

Tenses

Simple vs Continuous

In English all tenses have a continuous so we can compare the two forms: **Simple – Continuous**.

The basic idea is that the **Simple** indicates a “**short**” action or “**shorter**” compared to the continuous that indicates a “**long**” action, or “**longer**” than the **Simple**.

The **Continuous** indicates a “**long**” or “**repeated**” action; there are 3 rules.

- 1) Two actions: normally 1 long and 1 short; but also 2 long or 2 short.**
- 2) With time: the action begins before, finishes after.**
- 3) 1 period, 1 action; the action “fills” the period**

All **continuous** tenses can use all three rules except:

Present Continuous – can only be used with **Rule 2**, the time is “now”.

Future Perfect Continuous – can only be used with **Rule 3**, the period is given with the tense.

Examples:

- **While I am working tomorrow, call the doctor**
(Two Futures rule and Imperative=Future)
- **I was working yesterday and my friend was reading a book**
- **John coughed; Mary sneezed**
- **I saw an eclipse when I was staying in London**

- **This time last year I was living in Rome**
- **At 2pm we will be having lunch**
- **The wind is blowing (now)**
- **When I arrived he was sleeping**

- **I will be working all tomorrow morning**
- **They had been living in France for 12 years before they came here**
- **I have been studying for 2 hours**
- **She has been waiting since 9am**

She has been wearing the same dress for 3 years

(not a continuous “24h” action, but repeated regularly over time; we do not know how many times and the individual durations)

When he wakes up he will have been sleeping for a long time

(a continuous action; no time given but the indication is more than normal for the time – night, morning)

I live here

(Present Tense; here indicating “habit”, I normally live here, it is my home, I consider it a permanent condition)

I am living here

(Rule 2 – Now – temporary, this is not my “normal” home: should I continue to live here, and my idea about permanence changes, I can then say “I live here”)

It has rained

(Present Perfect; from when it was not raining to now – or just finished – there was rain – probably not too much)

It has been raining

(Present Perfect Continuous; from when it was not raining to now – or just finished – there was rain – probably a lot, could be continuous or a shorter storm, but enough to leave strong visible signs, puddles)

Tomorrow I will work

(Future; indicating that the “work” tomorrow is, probably, normal and not filling all the day)

Tomorrow I will be working

(Future Continuous; indicating that the “work” tomorrow is, probably, normal and could fill all the day, or, at least, is considered to be “long”)