

# English tenses

## Present simple and present continuous

---

### Present simple tense

#### Form

Positive statement: *I play, He plays*

Negative statement: *I do not play (I don't play), He does not play (He doesn't play)*

Question form: *Do you play? Does he play?*

Negative question: *Do you not play? (Don't you play?) Does he not play? (Doesn't he play?)*

The passive voice: *The game is played. The letters are written.* (See more at Active and passive voice.)

#### Spelling

We only use -s ending (plays) in the third person singular.

We add -es to the verbs that end in ss, sh, ch, x and o: misses, finishes, watches, mixes, goes.

If the verb ends in a consonant and -y, we change -y into -i and use the -es ending: carry - carries, try - tries.

But: play - plays, because this verb ends with a vowel and -y.

The auxiliary verb *do* is not used to make questions and negative statements with modal verbs and the verb *to be*.

*Are you a student? Is he in London? I am not at home. He is not happy. Can you sing? Must I come? I cannot swim. He mustn't stay.*

If the *wh*-pronoun introducing the question (who, which) is the subject of the question, we do not use the auxiliary verb *do*. Compare the following sentences.

*Who knows you? (who is the subject)*

*Which cars belong to you? (which cars is the subject)*

But: *Who do you know? (who is the object)*

The negative question normally expresses a surprise.

*Doesn't he work?*

#### Use

1. We use the **present simple tense** for activities that happen again and again (everyday, sometimes, ever, never).

*I sometimes go to school by bike. You don't speak Greek. Do they get up early?*

*He often travels. She doesn't work. Does she ever help you?*

2. We use it for facts that are always true.

*Our planet moves round the sun.*

*Lions eat meat.*

3. With a future time expression (tomorrow, next week) the present simple is used for planned future actions (timetables).

*The train leaves at 8.15.*

*They return tonight.*

# Present continuous tense

## Form

Positive statement: *I am playing, You are playing, He is playing*

Negative statement: *I am not playing (I'm not playing), You are not playing (You aren't playing), He is not playing (He isn't playing)*

Question: *Are you playing? Is he playing?*

Negative question: *Are you not playing? (Aren't you playing?) Is he not playing? (Isn't he playing?)*

The present continuous tense is formed with the verb to be and the present participle (-ing ending).

The negative question normally expresses a surprise: *Isn't he working?*

## Use

The **present continuous tense** is used:

1. If we want to say that something is happening at the time of speaking. We often use it with time expressions such as *now* or *at the moment*.

*I am doing housework at the moment.*

*You aren't listening to me now!*

*Look at him! What is he doing?*

2. For temporary activities that are true now, but maybe not happening at the time of speaking. Time expressions such as *today*, *this week* or *these days* are typical of this use.

*I am in London. I am learning English here.*

*She can't go out today. She is preparing for an exam.*

*You can't meet him this week. He is working in Bath.*

3. For planned future arrangements. The time of the action must be given in the sentence (*soon*, *tomorrow*, *on Monday*, *next week*), otherwise it is not clear that we talk about future.

*I am coming soon.*

*We are leaving on Monday.*

*She is starting next week.*

4. With *always* to express the idea that something happens too often and it annoys the speaker.

*I am always forgetting my keys.*

*He is always smoking in the living room!*

We do not normally use in the continuous the following groups of verbs (so called state verbs):

1. Of senses: *feel, hear, see, smell, taste*. On the other hand, *look, watch* or *listen* are action verbs and can be used in the continuous:

*I can hear you. - I am listening to you.*

*Can you see the bird? - Are you looking at the bird?*

2. Of liking and disliking: *like, love, hate, fear, detest, want, wish...*

*I like animals.*

*I hate snakes.*

3. Of mental states: *agree, believe, forget, know, remember, suppose, think...*

*I agree with you.*

*I suppose you are right.*

4. Of permanent states: *be, have, belong, contain, owe, own, possess...*

*This pen belongs to me.*

*I have a new pet.*

5. Of appearance: *seem, appear, look, sound...*

*It seems that it will rain.*

*Your new haircut looks really good.*

If some of these verbs are used in the present continuous, they have a different meaning. In such a case they become action verbs.

*I think he is my best friend.* (mental state) - *I'm thinking of giving him a present.* (mental activity)

*He has a new bathroom.* (possess) - *He is having a bath.* (take a bath)

*I see what you mean.* (know) - *I am seeing a doctor. I am ill.* (visit)

*The flower smells beautiful.* (scent) - *The dog is smelling the sausage.* (sniff)

*This wine tastes sour.* (It has a sour taste.) - *She is tasting the soup if it is warm enough.*