

The Perfect Progressive Tenses

Editor's note: See [An Introduction to Verb Tenses](#) for the first story in this series.

For VOA Learning English, this is Everyday Grammar.

This is the last in our four-part series on verb tenses. Make sure you see our **episodes** on [progressive](#) and [perfect](#) tenses before trying to learn the perfect progressive tenses.

For English learners, the perfect progressive tenses can be scary.

 Everyday Grammar: Perfect Progressive Tenses

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But they are more **straightforward** than you might think.

When you talk about grammar, *perfect* means "complete," and *progressive* means "unfinished."

Perfect progressive sentences focus on the completion of an action that *is*, *was* or *will be* in progress.

Think about this sentence in the past perfect progressive:

"I had been waiting for three years by the time my application was approved." In this example, the emphasis is on duration of the first verb *waiting*.

Perfect progressive tenses often answer the question *how long*? There are three perfect progressive tenses: the *present perfect progressive*, the *past perfect progressive*, and the *future perfect progressive*.

	Past Perfect Progressive	Present Perfect Progressive	Future Perfect Progressive
PERFECT PROGRESSIVE TENSES	It had been snowing for two days before it stopped. Had been + -ing verb + for/since	It has been snowing all month long. Has/have + -ing verb + for/since	It will have been snowing for three days by the time it stops. Will have been + -ing verb + for/since

Present Perfect Progressive

Let's start with the present perfect progressive. You form the present perfect progressive by using *have been* (or *has been*) followed by an *-ing* verb.

For instance, "She has been sitting in class since early this morning." The action, *sitting*, is continuing. But the emphasis is on the completed part of the action. Here are some more examples:

I have been waiting for 20 minutes.
I have been studying since I was a child.
It has been snowing all day long.

In all of these sentences, the emphasis is on how the finished activity relates to the present.

A time reference is not required to use the present perfect progressive. Sometimes we use it to refer to recently completed actions.

Imagine your friend comes to your house with red, **puffy** eyes. You might say, "Your eyes are red. Have you been crying?"

Or you notice that a co-worker is looking tanned. You might ask, "You look **tanned**. Have you have been sunbathing?"

Remember that **stative verbs** cannot be used in any progressive tense. A stative verb describes unchanging situations, often mental states such as *realize*, *appear* and *seem*.

You should not say, "I've been knowing you for a long time." If you have a stative verb, use the present perfect: "I have known you for a long time."

Almost all native speakers will **contract**, or shorten the pronoun that comes before *have* or *has*. "I have been" will sound like, "I've been."

Expert grammarian and teacher Betty Azar tells English learners: "[Don't expect slow, careful pronunciation of helping verbs in normal conversation.](#)"

Past Perfect Progressive

Let us move on to the past perfect progressive. The past perfect progressive emphasizes the duration of a past action before another action happened.

For example, "I had been smoking for 10 years before I quit."

You form the past perfect progressive by using *had been* followed by an *-ing* verb.

Notice how the past perfect progressive often includes the adverbs *for* and *since* to express duration. You will also see the adverbs *before*, *when* or *by the time* used to introduce a second action.

The second action uses the simple past tense. Here are some more examples:

*I had been studying for 12 years by the time I **graduated** from high school.*
She had been living there since she was a child.
*He had been teaching for 12 years before he was **certified**.*

The past perfect progressive can also describe a recently completed action. For instance:

My clothes were wet because it had been raining.
He was talking loudly because he had been drinking.

Future Perfect Progressive

We will end with the future perfect progressive. The future perfect progressive describes the **duration** of an action as it relates to a future event.

There are two ways to form the future perfect progressive. Both require two actions. One is by using "will have been" plus a present **participle**, followed by "when" or "by the time" and the

second action.

For example, "I will have been working for 35 years by the time I retire." Notice that the second planned action, *retire*, is in the simple present. The simple future is never used with the second action.

The other way to form the future perfect progressive is using "be going to have been" plus a present participle followed by "when" or "by the time" and the second action. The order of the actions can be reversed with either form.

For example, "By the time the plane arrives, I am going to have been waiting for five hours."

With the future perfect progressive, it is not always clear if the *-ing* verb started in the past or will start in the future. For example, "The doctor will have been working for 24 hours by the time his shift is finished."

The future perfect progressive is rare because it is difficult to know the duration of an activity relative to another future event.

And those are the three perfect progressive tenses in English.

We have been talking about verb tenses for several weeks now. It is time to move on to other topics. We leave you with a present perfect progressive song by the music band "Foreigner."

*"I've been waiting for a girl like you
To come into my life"*

I'm John Russell.

And I'm Jill Robbins.

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

What do you think is the hardest verb tense of the ones you've studied? Write to us in the Comments section or on [our 51VOA.COM](https://www.51VOA.COM).

Words in This Story

straightforward – *adj.* direct, not complicated

puffy – *adj.* larger than normal

contract - *v.* to make (something) smaller or shorter

certified – *adj.* having met the official requirements that are needed to do a particular type of work

episode - *n.* part of a longer program, such as a film or television series

tanned - *adj.* becoming more brown in color

graduated - *v.* successfully completed a study program

duration - *n.* the time during which something continues

participle - *n.* a form of a verb that is used to change a noun or verb