

English Grammar: Crucial Rules for Tenses

Part 1: The 7 Golden Rules for Spotting Errors

Rule 1: The "Since" vs. "For" Rule

- Use **Since** for a specific starting point in time (e.g., *since Monday, since 2019, since morning, since birth*).
- Use **For** for a duration or length of time (e.g., *for two hours, for five years, for a long time*).

Rule 2: The Stative Verbs Rule

Verbs that describe a state of mind, emotion, or possession are generally **not** used in continuous (-ing) forms. Examples: *know, understand, love, hate, believe, belong, possess*.

- **Incorrect:** I am knowing the answer.
- **Correct:** I **know** the answer.

Rule 3: The "Past Perfect" Sequence Rule

When two actions occur in the past, the earlier action takes the **Past Perfect** (*had* + V3) and the later action takes the **Simple Past** (V2).

Example: The patient **had recovered** (1st action) before he **was** (2nd action) discharged.

Rule 4: Type 1 Conditional Sentences Rule

In "if" clauses referring to the future, the condition part uses the **Simple Present**, and the main result part uses the **Simple Future**.

- **Incorrect:** If you will study hard, you will pass.
- **Correct:** If you **study** hard, you **will pass**.

Rule 5: The "It is high time" Rule

Whenever a sentence starts with "It is time" or "It is high time" and is followed by a subject, you **must** use the **Simple Past (V2)** tense.

- **Incorrect:** It is high time we start studying.
- **Correct:** It is high time we **started** studying.

Rule 6: The "Do / Does / Did" Trap

The helping verbs *do*, *does*, and *did* are **always** followed by the base form of the verb (V1). Never use a past tense verb after "did".

- **Incorrect:** Did the patient took his medicine?
- **Correct:** Did the patient **take** his medicine?

Rule 7: The Double Future Rule

A single sentence cannot have two future tenses (will/shall). The dependent clause starting with words like *if*, *when*, *unless*, *until*, *as soon as*, *before*, *after* must be in the **Simple Present** tense.

- **Incorrect:** As soon as the doctor will arrive, we will start.
- **Correct:** As soon as the doctor **arrives**, we **will start**.

Part 2: Keyword Rules for Identifying Tenses

If you are faced with a "Fill in the Blanks" question and do not know which tense to use, look for these specific time markers in the sentence.

Rules for Identifying Present Tenses

- **Simple Present:** Look for routine words: *Always, usually, often, daily, every day, seldom, rarely, generally, frequently.*
- **Present Continuous:** Look for "right now" words: *Now, right now, at present, at the moment, currently, nowadays.*
- **Present Perfect:** Look for words connecting past to present: *Just, already, yet, recently, lately, so far, ever, up to now.* (Note: "Yet" is mostly used in negative sentences or questions).

Rules for Identifying Past Tenses

- **Simple Past:** Look for finished time periods: *Yesterday, ago, last (night/ week/month/year), the other day, or a specific past year (e.g., in 2020).*
- **Past Continuous:** Look for interruption words connecting a long action and a short action: *While, when.*

Rules for Identifying Future Tenses

- **Simple Future:** Look for basic future markers: *Tomorrow, next (week/ month/year), soon, shortly.*
- **Future Perfect:** Look for the preposition "**By**" combined with a future time (meaning an action will be finished *before* that time): *By tomorrow, by next week, by 2027, by the end of this month.*