

Verb structure & auxiliary verbs

Verb structures

English combines present and past time with the simple, continuous or perfect aspect to form different tenses.

Present verb structures

You use the present simple mainly to talk about habits and routines or things that are always true.

I usually go to bed around midnight.

You can use the present continuous to talk about activities that are in progress now, or to describe changing situations.

I'm learning Japanese as well as English.

You can use the present perfect to talk about present situations which started in the past and that are continuing now, or which exist because of a completed past event, or which happened at an indefinite time in the past.

I've been taking English classes since last year.

Past verb structures

You use the past simple to fix events and situations in the past.

Nelson Mandela was in prison for 27 years. He was released in 1990.

You usually use the past continuous in contrast with the past simple to talk about activities that were in progress when something happened.

He was driving to London when the accident happened.

You use the past perfect to show clearly that one past event happened before another past event.

The film had started when I arrived.

You can use both would and used to to refer to regular or repeated past actions.

When she was at school, she used to get up before six o'clock.

Auxiliary verbs

The auxiliary verbs **be**, **have** and **do** are used to form different verb structures. They are also used with **so** and **neither** in question tags and in short answers.

So & neither

You use **so** to mean «also» in the structure **So + auxiliary + subject**
«I'm American.» «So am I».

You use **neither** or **nor** to mean «also not» in the same structure.
«I don't like warm beer.» «Neither do I».

Both **so** and **neither** are used to show agreement between speakers. Note what happens when there is disagreement between speakers.
«I'm Irish.» «I'm not.»

Questions tags & short answers

You usually use a negative tag with a positive statement, and a positive question tag with a negative statement.

You are Irish, aren't you?

You are not Irish, are you?

You use **they** to refer to **somebody**, **anbody**, **everybody** and **nobody**.
Somebody must have called earlier, mastn't they?

You use a positive question tag after **never**, **hardly**, **little**.
He never gives up, does he?

You can use **will/would** or **can/can't/could** after imperatives.
Get me some milk from the shops, would you?