3

Be, *Have*, and the Present Tenses

3.1 The verb *be*

Be is the most irregular — and most important — verb in English.

	Present	Past	Contractions
I	am	was	I'm, I'm not
you / we / they	are	were	you're, they aren't
he / she / it	is	was	she's, it isn't

Be makes questions and negatives *without do*:

- Statement: *She is tired.*
- Negative: *She is not (isn't) tired.*
- Question: *Is she tired?* — *Yes, she is. / No, she isn't.*

Common Error

- ✗ *She is agree with you.* → ✓ *She agrees with you.* (*agree* is a verb, not an adjective)
- ✗ *I am boring in this class.* → ✓ *I am bored in this class.* (*-ed* = how you feel; *-ing* = what causes the feeling: *the class is boring*)
- ✗ *He has 25 years.* → ✓ *He is 25 (years old).* (age uses *be*, not *have*)
- ✗ *They are cold the soups.* There is / there are: ✓ *There are two soups on the menu.* Use *there is/are* to say that something exists.

3.2 *There is / there are*

Use *there* + *be* to introduce the existence of something: ***There is*** *a problem.* ***There are*** *three emails for you.* ***Is there*** *any coffee?* ***There isn't*** *any time.* The verb agrees with the noun that follows: *there* ***is*** *a chair, there* ***are*** *chairs.*

3.3 *Have* and *have got*

Have expresses possession, relationships, and characteristics: *I have two brothers. She has blue eyes. We have a meeting at ten.*

Usage Note

British English often uses *have got* in speech: *I've got two brothers. Have you got a minute?* American English prefers plain *have* with *do*-support: *Do you have a minute? I don't have time.* Both are correct; *have got* is informal and has no infinitive or progressive forms.

3.4 The present simple

3.4.1 Form

Base verb for all persons, with *-s* in the third person singular:

Statement	Negative	Question
I/you/we/they *work*	*don't work*	*Do you work?*
he/she/it *works*	*doesn't work*	*Does she work?*

Spelling of the *-s* form follows the plural rules of Chapter 1: *watch* → *watches*, *study* → *studies*, *go* → *goes*, *have* → *has*.

3.4.2 Uses

1. **Habits and routines:** *I **get up** at six. She **plays** tennis on Fridays.* Often with adverbs of frequency: *always, usually, often, sometimes, rarely, never* (placed before the main verb but after *be*: *He **is always** late; he **always arrives** at 9:15*).
2. **General truths:** *Water **boils** at 100 °C. The Earth **orbits** the Sun.*
3. **Permanent situations:** *She **lives** in Madrid. He **works** for a bank.*
4. **Timetables and schedules (future):** *The train **leaves** at 8:40 tomorrow.*
5. **Narration, commentary, headlines:** *Messi **passes** to Suárez… / Government **announces** new policy.*

Common Error

The third-person *-s* is the most frequently dropped ending in learner English. Check every present-simple verb with a he/she/it subject: ✗ *She work in London and go home at five.* → ✓ *She works in London and goes home at five.* Also, do not double-mark questions and negatives: ✗ *Does she works here?* → ✓ *Does she work here?* ✗ *He doesn't likes fish.* → ✓ *He doesn't like fish.*

3.5 The present progressive (continuous)

3.5.1 Form

am / is / are + verb-*ing*: *I am working, she is working, they are working.* Spelling: *make* → *making* (drop silent *-e*); *run* → *running*, *sit* → *sitting* (double a final single consonant after a stressed short vowel); *lie* → *lying*.

3.5.2 Uses

1. **Actions happening now:** *Be quiet — the baby **is sleeping**.*
2. **Temporary situations:** *She usually works in Paris, but this month she **is working** in Rome.*
3. **Changing and developing situations:** *Prices **are rising**. Your English **is getting** better.*
4. **Fixed personal arrangements (future):** *We **are meeting** the clients on Tuesday.*
5. **With *always*, for irritating habits:** *He **is always losing** his keys!*

3.6 Present simple vs. present progressive

Present simple	Present progressive
permanent, repeated, general	temporary, in progress, changing
She teaches French. (her job)	*She is teaching French this term.* (temporary)
I live in Seoul. (home)	*I'm living with friends until I find a flat.*
What do you do? (= your job)	*What are you doing?* (= right now)

3.6.1 Stative verbs

Verbs describing states rather than actions are not normally used in the progressive:

- Thinking and knowing: *know, believe, understand, remember, mean, doubt*
- Emotions: *love, hate, like, prefer, want, need*
- Senses and appearance: *see, hear, seem, appear, look (= seem), sound*
- Possession and relations: *have (= own), own, belong, contain, consist, depend*

✗ *I am knowing the answer.* → ✓ *I know the answer.*
✗ *She is wanting a coffee.* → ✓ *She wants a coffee.*

Usage Note

Many of these verbs have an *active* sense that does allow the progressive: *I **think** you're right* (opinion — state) vs. *I'**m thinking** about the offer* (mental activity); *She **has** a car* (possession) vs. *She'**s having** lunch* (activity); *The soup **tastes** good* vs. *The chef **is tasting** the soup.* Advertising has also normalized *I'm loving it*-type usage in very informal registers.

3.7 The imperative

Use the base verb, with no subject, for instructions, invitations, and warnings: ***Sit** down.* ***Take** the second left.* ***Have** a biscuit.* ***Don't touch** that!* Soften commands with *please* or question forms (*Could you…?*).

Exercises

Exercise 3.1 Present simple or progressive?

Put the verb into the correct present form.

1. Water _____ (freeze) at 0 °C.
2. Don't call now — they _____ (have) dinner.
3. She normally _____ (drive) to work, but this week she _____ (cycle).
4. I _____ (not/understand) this exercise.
5. Look! It _____ (snow).
6. The 7:15 train _____ (arrive) at platform 3 tomorrow.

Exercise 3.2 Make questions and negatives

Rewrite as indicated.

1. She speaks Portuguese. (question)
2. They are ready. (negative)
3. He has got a driving licence. (question, BrE)
4. The children like broccoli. (negative)
5. There are some messages for me. (question)

Exercise 3.3 Error correction

Correct one error in each sentence.

1. He don't work on Saturdays.
2. I'm not believing this story.
3. She have two children.
4. Does he plays the piano?
5. I am agree with the proposal.
6. Always she drinks tea in the morning.