline main topics of the research and aims of a project: use the present simple in the first sentence to describe the whole paper, use the past simple to outline what you did.
- ▶ 2. When describing the aim of the project, use the present simple if the project is still ongoing, use the past simple if your paper describes a finished project.



## 2.1. Simple past (cont)

- ▶ 3. Present simple to describe a procedure (method, etc.) established by other authors, i.e. to state general principles relevant to the procedure.
- ▶ 4. Present simple to refer to your methodology, process or procedure if you are just explaining in general how it works, rather than what you did on one specific occasion.
- ▶ 5. Past simple to state what the objectives of your experiments were, what equipment was used, how other methods were adapted, what steps were followed etc.



## 2.1. Simple past (cont)

- ▶ **6 Present simple, present perfect and simple past: reference to the literature**
- ▶ 1. Past simple to refer to the literature when you give the date within the main sentence (i.e. not just in parentheses).
- ▶ 2. Present perfect to give past-to-present background information. The present simple is possible here, but is much less commonly used.



## 2.1. Simple past (cont)

- ▶ 3. Present perfect if the method, technique, procedure, etc. is the subject of the verb and there is no time reference, past simple if the author is the subject of the verb. In such cases there may or may not be a time indication.
- ▶ 4. Past simple (or less commonly present simple) to report what other authors have *suggested, proposed, claimed, implied, hypothesized, put forward*, etc. There cannot be a specific time reference if you choose to use the present simple in such cases.



## 2.1. Simple past (cont)

- ▶ 7 **Present simple vs. past simple: specific rules (results and discussion)**
  1. Very important: if you use the simple present to report your findings it must be 100% clear to readers that you are talking about **OUR** findings and **NOT** what has been reported in the literature. This rule is extremely important and should never be ignored.
  2. Present simple to state what a figure or table shows, highlights, describes, reports etc.



## 2.1. Simple past (cont)

- ▶ 3. Present simple to discuss your data and results, and to state the implications of your findings. Typically after *show, explain, highlight, believe, mean, indicate, reveal*.
- ▶ 4. Introductory verbs such as *show, highlight, reveal* can be either in the present simple or past simple, but to talk about what you *found, discovered, noticed*, etc. only use the past simple.



## 2.2. Past Perfect

- ▶ **Past Perfect**
- ▶ The **past perfect**, also called the pluperfect, is a verb tense used to talk about actions that were completed before some point in the past.
- ▶ We were shocked to discover that someone **had graffitied** “Tootles was here” on our front door. We were relieved that Tootles **had used** washable paint.



## 2.2. Past Perfect (cont.)

- ▶ The past perfect tense is for talking about something that happened before something else. Imagine waking up one morning and stepping outside to grab the newspaper. On your way back in, you notice a mysterious message scrawled across your front door: Tootles was here. When you're telling this story to your friends later, how would you describe this moment? You might say something like:
- ▶ I turned back to the house and saw that some someone named Tootles **had defaced** my front door!



## 2.3. Past Continuous

- ▶ The past continuous tense, also known as the past progressive tense, refers to a continuing action or state that was happening at some point in the past. The past continuous tense is formed by combining the past tense of to be (i.e., was/were) with the verb's present participle (-ing word).
- ▶ There are many situations in which this verb tense might be used in a sentence. For example, it is often used to describe conditions that existed in the past.
- ▶ The sun was shining every day that summer.
- ▶ As I spoke, the children were laughing at my cleverness



## 2.3. Past Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ It can also be used to describe something that was happening continuously in the past when another action interrupted it.

The audience was applauding until he fell off the stage.

I was making dinner when she arrived.

The past continuous can shed light on what was happening at a precise time in the past.

At 6 o'clock, I was eating dinner.



## 2.3. Past Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ It can also refer to a habitual action in the past.

She was talking constantly in class in those days.

One final caution: Though the irregularities are few, not every verb is suited to describing a continuous action. Certain verbs can't be used in the past continuous tense. One common example is the verb *to arrive*.

At noon, he was arriving.

At noon, he arrived .



## 2.4. Past Perfect Continuous

- ▶ The past perfect continuous tense (also known as the past perfect progressive tense) shows that an action that started in the past continued up until another time in the past. The past perfect continuous tense is constructed using **had been + the verb's present participle (root + -ing)**.
- ▶ Unlike the present perfect continuous, which indicates an action that began in the past and continued up to the present, the past perfect continuous is a verb tense that indicates something that began in the past, continued in the past, and also ended at a defined point in the past.



## 2.4. Past Perfect Continuous (cont.)

He had been drinking milk out the carton when Mom walked into the kitchen.

I had been working at the company for five years when I got the promotion.

- ▶ When, for, since, and before are words that you may see used alongside the past perfect continuous tense.

Martha had been walking three miles a day before she broke her leg.

The program that was terminated had been working well since 1945.

Cathy had been playing the piano for 35 years when she was finally asked to do a solo with the local orchestra.

He had been throwing rocks at her window for five minutes before she finally came out on the balcony and said, “Hey, Romeo.”



## 2.4. General rules

- ▶ **1. Present perfect: key rules**

- ▶ 1. The active form of the present perfect is often used in an Abstract to announce a new finding or some new advance in a particular discipline. This usage tends to be confined to the first line of the Abstract, or immediately after the background information has been given. However, to add further details about this innovation/news, the present simple or past simple are used.



## 2.4. General rules (cont.)

- ▶ 2. When writing a response to the referees regarding your
- ▶ manuscript, use the present perfect to announce what additions and
- ▶ changes you have made. However, when you give more details of
- ▶ these changes and why you made them, use the past simple.



## 2.4. General rules (cont.)

### 3. Present perfect vs. present perfect continuous

- ▶ 1. If a situation has existed for a considerable number of years then the present perfect is preferred to present perfect continuous, BUT if the situation is more recent then both forms can be used with the continuous form indicating that the situation may be temporary.
- ▶ 2. Do not use the present perfect continuous for completed actions or when you talk about the number of occasions that something has happened or when you specify a quantity [exception: *years, days, hours, minutes, etc.*].



## 2.4. General rules (cont.)

### 4. Past continuous and past perfect vs. simple past

- ▶ 1. Past continuous to indicate a long action that was interrupted by a short action.
- ▶ 2. Past continuous to indicate two long actions that took place at the same time, past simple for a series of non-simultaneous actions.
- ▶ 3. Past perfect to highlight when one action took place earlier than a later action. The past simple indicates a series of consecutive actions.



# 3. Future Tenses

- ▶ Simple Future
- ▶ Future Perfect
- ▶ Future Continuous
- ▶ Future Perfect Continuous



## 3.1. Simple Future

- ▶ The simple future is a verb tense that's used to talk about things that haven't happened yet.

This year, Jen **will read** *War and Peace*. It **will be** hard, but she's determined to do it.

- ▶ Use the simple future to talk about an action or condition that will begin and end in the future.
- ▶ The formula for the simple future is **will + [root form of verb]**.

I **will learn** a new language. Jen **will read** that book. My brothers **will sleep** till noon if no one wakes them up. You **will see** what I mean.



## 3.1. Simple Future (cont.)

- ▶ It doesn't matter if the subject is singular or plural; the formula for the simple future doesn't change.
- ▶ However, there is another way to show that something will happen in the future. It follows the formula [**am/is/are**] + **going to** + [**root form verb**].

I **am going to learn** a new language. Jen **is going to read** that book. My brothers **are going to sleep** till noon if no one wakes them up. You **are going to see** what I mean.



## 3.1. Simple Future (cont.)

- ▶ The “going to” construction is common in speech and casual writing. Keep in mind though that it’s on the informal side, so it’s a good idea to stick to the **will + [root form]** construction in formal writing.



## 3.2. Future Perfect

- ▶ The **future perfect** is a verb tense used for actions that will be completed before some other point in the future.

The parade **will have ended** by the time Chester gets out of bed.

At eight o'clock I **will have left**.



## 3.2. Future Perfect (cont.)

- ▶ The future perfect tense is for talking about an action that will be completed between now and some point in the future. Imagine that your friend Linda asks you to take care of her cat for a few days while she goes on a trip. She wants you to come over today at noon so she can show you where to find the cat food and how to mash it up in the bowl just right so that Fluffy will deign to eat it. But you're busy this afternoon, so you ask Linda if you can come at eight o'clock tonight instead.

“No, that won't work! At eight o'clock I **will have left** already,” she says.



## 3.2. Future Perfect (cont.)

- ▶ What does the future perfect tell us here? It tells us that Linda is going to leave for her trip some time after right now, but before a certain point in the future (eight o'clock tonight). She probably shouldn't have waited until the last minute to find a cat sitter.



## 3.3. Future Continuous

- ▶ The future continuous tense, sometimes also referred to as the future progressive tense, is a verb tense that indicates that something will occur in the future and continue for an expected length of time. It is formed using the construction will + be + the present participle (the root verb + -ing).



## 3.3. Future Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ The simple future tense is a verb tense that is used when an action is expected to occur in the future and be completed. For example, let's suppose you have a meeting tomorrow at five o'clock.
- ▶ I will arrive at five o'clock.
- ▶ *I will arrive* is the simple future tense of the verb *to arrive*. You arrive once; beyond that, you can't keep on arriving. However, once you get there, you may be doing something that goes on continuously, at least for a certain period of time.



## 3.3. Future Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ At five o'clock, I will be meeting with the management about my raise.
- ▶ *Will be meeting* is the future continuous tense of the verb *to meet*. The construction will + be + the present participle *meeting* indicates that the meeting isn't going to happen in an instant, all at once. It will have a duration. The will + be + present participle construction always indicates the future continuous tense.
- ▶ Michael will be running a marathon this Saturday.
- ▶ Eric will be competing against Michael in the race.
- ▶ I will be watching Michael and Eric race.



## 3.3. Future Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ **The Future Continuous Tense Is for Action Verbs Only**
- ▶ It is important to note that the future continuous tense is only used with action verbs, because it is possible to do them for a duration. (Action verbs describe activities like running, thinking, and seeing. Stative verbs describe states of existence, like being, seeming, and knowing.) To use the will + be + present participle construction with a state verb would sound very odd indeed.
- ▶ I will be being stressed tomorrow during my science test.



## 3.3. Future Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ I will be stressed tomorrow during my science test.
- ▶ When the sun comes out tomorrow, winter will be seeming like a distant memory.
- ▶ When the sun comes out tomorrow, winter will seem like a distant memory.
- ▶ After I study, I will be knowing all the answers for the test.
- ▶ After I study, I will know all the answers for the test.
- ▶ As you can see, only the simple future tense is suited to state verbs like *to be* and *to seem*.



## 3.4. Future Perfect Continuous

- ▶ The future perfect continuous, also sometimes called the future perfect progressive, is a verb tense that describes actions that will continue up until a point in the future. The future perfect continuous consists of **will + have + been + the verb's present participle (verb root + -ing)**.



## 3.4. Future Perfect Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ When we describe an action in the future perfect continuous tense, we are projecting ourselves forward in time and looking back at the duration of that activity. The activity will have begun sometime in the past, present, or in the future, and is expected to continue in the future.
- ▶ In November, I will have been working at my company for three years.
- ▶ At five o'clock, I will have been waiting for thirty minutes.
- ▶ When I turn thirty, I will have been playing piano for twenty-one years.



## 3.4. Future Perfect Continuous (cont.)

- ▶ **Non-action Verbs Do Not Use the Future Perfect Continuous**
- ▶ Remember that nonaction verbs like to be, to seem, or to know are not suited to the future perfect continuous tense. Instead, these verbs take the future perfect tense, which is formed with **will + have + past** participle.
- ▶ On Thursday, I will have been knowing you for a week.
- ▶ On Thursday, I will have known you for a week.
- ▶ I will have been reading forty-five books by Christmas.
- ▶ I will have read forty-five books by Christmas.



## 4. The use of tenses in articles

- ▶ In a typical research paper, the use of tenses varies with the section of the paper. Here is a brief guide to using the four variants, namely simple past, simple present, present perfect, and past perfect.



## 4.1. Simple Present:

- ▶ - Use simple present for stating what is generally true and unlikely to change, for example:
- ▶ The sun rises in the east.
- ▶ Human babies generally start speaking when they are two years old.
- ▶ In July and August, it rains in most parts of India.



## 4.1. Simple Present (cont.)

- ▶ -Use simple present also to indicate research results that you believe to be true and relevant to your present research, for example:
- ▶ Robinson maintains that soaking seeds in strong acids help in breaking seed dormancy.
- ▶ -Lastly, simple present is used when talking about the research paper that you are writing, for example:
- ▶ Section 2.3 discusses the advantages of soaking seeds before sowing them.



## 4.2. Simple Past:

- ▶ Use simple past to describe specific actions or events that occurred in the past and that are not being linked to the present in the same sentence, for example:
- ▶ We selected 5 diabetic patients at random to participate in this study.
- ▶ Tanaka reported that 30% of the patients showed symptoms of hypertension.
- ▶ Watson and Crick published their landmark paper on the structure of DNA in 1953.



## 4.3. Present Perfect:

- ▶ Use present perfect to talk about a past event that is linked to the present, to talk about trends, or about events that have ended or occurred recently or still continuing, for example:
- ▶ According to previous studies, the use of cell phones or mobile phones to access the Internet has increased recently.
- ▶ Multi-megawatt turbines have been used in Europe for offshore sites.



## 4. 4. Past Perfect:

- ▶ Use past perfect to describe two related past events that occurred at different times in the past, for example:
- ▶ By the time they were sown, the seeds had already germinated'
- ▶ Those candidates that had been exposed to radiation earlier were excluded.'



## 5. Use of tenses in different parts of scientific papers:

- ▶ Different tenses can be used in various parts of a scientific paper.



# 5.1. Abstract

- ▶ The tense you would use largely depends on the subject of your sentence Generally, use the simple past (or for a concise introductory phrase the present perfect); for general statements and facts use the present tense
- ▶ **General rules**
- ▶ Any statements of **general fact** should be written using the **present tense**.
- ▶ Example: The anaerobic formation and oxidation of methane involve...”).
- ▶ If the **subject of your sentence is your study or the article you are writing**, then you should use the **present tense**.
- ▶ Our study demonstrates...
- ▶ Here, we show mobile phones affect the hearing ability of the elderly.
- ▶ In the present article, we show that an anaerobic thermophilic enrichment culture is required for the experiment.



## 5.1. Abstract (cont)

- ▶ If you are stating a **conclusion** or an **interpretation**, use the **present tense**.
- ▶ Any discussion about **prior research** should be explained using the **past tense**. Also, when talking about an actual observation or result, however, the past tense is used, for example:
- ▶ Genes encoding 16S rRNA...were repeatedly retrieved from marine subsurface sediments.
- ▶ Mice in Group B developed diabetes.



## 5.2. Introduction

- ▶ **Introduction:**
- ▶ Use a mixture of present and past tense:
- ▶ The present tense is applied when you are talking about something that is always true, i.e. for mentioning basic facts
- ▶ The past tense is used for earlier research efforts, either by your own or by another group.
- ▶ For the concluding statements of your introduction section, use the simple past.



## 5.2. Introduction (cont)

- ▶ If the time of demonstration is unknown or not important, use the present perfect.
- ▶ You may use the past perfect, when you talk about something that was true in the past but is no longer so. Present perfect tense for referring to previous research works



## 5.3.Methods

- ▶ Here you generally use the passive voice in the simple past.
- ▶ Past tense to describe what was done. It may be past active or past passive.
- ▶ Present tense can also be used for presenting diagrams and figures presented in the methods section.



## 5.5. Results

- ▶ Simple past and present tense should be employed here, but when you refer to figures and tables you use the present tense, since they continue to exist in your paper.
- ▶ You can use past tense for the results obtained. You can mix active and passive voice.



## 5.6. Discussion

- ▶ **Discussion:**
- ▶ In discussion, use combination of tenses to highlight past research and future directions.
- ▶ Use present tense to explain significance of the results obtained and interpretation of the results.
- ▶ Use the simple past for your own findings and summarizing the results
- ▶ Use the perfect tense for cited information.



## 5.7. Conclusions and Further work:

- ▶ Use a combination of tenses to highlight past research and future directions
- ▶ Use present perfect to make clear that your statements still hold at the time of reading.
- ▶ For further work and recommendations, the future tense (or the present) is acceptable.
- ▶

