

MPC English & Study Skills Center

Verb Tenses: Simple Present vs. Present Progressive

Simple Present

The simple present tense is used to present events or situations that are habitual or always present or true. Some groups of verbs are only used in the simple present, not the progressive; they describe mental states or conditions that exist rather than actions that are in progress.

Note: For a complete listing and explanation of verb tenses, **see also** the handout on **Verbs/Verb Tenses**.

‡ Verbs that show habitual actions—those things that occur over and over:

- Tom works for Macy's. (*five days a week!*)
- I eat lunch in the cafeteria. (*day after day*)
- She drives the freeway to work. (*every time she goes*)
- We study in the library. (*day after day*)

‡ Verbs that show conditions that are always true:

- The sun rises in the east.
- The sky is overhead.
- Rain feels wet.
- Kasarah lives in New York City.

‡ Verbs that show mental state:

know	believe	imagine	want
realize	feel	doubt	need
understand	suppose	remember	prefer
recognize	forget	mean	think*

- She knows that I love her.
- Janet understand the problem.
- They need a raise.
- I doubt his answer is true.
- He thinks that he knows the secret to life.

Note: "Think" can be used in a progressive form, but the meaning is different.
I am thinking about you.

Here, the focus is on the ACT of thinking.

🔗 Verbs that show emotional state:

love	adore	fear	hate
like	dislike	envy	mind
appreciate	despise	loathe	care

- I **despise** liars.
- Stanley **dislikes** physics.
- Margarita **loves** her job.
- He **envies** her ability to learn things so quickly.

🔗 Verbs that show possession:

possess	own	belong	have*
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- Jason **possesses** the secrets to the universe.
- I **own** my home.
- Tony **belongs** to the Elks Club.
- I **have** a new car.

Note: "Have" can be used in a progressive form, but the meaning is different.

Help! This man **is having** a heart attack!

Here, "is having" focuses on an action rather than possession.

🔗 Verbs that show sense perception:

taste	feel	hear	see	smell
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- The dog **hears** the siren.
- She **smells** the smoke.
- I **feel** the sand under my feet.

Note: Some of these verbs also have a meaning not associated with the senses and can be used in the progressive:

Jonas **is feeling** quite ill.

Here, "is feeling" does not relate to the sense of touch.

🔗 Verbs that show existing states:

seem	cost	be	consist of
look	owe	exist	contain
appear	weigh	include	contain

- She **seems** so tired this afternoon.
- The list **includes** the names of 200 people.

Present Progressive (Be + verb + -ing:

The present progressive tense gives the idea that an action is **in progress** or continuing, that someone or something is in the middle of doing something. It can be used to describe an action taking place at this moment or in general.

- I **am studying** in the library. (*Right now.*)
- She **is painting** the barn. (*She is in the middle of doing it.*)
- They **are dancing** to the waltz. (*They are on the dance floor now.*)
- Terra **is taking** math this semester. (*Generally true—she is in the middle of the semester, but she is not in class at this very moment.*)

Note: "Be" and "have" are rarely used in the progressive form.

🔗 Verbs with different meaning in different tenses:

Verb	Simple Present: Existing State	Present Prog.: Activity in Progress
think	I think he is nice.	I am thinking hard.
have	She has a new baby.	He is having a temper tantrum.
taste	The dessert tastes good.	They are tasting the wine.
smell	The perfume smells sweet.	Sarah is smelling the rose.
see	I see very well.	The doctor is seeing her patients.
feel	The baby's skin feels soft.	The baby is feeling the cat's fur.
appear	She appears to be confused.	Jack is appearing in court.
weigh	The elephant weighs a ton.	The man is weighing the food.
be	I am a student.	She is being a jerk.