**ENGLISH LANGUAGE JSS 3**

**TOPIC: TENSE**

**Tenses** tell you when something happens. Getting the tense wrong in a sentence can lead to confusion and misunderstandings.

Tenses are a term used in grammar to indicate the time of the action or event.

In any language, tense is divided into three classes namely:

1. Present Tense
2. Past Tense
3. Future Tense
4. Present Tense: When a verb is used to show that an action takes place at present, it is known as the Present Tense.

Example:

1. He speaks English well
2. She writes very beautifully
3. We are fond of music
4. They are afraid of snakes
5. It rains today
6. I like Nigerians

2. Past Tense: When a verb is used to show that an action was completed, it is known as the Past Tense.

Example:

1. He went to Abuja yesterday
2. Obi died four years ago
3. We were in Abuja last year
4. They stayed in a hotel for a week
5. It was hot yesterday
6. I spoke to her for two hours

3 . Future Tense: When a verb is used to show that an action will take place in future, it is known as the Future Tense.

Example:

1. He will go to Jos tomorrow
2. Dorothy will be twenty years old next year
3. We shall marry this year
4. They will send us a telegram
5. It will rain tomorrow
6. I shall teach you Igbo

Learning English tenses can seem difficult at first, but all you need to do is remember a few sentence structures, and learn a few simple rules.

**The Quick and Easy Guide to Learning English Grammar Tenses**

**Saying “I eat fish” is not the same as saying “I am eating fish.”**

But what’s the difference?

To understand why the two statements are different, you need to understand English tenses.

**Went, Going, Gone!**

There are only three basic tenses in the English language: the past, the present, and the future.

* **The past tense is used for anything that happened before this moment in time.**
* **The present tense is used for anything that happens right now or for general statements.**
* **The future tense is used for anything that will happen at some point later than right now.**

These tenses have a few variations that make them more specific.

These variations talk about the exact time during which actions happen.

All three tenses have two main types of variations: simple and continuous.

* **The continuous tenses are used for actions that happen repeatedly over a period of time.**
* **The simple tenses are used for…everything else!**

Since the past and the present tenses are very closely linked, it’s better to look at them together.

Here is a basic guide that will help you begin to understand when to use which tense.

**Simple Tenses**

Look back at the very first example used: “I eat fish.” This sentence uses the simple present tense.

Simple Present

The simple present tense is mostly used for three things:

1. To describe things that are permanent or unchanging.

2. To describe how often something happens.

3. To talk about scheduled events.

To use the tense, add an -s to the end of the verb when “he” or “she” is doing the action (he speaks, she eats).

Use the unchanged verb when anyone else is doing it (we speak, I eat).

So you would use this tense if you wanted to tell someone about yourself or your hobbies, share something you believe to be true, or ask about when you can catch the next bus at the stop.

**Here are some examples:**

If your hobby is the violin, you can say “I play the violin.” Since it’s just a hobby though, you can add:

**“I am not a professional violinist.”**

You might be worried about your friend if you notice he’s biting his nails because “he bites his nails when he’s nervous.”

You’ll need to get ready quickly if you want to make it to your friend’s party, because she just told you that “the party starts in an hour.”

Maybe you should remind your friend to bring a gift since “he never remembers birthdays.”

**Simple Past**

The simple past is used in a very similar way to the simple present.

Simple past verbs use -ed (I walked, he smiled). There are many irregular verbs that don’t use the -ed form, which you will need to learn (I spoke, he ate).

Instead of talking about now, this tense talks about something that has already happened or is no longer true.

Use the simple past if you want to describe an action that already happened.

This description of a trip uses the simple past tense: “Last year I visited New York. I lived in a hotel for a month. I rode the train, took many pictures and walked all around Central Park.”

You can also use this tense for many of the same reasons as the simple present. It can be used to describe a hobby or habit you had in the past, or something you used to believe was true.

In fact, the words “used to” are often used for this tense. You can say it either way: “I used to play the violin when I was young” has the same meaning as “I played the violin when I was young.”

**Continuous Tenses**

The word continuous means something that’s ongoing, happening right now.

The continuous tense uses the -ing ending of a verb (eating, speaking) in both the present and the past.

But wait, if the continuous tense is happening “right now,” how can you have a past continuous tense?

**Present Continuous**

You can use the present continuous to talk about something ongoing that’s happening now or soon.

Maybe you’re drinking some coffee or taking a break from work. Later today you might be meeting some friends for dinner.

By adding the words “always” or “constantly” you can express the frequency of the action. For example: “My mother-in-law is always complaining,” or “that child is constantly crying.” These are not good things, but they do use the right tense!

**Past Continuous**

This tense is used to describe a continuous action that got interrupted. If you got a phone call late at night, you could say “I was sleeping last night when I got the call.”

You can also use this tense to say what you were doing at a specific time in the past. For example: “I was already writing at 6 in the morning,” or “yesterday in the evening I was eating dinner.”

**Looking to the Future**

The future is anything that hasn’t happened yet. It can be a few seconds from now or a few years from now.

**Simple Future**

Speaking about the future is pretty simple: just add the words “will” or “is going to” before an unchanged verb.

How do you know when to use “will” and when to use “is going to”?

Don’t worry about it too much—you can usually use either one! You can say “I will call you later,” or “I am going to call you later.” They are both correct.

The slight difference is in the meaning: “going to” is used more often for things that are planned. So in the above example, the first sentence is more offhand (without giving it too much thought), but the second sentence sounds like you will make sure to call later.

The difference is subtle (not too big) and you can get away with using either one. Just remember that “will” is used more often for promises and things you do by choice, and “going to” is used for making plans.

Both can be used for predictions too, or things you think will happen. You can say “the world will end in ten years,” and you can also say “the world is going to end in ten years.” Either way is correct—but hopefully the prediction is wrong!

**Future Continuous**

This last way to talk about the future has the same uses as the past continuous.

You use this tense to talk about things that might be interrupted in the future, or to say what will be happening at a specific time in the future.

**Just add the -ing form of a verb after the words “will be” or “am going to be.”**

If you know your friend is coming to visit you tomorrow, for example, you could tell her to come before 7 because “we will be eating dinner at 7.” You can also tell her: “I will be waiting for you at the train station.