

Are You Progressing with Progressive Tenses?

Editors note: This is the second of a four-part series on verb tenses. [Click here to see part one.](#)

For VOA Learning English, this is Everyday Grammar.

Today we are going to look at the progressive verb tenses. Progressive tenses express actions that are unfinished or in progress. There are three progressive verb tenses: the *past progressive*, the *present progressive*, and the *future progressive*. Progressive tenses are the same as continuous tenses.

	past	present	future
Progressive Verbs	It <i>was snowing</i> when I <i>drove</i> to work. Was/were + -ing verb	It <i>is snowing</i> . Am/is/are+-ing verb	It <i>will be snowing</i> by the time I <i>get</i> home. Will be + -ing verb

Present Progressive

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We will start with the present progressive, the most common progressive tense. You form the present progressive tense by using a form of the verb *be* followed by an *-ing* verb. For example, "I am watching a movie."

It is easy to confuse the simple present and the present progressive. What's the difference between, "It rains in Seattle" and "It is raining in Seattle"?

"It rains in Seattle" states that it rains in general. It does not necessarily mean that it is raining at the moment of speaking. "It is raining in Seattle" means that the rain started in the past, is happening now, and will probably continue into the future.

Now, *at this time*, and *currently* are common adverbs in the present progressive.

The present progressive can also express a scheduled event in the future. For example, this sentence is in the present progressive: "She is starting school next semester."

The meaning here is the same as the sentence in the simple future: "She is going to start school next semester." The present progressive and simple future (with *be going to*) sometimes have the same .

You can also use present progressive with *always* to say that something disturbs you. "My neighbor is always playing loud music at night" or "I am always making mistakes with verb tenses!"

Past Progressive

Let's move on to the past progressive. The past progressive describes an event that was in progress in the past. To form the past progressive use *was* or *were* followed by an *-ing* verb. For example, "I

was working late last night."

Sentences in the past progressive often have two actions.

For example, "It *was snowing* when the plane *landed* in Denver."

Notice that the second action, *landed*, is in the simple past.

The past progressive can also express an action in progress interrupted by a second action. "I was running when I slipped and fell" or "I was sleeping when you called."

It is possible to have two progressive actions in the same sentence if the two actions are happening at the same time. You could say, "I was sleeping when you were working".

Future Progressive

The future progressive tense describes an event that will be in progress in the future. To form the future progressive tense, use *will be* followed by an *-ing* verb. For example, "I will be waiting for you when you finish work."

The future progressive can be useful when you are making plans. Imagine your friend wants you to pick her up the airport tomorrow. But you have to work.

You could tell her, "I'm sorry, but I will be working when your plane gets in."

Sometimes, the future progressive is an alternative for the simple future form *be going to*. "I will be studying later" has a similar meaning to "I am going to be studying later." The future progressive just emphasizes the continuing nature of the future action. You can learn more about future tenses in [this previous episode of Everyday Grammar](#).

Stative Verbs

There are some verbs that cannot be used in any of the progressive tenses. You would say "I own a car," not "~~I am owning a car.~~" *Own* is a **stative** verb. Stative verbs describe unchanging conditions or situations. Stative verbs often refer to mental states such as *know*, *realize*, *like*, *believe*, *understand*, *love*, *hate*, *appear*, and *exist*.

A few verbs have both stative and non-stative meanings. Let's look at the verb *think*. "I *think* the book is good" is stative. The action does not change. "I *am thinking* about you" is progressive. It shows a temporary, changing action. **Sensory** verbs like *see*, *taste*, *feel*, *smell*, and *hear* work the same way.

Progressive verbs are especially useful for describing changing emotional states. For that reason, they are very common in song lyrics. We will leave you with a few examples.

I'm John Russell.

And I'm Jill Robbins.

[John Lennon]

*"I was dreaming of the past
And my heart was beating fast
I began to lose control..."*

[Styx]

*"I'm sailing away
Sail an open course for the virgin sea"*

[Adele]

*"I'll be waiting for you when
you're ready to love me again
I put my hands up
I'll do everything different
I'll be better to you"*

Adam Brock wrote this story for Learning English. Jill Robbins and Kathleen Struck were the editors.

Words in This Story

stative - *adj.* describes verbs that express a state rather than an action; usually relating to thoughts, emotions, relationships, senses, states of being and measurements

sensory – *adj.* of or relating to your physical senses