

# grammar in the classroom

What follows is a basic guide to grammar with some ideas on how it can be used in the classroom. The points are presented roughly in the order in which students normally learn and (hopefully) master them, although there is inevitably some skipping around.

## basic terms

These are the most of the elementary units of a sentence. A few other terms are introduced later. The footnotes go into a little more technical (but, practically speaking, unnecessary) detail.

**Noun** (ሰብዓዊ ቃላት) – a ‘thing’ word. Nouns can be split into two basic groups, **abstract nouns** (*beauty, intelligence, boredom* – things you can’t touch, see, hear, taste or smell) and **concrete nouns** (*chair, salt, wind* – things you can). Abstract nouns are usually, and understandably, more difficult for students to recognise as nouns.

**Pronoun** (ደብዳቤ ቃላት) – a word that ‘stands for’ a noun. *I, you, he, she, it, we* and *they*. **They are funny**. Here **they** might stand for the nouns *Burt and his animals*<sup>i</sup>.

**Verb** (ሰራዊት ቃላት) – an ‘action’ word. There are basically two kinds of verbs, **normal verbs**, *come, go, take, eat, buy, fight, involve, interrupt* etc. And there **helping verbs**<sup>ii</sup> (ጠቃሚ ቃላት). These are words like *should, would, will, do, is, am, might* and *must*. These are used to give information about other verbs. Helping verbs are few in number (about fifteen), but extremely common and fundamental to how English works.

In addition verbs take certain forms depending on their function in a sentence.

- The **past** (ጠቃሚ ቃላት ስራዊት) – *ate, saw, cleaned, was* etc.
- The **past participle** (ጠቃሚ ቃላት ስራዊት) – *eaten, seen, cleaned, been* etc. These words are used with *have* or *had* to produce perfect tenses. More on that later.
- The **-ing form** (ጠቃሚ ቃላት ስራዊት) – any verb that ends in *ing*<sup>iii</sup> – *eating, seeing, cleaning, being* etc.
- The **bare infinitive** (ጠቃሚ ቃላት ስራዊት) – the ‘bare’ ‘dictionary entry’ form of the verb – *eat, see, clean, be*, etc.
- The **to infinitive** – the ‘bare’ ‘dictionary entry’ form of the verb, with the word ‘to’ in front of it – *to eat, to see, to clean, to be*, etc.

**Adjective** (ጠቃሚ ቃላት) – a ‘thing describing’ word (*tall, beautiful, red, contumacious*). Adjectives are usually found either before nouns (*I like beautiful fingers*) or after verbs<sup>iv</sup> (*that is beautiful*).

**Adverb** (ጠቃሚ ቃላት) – an ‘action describing’ word (*actually, beautifully, well, almost*). Adverbs are usually found after verbs and they usually end in *-ly* (*He talks beautifully*), but some adverbs, **adverbs of frequency** (*often, never, sometimes, always*, etc), are usually found before verbs (*she never does that any more*). Adverbs are also used to describe adjectives (**actually red, beautifully contumacious**) or to describe one’s opinion about a sentence (**strangely, he never asked me a question**). Basically, if you don’t know what a word is, it’s probably an adverb.

**Preposition** (ጠቃሚ ቃላት) – a ‘relationship’ or ‘link’ word (*to, over, under, through*). Prepositions are most often used to describe the movement, time and position of nouns (**across the field, through the week, in my mouth**). They have other uses, most confusingly for students of English, in phrasal verbs – two or three word verbs like *get up, take over, run out of*, etc.

**Subject and object** – the **subject** of the phrase is who or what is doing the thing being done and the **object** is the thing it’s being done to. In *the dog bit the man*, the dog is the subject and the man is the object. In the “passive” phrase *the man was bitten by the dog*, although the grammar has changed the sentence around, the subjects and objects are the same.

It’s quite important that students at least know whether a word is a verb, a noun or an adjective. You can explain, with examples, the difference and ask students to identify words. One way to test this is to get

students to stand up in rows (each row is a team), you say a word and each person at the front of the row has to say whether it's a verb, adjective or noun<sup>v</sup>. If they get it wrong, they stay standing (and remain at the front of the row to be asked the next question), if they get it right, they can sit down and the person behind them has to answer the next question. The first team to all be seated wins. Give some words in pairs that highlight the difference between the classes of word, for example "*chair* and *sit*" or "*blue* and *sky*." (This game can be adapted for all kinds of "spot quizzes")

## Basic Grammar Guide

### to be (present simple)

Positive	<i>I am, you are, he/she/it is, we are, they are</i>
Negative	<i>I am not, you aren't, he/she/it isn't, we aren't, they aren't</i>
Question	<i>am I? are you? is he/she/it? are we? are they?</i>

For obvious reasons 'to be' is pretty much the first 'item of grammar' a student of English learns. The formula is;

(noun) subject + **to be** + (noun or adjective) object.

*I **am** a man.*

*I **am** happy.*

Or a combination.

*I **am** a happy man!*

The negative is formed by adding *not* or a contraction (*n't*). And a question is formed by changing the subject with the verb; *I am happy* becomes *Am I happy?*

There are lots of activities you can use to present, test or simply use this information. From flash cards (*Is he Matsui? Yes, he is Matsui*) to locating places on a map (*Where is Canterbury? It is in England*) to bingo to basic self introductions.

### demonstrative pronouns

*this/that/these/those*

The point to get across here is that *these* and *those* are used for plurals and *that* and *those* are used for things far from the speaker. Simply translating into Japanese should clear it up, but it's a good idea to use some activities that test whether beginner students recall these (rather similar sounding) words.

Teaching and using these words goes hand in hand with the present simple. How to use them in class should be fairly straightforward: Role plays in shops and restaurants (*What is this? That is a hamburger*, etc), spot quizzes where you ask students what things are, and games where students have to guess what *this* is or isn't (for example pictorial – each round preceded by "What is this?" or "What are these?" with the answer "That/those is/are...").

### subject pronouns

*I, you, he/she/it, we, they*

You might like to do a quick exercise to match up nouns with the pronouns that replace them. Students often use *he*, when they mean *it*, or *it* when they mean *they*, so perhaps an exercise that presents phrases like *Peter and Joe are my friends*, or *The car isn't here*, and which the students have to match up with the pronoun (i.e. *they* and *it*). They can choose cards, or race around the room looking for words to replace them, or you could just write up a quick exercise on the board.

### basic nouns and basic adjectives

Again, used in concert with *to be*. I've touched on how I approach teaching vocabulary at the end of this guide, but adjectives lend themselves very well to fun activities. You can use them to describe pictures of cities, or people. You can split them up into opposites and get students to match them up. You can do true / false type betting games with various **to be/adjective** statements; *Tom Cruise is British*, *Tom Cruise is handsome*, *Tom Cruise is tall*, etc. There is also, of course, a near infinite way of teaching and practicing nouns, at any level, from crosswords to spot the difference, to memorise all the objects on the board and then remove a couple (a personal favourite of mine, also known as "Kim's game") down to the humble gap fill, where students match the words with the pictures (usually so they can then go on and do another activity that uses those words).

## Present Simple of normal verbs

The first nightmare of English language study.

Positive	<i>I eat, you eat, he/she/it eats, we eat, they eat</i>
Negative	<i>I don't eat, you don't eat, he/she/it doesn't eat, we don't eat, they don't eat</i>
Question	<i>Do I eat? do you eat? does he/she/it eat? do we eat? do they eat?</i>

The present simple is used for habitual actions (I read the paper in the morning) and general truths (Frogs eat flies)<sup>v</sup>.

First of all, if students are unsure of how to form or recognise the positive, the negative and the question form of this (or any other) tense, make sure you present them separately; lumping them all together is confusing. Secondly note that the third person<sup>vi</sup> is irregular, using s. If students master the fact that you say *he eats*, they are likely to then go on and say *he doesn't eats*. To this my standard response is "only one s!" And then point to the s in *does* (or *doesn't*).

Another source of confusion is when to use *is/am/are* and when to use *do/does* in questions. You may hear questions like *Is he drink Coke?* or, less likely, *Does he English?* It's at this point you hope that everyone knows what a verb, a noun and an adjective are, because you can simply point out (and spot test) that *do/does* are for **verbs** – *Does he drink Coke?* And *is/am/are* are for nouns and **adjectives** – *Is he English?*

It is a good idea, every now and then, to hit 'em with a quick round of questions along the lines of, "I give the positive, you give the negative". You give each student a simple phrase, "*I like chips*" and they have to give the negative, "*I don't like chips*." Throw in the verb to be (*She is my sister, she isn't my sister*) so that students can compare the two ways of forming negatives. You could turn this into a game (grammar poker, or the standing-until-correct game outlined in "terms"), or, as I do, fill up a slack five minutes by putting on the Hawaii-5-0 theme and marching round the room firing strident military-style orders.

As far as practicing question formation goes, the possibilities are practically endless. A favourite of mine is to ask the students ten questions, get them to write down the answers (answers only), and then, when I've finished, get them to remember the questions. Forming questions based on reading and listening texts is also standard. See "all time favourites" at the end for a great translation game.

There are also many ways of practicing and using the present simple as a whole. Daily routines, facts about the world, questions about each other, about celebrities, about countries, about you. I've found that students like to lie and invent things, so getting them to pretend to be someone else, or lying about their daily routines can be very productive.

It's a good idea to get students to do a bit of conjugation. They write down their daily routine using I, then give it to a partner who writes it down using he or she (with s!)

### possessive adjectives

*my, your, his/her/its, our, their*

This is the usual place to introduce vocabulary for family. Getting students to draw family trees and writing sentences about their family can work well. If students are reticent about talking about their family, you can give them famous families to write about (the Simpsons is a classic of course, s azae-san I believe has a well-known family here in Japan), or get them to invent (and draw) a fictional family.

### prepositions of place

*in, under, over, next to, opposite, in front of, behind, on, etc*

You could also combine these with north, south, east and west, and do some activities using maps (finding and describing countries, etc). These words lend themselves to shop-type role plays (describing where a shop is, finding things in a shop, etc) and finding-things-in-a-town activities. Note that these prepositions are no good for activities requiring giving directions; for those you'll need prepositions of movement.

## there is / there are

*There is* and *there are* (or existentials as I believe they are known), describe the fact that something exists. Getting students to describe a picture of a cluttered room or street is standard practice. Also, used in conjunction with prepositions of place, "room dictation", where you "dictate" an imaginary room to the class who draw it (then students do the same, dictating to each other).

By now students have probably come across *there are*, *they are*, *there*, and *their*. You might like to do a quick quiz to help them sort this mess out.

## basic word order

It is quite important for students (of Japanese especially, whose language uses a very different word order) to practice assembling sentences from their constituent parts. The basic way to test word order is to cut up sentences and get students to rearrange them. Problems usually occur with questions. Here is a basic chart

do/does	1. Question word/phrase	2. Helping verb	3. Noun/pronoun	4. Main verb
	What	do	you	want?
	How many apples	does	she	eat?
is/am/are	Where	do	Jane and John	live?
	1. Question word/phrase	2. Helping verb	3. Noun/pronoun	4. Noun/adjective
	What	is	that?	
	Why	are	Europeans	tall?
	What time	is	lunch?	

A table like this is probably a bit confusing (and dull) for students, so the basic rules ...

- Question word + helping verb<sup>viii</sup>
- Do/does/did for verbs, is/am/are for nouns and adjectives

...normally gets the point across.

The standard way to help students get word order right, once, perhaps, you've outlined the rules, is to give them cut up sentences to rearrange. This can be done as a race, giving groups envelopes full of words.

## adverbs of frequency

*always, often, usually, sometimes, rarely, never*

The point here is where they go in a sentence. Strictly speaking **adverbs of frequency** go before a **normal verb** or after a **helping verb** (*I never eat insects, I would never eat an insect*). But this information is not essential for students encountering or using these words for the first time. The basic point is explaining what "how often" means, and then, one way or another, getting a variety of responses.

Practice of adverbs of frequency goes hand in hand with the present simple. Role plays, where everyone is given (or creates) a character with various habits, and then is interviewed, are standard. But simply giving out interesting questions that the students ask each other (How often do you shave? How often do you go to Tokyo?) works too.

Also, if you are touching on adverbs of frequency, this is an appropriate place to revise or mention time expressions like *once a week, twice an hour, on Thursdays, at the weekend*<sup>ix</sup> etc, which, unlike adverbs of frequency, go at the end of the sentence.

## present continuous

Now things get more complex. We have said that **is/am/are** are only for nouns and adjectives, but now it turns out they are also used for **-ing** verbs. I **am going**. She **is talking**. The negatives and questions are formed the same as they are for the basic **to be** verb, but expect to get sentences such as "she does eating".

The present continuous is used to express things that are happening right now. It should be contracted with the present simple, *I go to the beach* (every weekend) and *I am going to the beach* (right now).

You can use the present continuous in mime games (what am I doing?), and to describe pictures (what is happening here?). Spot the difference works with the present continuous; students each have a picture with lots of action, identical but for a few changes, and they have to describe what is going on in order to find the differences. Or picture dictation, where students describe a picture they are looking at (again with plenty of action), and then everyone compares it to the original.

### **can**

The word *can* gets complicated later, as the future and conditional forms have to be made with "is able to". For now it is the first helping verb the student has encountered since *to be*. As such the positive negative and question forms need to be revised to avoid falling into traps like "*Do you can play the piano?*"

The standard EFL exercise for *can* is "Find someone who?" Students have a sheet with pictures of activities (like skiing, swimming, etc) and blank spaces next to them. They go round asking people "*Can you...?*" (*ski, swim, etc*). If they get a positive response, they write the student's name down. "Find someone who" can be adapted for a variety of purposes.

### **quantifiers**

*much, many, lots of, some and any*

The basic rules here are as follows

*Much* is used for uncountable nouns.

*I don't have much money*

*Many* is used for countable nouns.

*How many wives do you have?*

*Lots of* is used instead of *much* and *many* for positive sentences

*I have lots of hair* (not *I have much hair*).

*Some*<sup>x</sup> is used for positive sentences

*I need some love.*

*Any* is used for negative sentences and questions.

*I don't have any problems.*

It all looks a bit complex but like that. It might be best to present this information piecemeal and rather indirectly. The classic topic with which to do so is food<sup>x</sup>, and food, as a topic, is pretty much inexhaustible.

Countable nouns are things that can be counted, like *cars, tables, and loaves of bread* and uncountable nouns are things that can't, like *petrol (gasoline), wood, and bread*. We say, "*How many tables?*" but "*How much wood?*"

A fun way to present or practice this is "How much/many X is in your fridge?" First students ask you (and then each other) about the contents of your larder. You can rope *some* and *any* into this, or into a role play or game involving food.

Higher levels will start to get involved with *a few* (countables), and *a little* (uncountables), and *anywhere, somewhere, anyone, someone* etc (which basically operate on the same principles as *some* and *any*).

### **object pronouns**

*me, you, him/her/it, us, them*

When presenting or clarifying this information it's probably best to put the sentences in groups of words, so that students can see what the subject, verb and object is in each phrase. It's also a good idea to use similar phrases, so students can see the difference between *he* and *him* etc

James is weak

He is James

I love her

She loves me

### **past simple**

English verbs are either regular or irregular. Regular verbs end in **-ed** in the past and in the past participle. We say *I watch television, I watch**ed** television* and *I have watch**ed** television*. Easy. Most students of English who get off the starting blocks will have encountered the list of irregular verbs

(attached as Appendix One) that do not follow this simple scheme. These include verbs such as drink (drank), see (saw), put (put) and so on. Irregular verbs are all the most commonly used, so they have to be learnt.

As far as learning them goes, straight memory tests work fine, and are not quite as dreary, I find, as it would seem. Spelling tests, while we're at it, I've always found more popular than I ever would have expected. So every now and then just have a ten question test, you give the present, students write down the past.

As far as using the past simple goes, possibilities are many and varied. Giving students questions to ask each other about their last holiday, about when they were children or about anything in the past is one idea. Short texts on the history of your country or on famous people is quite obvious. Again, as with present simple, activities that require the students to lie and to guess if each other is lying tend to work pretty well.

Needless to say, the past simple is formed just as the present simple is, but with the past simple for m replacing the present simple form, and *did* replacing *do/does*. And just as with the present simple *He doesn't like football*, look out for *He didn't eat his dinner*. The rule to tattoo to your student's forehead is – "if do/does is in the past, the main verb isn't in the past".

### like / would like

Just make students aware, should these expressions crop up together, that two very similar expressions mean very different things. *I like to go fishing*, and *I'd like to go fishing* are not the same.

### comparatives and superlatives

The rules here are quite straightforward, but a frustratingly exception ridden. Basically for comparatives the rules are;

For adjectives with one syllable (*big, long, short, etc*)

noun + **to be** + **adjective+er** + than + noun

*David is bigger than Dick*

For adjectives with two or more syllables (*handsome, interesting, beautiful, etc*)

noun + **to be** + **more adjective** + than + noun

*David is more handsome than Dick*

For adjectives with two syllables that end in y (*silly, ugly, dirty, etc*)

noun + **to be** + **adjective+ier** + than + noun

*Dick is happier than David*

Note the spelling changes with big and bigger (the same spelling changes affect the formation of +ing verbs, the rule being that when adding er, est, or ing to a word that ends with **vowel+consonant**, you **double the consonant**, *run, running, etc*).

The rules for superlatives are exactly the same, but instead of +er, it is +est, and instead of *more*, it is *most*

There are three irregular adjectives, *good* (the comparative form being *better* and the superlative form being *best*), *bad* (*worse* and *worst*) and, for some reason *far* (*farther* or *further* and *farthest* or *furthest* – probably better not to burden students with this oddity).

Basically, as you know, comparatives compare two or more things, and superlatives tell you that one thing surpasses all the others.

The opportunities for using and revising comparatives and superlatives are enormous. Comparing class members, cities, countries, you name it. Getting the students to line up with the oldest at one end and the youngest at the other, asking the question "My birthday is x; are you older than me?" is common, as is a range of questions about one's life experiences (*what is the strangest meal you have ever eaten?* Etc).

You might want to separate the teaching or use of comparatives and superlatives, because like any other language points that are too similar, it's best not to introduce them together.

## plurals

The basic rules are as follows

Add s to make a plural noun (*chair = chairs*), BUT  
Any s like sound (x, sh, ss, tch), add es (*box = boxes*)  
Any word that ends in o, add es (*potato = potatoes*)  
Any word that ends in y, remove the y and add ies (*city = cities*)  
(exception; words that end in **vowel +consonant**, like *boy*)

And then there are a raft of irregular nouns like;

sheep/sheep  
man/men  
tooth/teeth  
foot/feet  
mouse/mice  
child/children

etc

## prepositions of movement

*Through, across, around, past, over, etc*

The perfect place to teach directions and role play getting lost and finding one's way around Covent Garden or some such.

## present perfect (for experience)

First just introduce the present perfect in terms of "Have you ever...?" "Yes I have..." "No, I have never..." (you can combine this effectively with the superlative to, (very) hopefully, illicit sentences like *The biggest egg I have ever seen was laid by an Emu*). The point to get across is that we have this verb form that is used to describe experience, "what you have done in your whole life". The formula is;

**have/haven't + past participle**

Questions are formed, as with other helping verbs, by changing the order of the subject and the helping verb – **he has seen** a blue cow = **has he seen** a blue cow?.

Theoretically the table of irregular verb forms is complete, in that students should know what it is there for. The game now is to get them to remember it, as rote (being able to say, off the bat *see, saw, seen* and *take, took, taken* – in much the same way as I was forced to remember *je suis, tu es, il a*, etc in French classes), and, ultimately, in context. Tests and gap-fills and wotnot are used to drill the forms by rote, and exercises and games to hear and use it in context.

If you want to be nightmare teacher from hell, you can do a role play based on a job interview. Using simple questions to ask about student's experience is fine though. A possible true/false game is students in teams write out a list of questions starting with *have you ever ... ?* and then ask consecutive members of other teams to either lie or tell the truth (placing a card face down that says "lie" or "truth" on it, so they don't change their answer), the object being for the first team to guess one way or the other, winning a point if the card reveals they are correct. To avoid students writing out boring or stupid questions (*have you ever watched television?*), you can include some of your own.

## going to

The rule is going to + bare infinitive

*Going to* is used to talk about things that you plan to do in the future. The present continuous is also used in this sense,<sup>xii</sup> but, as I say, one grammar item at a time is best. Role plays and exercises involving making plans are the natural place to encounter and revise *going to*.

## infinitives of purpose

We use the **to infinitive** to talk about our reasons for doing something. I am going to London **to buy** a dress. This goes well with *going to*.

## should

Should is a helping verb that expresses advice. The standard EFL routine is to read some kind of problems page, and then to give students a load of problems that other students solve. I usually find this quite good fun, having students lamenting that they are terrified of vegetables and so forth.

## present perfect (vs past simple)

It's about time to launch into something students will most likely never fully grasp about English, but that they should definitely know how to use. This is the present perfect, and, more precisely, how it differs from the past simple. This is my basic Anglo-centric guide (Americans use the present perfect less than Brits, saying things, I believe, like *Did you pick up my pastrami on rye yet?*)

Past Simple	Present Perfect
Used with times and dates <i>I saw her yesterday</i> <i>I went home at 5</i>	Used to express experience, when the time is not important <i>I have lived in six countries</i> <i>I have seen a man cry</i>
Used when relating a story, where linear time is important <i>I walked into the bar, I saw her, I dropped dead.</i>	Used when the result <i>now</i> is important <i>I have lost my keys</i> (and I can't get into my house <i>now</i> ) <i>She has gone to bed</i> (and isn't up <i>now</i> )
Used with the following words; <i>ago, when, during</i>	Used with the following words; <i>Since, for, yet, already</i>

*Ago* is used for a point in time that is completely over, unrelated to the present. *Since* is used for the start time of a situation or activity that is ongoing, and *for* is used for the length of time of a situation or activity that is ongoing. I usually explain the difference by using hand gestures that, alas, cannot be put into words.

I have never managed to successfully explain what the words *yet* and *already* mean without translating them. If you can sum it up in a couple of easy to understand lines, then please let me know.

Practicing and using the present perfect in a nicely parcelled situation or activity is difficult. It can only really be slipped into a role play I find. Or, for fun, tested with grammar poker (see below). Other than that it's gap-fills and rote learning, so perhaps best avoided, at least head on, by JETs.

## have / gave got

This is a bit of pedantic nightmare. Personally I always use, with lower level students, "have" and "don't have," because, although British speakers of English don't use such bizarre expressions, it fits with the rules I have taught them. If "I've got" or "I haven't got" crops up I tell them that I'll explain that later and then usually forget about it.

But you could explain the difference if you want to drill the life out of them for an hour or two. In fact there is pretty much no difference worth teaching. *Have* is more common in US English while *have got* is more common in the UK (and is not used for actions; we don't say *I have got breakfast every day at 8*).

## -ed adjective and -ing adjectives

You might hear students say "*I am boring*" and you might well smugly chuckle to yourself and say, "yes *I know*," before realising that nobody gets the joke but you, sighing, and then somehow pointing out that -ed adjectives are used for feeling and -ing adjectives are used for making other people feel. So, for example, a film can never be *interested* because a film can't feel anything, it can only make people feel things.

Other common words like this, apart from *bored / boring* and *interested / interesting* are *annoyed / annoying*, *excited / exciting*, and *depressed / depressing*.

## will (vs going to)

*Will* differs from *going to* in that it expresses something you decide to do at that moment ("oh, the phone is ringing, I'll get it) rather than something you've planned ("I'm going to the pictures tonight").

*Will* is also used for predictions that have not much evidence to support them (both of “the weatherman” and “the gypsy” variety) and *going to* is used for predictions based on something that is happening now (that book (which is now teetering on the edge) is going to fall).

The appropriate context to present, test or use all of this is probably a weather report of some kind, although for predictions you could use a going to a palm-readers activity. I often combine *will/w* with a lesson based on Astrology, in which can be roped lots of adjectives to describe character and appearance as well as vocabulary relating to jobs, family and so forth.

### modals of obligation

*Must / Have to (vs should)*

Note that the opposite of *have to* is not *don't have to*, but *mustn't*. I normally put something like this up on the board and then ask a load of questions about air travel (*True or False, You don't have to wear a seat-belt when taking off?*).

	Positive	Negative
Choice	can	don't have to
No choice	must/have to	mustn't

There are lots of activities you can do using these helping verbs (note that they are helping verbs and don't form questions or negatives with *do/does/did*). My favourite is to get students to rewrite the school rules, but anything based on rules is apt. You could combine it with sagely advice about the future, *if you want to succeed you have to...*

Not worth getting into the slight difference between *must* and *have to*<sup>xiii</sup>.

### possessive pronouns

Mine, yours, hers, his, its, ours, theirs

Probably around now they can handle these words and not get too confused with object and subject pronouns and possessive adjectives (*I, me, my, mine*).

### used to

*used to* +bare infinitive is used to talk about habitual activities in the past. As such it is kind of the natural past tense for the present tense, as it were, in that when we say *I play football* we are talking about something we do regularly or habitually. If we want to talk about something we did regularly or habitually in the past we say *I used to play football*<sup>iv</sup>.

Naturally this crops up when talking about the distant past. *When I was a child I used to drink Coca Cola, now I drink fine single malt whiskeys.*

### verb forms

Verbs which go with other verbs have a set of rather arbitrary rules governing them. A short list follows

Verbs which are followed by the to infinitive	Verbs which are followed by the -ing form	Verbs which are followed by the bare infinitive
want manage choose deny decide	continue enjoy regret believe in go (for activities)	let make

This is an abridged list. Some verbs, like *like* and *love* can be followed by the to infinitive or the -ing form. Some verbs change their meaning depending on whether they are followed by the to infinitive or -ing form (for example *try, stop, and remember*) but all this comes later.

We also know that *to be* is followed by the +ing form in continuous sentences and all *helping verbs* are followed by the *bare infinitive*.

All of this is 'pure grammar' and is hard to teach in any other way than to stupefy your students with a hideous grammarama.

## past continuous

The past continuous is *was* or *were* followed by the +ing form. It is basically the present continuous in the past. Make sure students know that they probably want to say

*I was eating my meal when the waiter dropped a plate*

And not;

*The waiter was dropping plates when I ate my meal.*

This form is useful to know when telling a story, and if students have got somewhere close to grasping this and the past simple, it's a good time to tell them and to get them to tell a simple story, perhaps with pictures or actions.

## articles

The basic difference between *a* and *the*<sup>xv</sup> is that *a* indicates that the noun in question is one of many (*please open a window*) and *the* indicates that we are talking about one specific noun that we both know (*please open the window*). For this reason we use *a* when mentioning something for the first time, and *the* when mentioning for the second and subsequent times (*I saw a cow, the cow was wise*). Equally obviously we use *the* when there is only one of the noun in question (*I live next to the police station*).

Unfortunately all this is extremely dull, hair-splitting, riddled with exceptions and very difficult to profitably teach or test. So best forget it.

## passive

Another horror story for students of English. The rule is **to be + past participle** (+ by). Here is a comprehensive table explaining it all.

Tense	Verb 'To Be'	+ Past Participle
Present Simple	<i>is / am / are</i>	<i>(done, been, eaten, taken, washed, telephoned, called, given, lived etc)</i>
Present Continuous	<i>is being / am being / are being</i>	
Present Perfect	<i>has been / have been</i>	
Past Simple	<i>was / were</i>	
Past Continuous	<i>was being / were being</i>	
Past Perfect	<i>had been</i>	
'Will' Future	<i>will be</i>	
'Going to' Future	<i>is going to be / am going to be / are going to be</i>	
'Used to be' Past	<i>used to be</i>	

## Examples

Tense	Active	Passive
Present Simple	Brazil grows coffee	Coffee <b>is grown</b> in Brazil
Present Continuous	The government is building a bridge	A bridge <b>is being built</b> (by the government)
Present Perfect	I have eaten the chicken	The chicken <b>has been eaten</b> (by me)
Past Simple	The boys washed the cars	The cars <b>were washed</b> (by the boys)
Past Continuous	My mother was preparing the food (at five thirty)	The food <b>was being prepared</b> (by my mother, at five thirty)
Past Perfect	He had seen them.	They <b>had been seen</b> (by him)
'Will' Future	I will give it to them.	It <b>will be given</b> to them (by me)
'Going to' Future	My friends are going to kill that snake.	That snake <b>is going to be killed</b> by my friends.
'Used to' Past	England used to produce coal.	Coal <b>used to be produced</b> by England.

It's a good excuse to review all the tenses covered so far, although presented like this most students would be terrified. If you are going to present it, it's best to start just with the first four tenses.

The passive swaps the role of the subject and object. *The dog bit the man* becomes *the man was bitten by the dog*. We do this when the subject is not so important (we say usually say *A new bridge has been built* rather than *They / the government have built a new bridge* – because the fact of the bridge being built is more important than the people who built it) or when we want to emphasise the object by placing it at the start of a sentence (The Mona Lisa hangs in the Louvre. It was painted by Leonardo De Vinci – in the second sentence the topic is the Mona Lisa, not Leonardo De Vinci, so it starts the sentence, even though it is not the subject... confused? So are your students; so avoid this kind of explanation.)

The passive crops up in stories about inventions and in news stories. And, as far as I know, it's quiet reading and writing activities that are used to talk about and present it (although getting students to present a news report would be a good idea, if they are up for it).

### first Conditional and time clauses

The First Conditional is for an imagined but likely future

"if" clause	<i>if + present simple</i>
"will" clause	<i>will + bare infinitive</i>

Examples:

*If I see her tonight, I will tell her*  
*We will be happy if she comes,*

Note that you are likely to hear such sentences as *If she will come, we see her* . Also note that the if clause and the will clause can come in either order.

Time clauses are the same as the first conditional in form but are used to express more certainty about the future. Time clauses do not use *if*, but *when, as soon as, before*, etc

"time" clause	<i>when / as soon as + present simple</i>
"will" clause	<i>will + bare infinitive</i>

Examples:

*When I get home, I will go to bed*  
*I will phone you as soon as I know .*

The kind of error you'll hear here is the same as for the first conditional, namely getting the tenses wrong - *I phone you as soon as I will know*. Also, again as with the first conditional, the time clause and the will clause can come in any order.

This grammar is not, as far as I know, very productive of fun activities. It's usually the kind of thing that pops up in listening texts when people are making arrangements.

### second conditional

Hot on the heels of the first conditional comes the far more enjoyable second conditional. The grammar is not a barrel of laughs, but the practice usually produces a couple of gems:

"if" clause	<i>if + past simple</i>
"would" clause	<i>would + Bare infinitive</i>

Examples:

*If I were king, I would buy a palace*  
*They would help us if they could*

Note that, firstly, commonly heard errors like *They will help us, if they could* and *They help us if they can* have both confused the tenses for the clauses. Secondly that, for some reason, We don't use **was** in the second conditional, only **were** . Thirdly that, like the first conditional, the clauses can come in any order.

The second conditional is very enjoyable to practice. *If I were Emperor of the universe I would... If I were invisible I would... If I met an alien tomorrow I would...* etc. Moral dilemmas are also formed with the second conditional, *what would you do if...?* So this is the time to put any students on the spot that have been irritating you all year. Also, usually presented alongside the second conditional, is the construction "I wish I were..." which also generates a few interesting responses.

### present perfect continuous (vs present perfect)

The formula is;

have/has been +ing form.

Another headache. What is the difference between *I have been painting the room* (present perfect continuous) and *I have painted the room* (present perfect)? It's not as simple as it might first seem. The easy answer is that the present perfect continuous suggests that the painting is not yet complete, and the present perfect that it is, but the more accurate answer is that the present perfect continuous emphasis the action and the present perfect emphasis the fact of it being done. For example:

(Woman comes in and sees her kid covered in chocolate, and is amazed at the mess)

*What have you been doing?* (emphasises the action of spreading chocolate all over the place)

(Woman comes in and sees her kid covered in chocolate, and is horrified that her newly baked cake is destroyed)

*What have you done?* (emphasising the fact that now there isn't any cake).

It's very subtle, and utterly amazing if students get it without having lived abroad. Probably best avoided.

### reported speech

Reported Speech:

*"I am happy," she said* becomes *She said that she was happy.*

*"My parents are moving house," he said* becomes *He said that his parents were moving house.*

Note that the verb has "shifted back" a tense.

### imbedded questions

*"Where is the station?" she asked*

*"I don't know where the station is" She said.*

Note that *the station* has changed places with *to be* in the second example. It might be around now that you explain the difference between *say* and *tell*. *Say* is never followed by a noun or pronoun and basically means "making a statement" (*she said she was happy*). *Tell* is almost always followed by a **noun** or **pronoun** and usually suggests a command or story (*he told me to jump in the air and squeak*).

### past perfect (vs past simple)

When I came in she made coffee.

When I came in she was making coffee.

When I came in she had made coffee.

The past perfect is used to describe something that happened before the past. The most obvious related task is to getting students to write or read simple stories and then switching the sentences around. They met in Copacabana and they fell in love, they had a shameless dispute in a public place becomes They had a shameless dispute in a public place, they had met and fallen in love in Copacabana.

Note that in *I'd fixed his car only three days before it broke down again* and *I'd fix his car if it had a problem* the 'd stands, in each case, for a different word, *had* and *would* respectively.

### third conditional

"if" clause	if + <b>past perfect</b>
"would have" clause	<i>Would have</i> + <b>bare infinitive</b>

If I had known, I would have told you.

The third conditional is used for "the imagined past". Most students, even those who are fluent, never really master it. It doesn't really matter.

## further reading

- Popularly referred to as 'The Bible,' the answer to every teacher's grammar question can be found in the straightforward and astonishingly comprehensive *Practical English Usage* by (the prophet) Michael Swan
- The standard grammar gap-fill books are *Essential Grammar in Use* and *English Grammar in Use* by Raymond Murphy. The former is for beginners and the latter for intermediate students, but for intermediate students I prefer *The Good Grammar Book* by Michael Swan.
- For straight vocabulary gap-fills my favourite books are *English Vocabulary in Use Elementary* by Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell and *English Vocabulary in Use Pre-Intermediate and Intermediate* by the same authors.
- It's not a bad idea to leaf through standard textbooks to see how they order and present information. The *Headway* series is ubiquitous and reliable, but for me the best coursebooks are *English File*.
- The *English File* teacher's books have superb photocopiable resource material, and *Reward* also do a series of Resource Books with good games, activities and handouts (some of which can be found on [onestopenenglish.com](http://onestopenenglish.com) – see below).

### Some useful websites

- [www.eslcafe.com](http://www.eslcafe.com) (lots of games and ideas)
- [www.teflgames.com](http://www.teflgames.com) (games ideas and downloadable quizzes)
- [www.onestopenenglish.com](http://www.onestopenenglish.com) (games and other activities)
- [www.teachingenglish.org.uk](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk) (good for games and advice on teaching)
- [www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant](http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant) (teaching tips and games)
- [www.esl-lounge.com](http://www.esl-lounge.com) (activities and links to other sites)
- [www.tefl.com](http://www.tefl.com) (professional development and jobs if you want to keep teaching after JET)

## Appendix 1 – English Irregular Verbs

Present	Past	Past Participle			
be	was, were	been	meet	met	met
Become	became	become	pay	paid	paid
begin	began	begun	quit	quit	quit
blow	blew	blown	read	read	read
break	broke	broken	ride	rode	ridden
bring	brought	brought	ring	rang	rung
build	built	built	rise	rose	risen
burst	burst	burst	run	ran	run
buy	bought	bought	say	said	said
catch	caught	caught	see	saw	seen
choose	chose	chosen	seek	sought	sought
come	came	come	sell	sold	sold
cut	cut	cut	send	sent	sent
deal	dealt	dealt	shake	shook	shaken
do	did	done	shine	shone	shone
drink	drank	drunk	sing	sang	sung
drive	drove	driven	sit	sat	sat
eat	ate	eaten	sleep	slept	slept
fall	fell	fallen	speak	spoke	spoken
feed	fed	fed	spend	spent	spent
feel	felt	felt	spring	sprang	sprung
fight	fought	fought	stand	stood	stood
find	found	found	steal	stole	stolen
fly	flew	flown	swim	swam	sw um
forbid	forbade	forbidden	sw ing	swung	sw ung
forget	forgot	forgotten	take	took	taken
forgive	forgave	forgiven	teach	taught	taught
freeze	froze	frozen	tear	tore	torn
get	got	gotten	tell	told	told
give	gave	given	think	thought	thought
go	went	gone	throw	threw	thrown
grow	grew	grown	understand	understood	understood
have	had	had	wake	woke (waked)	woken (waked)
hear	heard	heard	wear	wore	worn
hide	hid	hidden	win	won	won
hold	held	held	write	wrote	written
hurt	hurt	hurt			
keep	kept	kept			
know	knew	known			
lay	laid	laid			
lead	led	led			
leave	left	left			
let	let	let			
lie	lay	lain			
lose	lost	lost			
make	made	made			



## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Note that in fact *Burt and his animals* is a **phrase** consisting of some words that are not nouns. This in fact is a 'noun phrase', a short sentence that serves the purposes of a noun. For the purposes of teaching it is enough here to consider **they** as standing for something like "Burt, monkey, aardvark, cow".

<sup>ii</sup> Helping verbs is a catch-all term for 'auxiliary verbs' and 'modal verbs'.

Auxiliary verbs, comprising of *be*, *do* and *have* are used to give information about the voice (i.e. active or passive), tense (e.g. present continuous or present perfect) and mood (e.g. positive or negative) of other verbs. In the sentence *Did you do it?* **Did** gives information about the tense (it tells us it is past) and about the mood (it tells us it is a question). Note that, confusingly, there are two 'dos' in this example. The first one is an auxiliary verb and the second one is a normal verb.

Modal verbs, comprising of such words as *might*, *should*, *must*, and *would* give information about the necessity or possibility of the action described by the main [normal] verb being carried out.

As both auxiliary and modal verbs function in the same sort of way in English they are, for teachers, best thought of as one group, usefully (if a little childishly) called 'helping verbs'.

<sup>iii</sup> This '-ing form' is actually the 'present participle'. This is, although they look the same, different to a 'gerund'. The gerund is the -ing verb being used as a noun, (*Writing is difficult*). The present participle is the -ing verb being used to form a continuous tense (*she is writing a letter*) or, less commonly, being used as an adjective (*Dr Rokotnix invented a tiny writing machine*). It is simpler and quite serviceable to just call them all -ing verbs, or the -ing form.

<sup>iv</sup> Strictly speaking adjectives are only found after copular verbs. These are verbs, like *be*, *appear*, *look*, *taste*, and *seem*, that describe the 'isness' or 'seemsness' of something.

<sup>v</sup> Or you could make it a bit more lively by doing something like getting them to put both hands in the air if it is a verb, put both hands on their hips if it is an adjective and shout "hurrah for the Queen!" if it is a noun.

<sup>vi</sup> At this stage it is. As with other tenses I've touched on here, later on they are used for other things. The present simple, for example, is also used for timetabled events; *the train leaves at 6* Or, at a very advanced stage, it is used with colloquial story-telling; *"He comes in and says to me..."*

<sup>vii</sup> The first person singular is *I*, the second person singular is *you*, the third person singular is *he*, *she* or *it*, the first person plural is *we*, the second person plural is *you* (unlike in other languages the same as the second person singular) and the third person plural is *they*.

<sup>viii</sup> You may be thrown by logical but incorrect questions like *who does love you?* Just mumble something about that being more advanced, and hope that they forget it. The reason there is no helping verb here is that this is a **subject question**. The answer is *she love me* (*she* is the subject). Most questions are **object questions** asking about the object (*who does she love? She loves me*) and do not use a helping verb.

<sup>ix</sup> Here is the place to touch on prepositions of time. We say *on Thursday, in the morning*, but *on Thursday morning*. We say *at night*, but *in the evening*, etc.

<sup>x</sup> With all kinds of subtle exceptions. Why do we sometimes say *have you got some tea?* Instead of *Have you got any tea?* I'll let you try to work that one out.

<sup>xi</sup> It might be the right time to introduce the imperative, *take that or add three spoonfuls of sugar*, which lends itself to the theme of food. I generally let students pick up the imperative for themselves, as I'm always using it in class and it is very straightforward (just use the bare infinitive).

<sup>xii</sup> *And* is the only form for *go*, and *come*; we do n't usually say *I am going to go to the pictures tonight*, but *I am going to the pictures tonight*.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Must* is used when the source of obligation comes from 'within' oneself, and *have to* is used when the source of obligation comes from 'outside' of oneself. For example, if we say *I must do my homework*, it probably means because I really want to, but if we say *I have to do my homework*, it probably means because I'll get punished if I don't.

<sup>xiv</sup> Advanced students can work on the colloquial tendency to use 'would' instead of 'used to'. *When I was a boy I would play football with my Dad and he would teach me how to trap the ball...*

<sup>xv</sup> Also (along with *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*, possessive pronouns and various other words) known as determiners.

## Classroom Japanese and Grammar Vocabulary

Stand up:	立ってください	1 <sup>st</sup> Person	1人称 にんしょう
Sit down:	座ってください すわってください	2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	2人称
Open your books:	本を開いてください ひらいてください	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person	3人称
open to pg.72 (common)	72ページを開いてください みてください	Singular	単数 たんすう
Be quiet:	静かにしてください しずか しなさい	Plural	複数 ふくすう
Please read it:	読んでください	Prefix	接頭辞 せつとうじ
~Aloud/to yourself	大きな声で ~ 黙読 (もくどく)してください	Suffix	接尾辞 せつびじ
Repeat:	繰り返してください くりかえしてください	Antecedent	先行詞 せんこうし
~after me	私の後から~	Compound sentence	複文 ふくぶん
put away your ketai	携帯をしまってください	Clause	節 せつ
raise your hand	手を上げてください おずてください	Subordinate clause	従属節 じゅうぞくせつ
~if you know the answer	答えが分かる人は~	Context	文脈 ぶんみゃく
take a guess	推測 (すいそく)してみてください	Sentence	文章・文 ぶんしょう ぶん
present (attendance)	出席している しゅっせき	Paragraph	段落 だんらく
to call roll	出席を取る	Line	行目 ぎょうめ
absent (attendance)	欠席している けっせき	Chapter	章 しょう
<i>please say here when I call your name.</i>	名前を呼んだら返事をして下さい	Lesson	課・レッスン か・レッスン
let's get started	始めましょう (はじめましょう)	Tense:	時制 じせい
that's it for today	今日はこれで終わらしましょう 今日 はここまでです	Future tense:	未来形 みらいけい 未来時制
speak up (say it louder)	もっと大きい声で言ってください	Present tense:	現在形 げんざいけい 現在時制
stop it!	やめてください	Past tense:	過去形 かこけい 過去時制
Shut up!	うるさい! 黙れ たまれ!	Progressive:	進行形 しんこうけい
Do you have any questions?	質問がありますか?	Present Progressive:	現在進行形 げんざいしんこうけい
If u have questions, raise your hands	質問があったら手を上げてください (あげて)	Gerrund:	動名詞 どうめいし
Are you paying attention?	ちゃんと聞いていますか?	Adverb:	副詞 ふくし
Pull yourself together!	しかりしなさい	Adjective:	形容詞 けいようし
Stop looking out the window!	窓の外 みまゝで!	Noun:	名詞 めいし
Past Participle:	過去分詞 かこぶんし	Verb:	動詞 どうし
Past Perfect:	過去完了 かこかんりょう	Auxiliary verb	助動詞 じょどうし
Present Perfect:	現在完了 げんざいかんりょう	Pronoun:	代名詞 だいめいし
Preposition:	前置詞 ぜんちし	Relative pronoun	関係代名詞 かんけいだいめいし
Infinitive:	不定詞 ふていし	2番目の文を読んでください	read the second sentence
Comparative:	比較級 ひかくきゅう	2行目を読んでください	read the second line
Superlative:	最上级 さいじょうきゅう	第2段落を読んでください	read the second paragraph
		第2章を読んでください	read the second chapter
		レッスン2を読んでください	read the second lesson