

1.4d Verbs - Present Tense

key words: verb, tense, present

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1e Form and use the simple (e.g., *I walked*; *I walk*; *I will walk*) verb tenses.

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/3/1/e>

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.4.1b Form and use the progressive (e.g., *I was walking*; *I am walking*; *I will be walking*) verb tenses. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/4/1/b>

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.1b Form and use the perfect (e.g., *I had walked*; *I have walked*; *I will have walked*) verb tenses. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/1/b>

(For a discussion of how the present tense plays out in the progressive and perfect. See Lessons 1.4e and 1.4f.)

Although we don't generally have any problem using present tense when we are speaking, it can be a bit hard to identify because of the lack of present tense suffixes in English. You can **conjugate** a verb with all of the subject pronouns to see this lack of tense marking:

I sing
you sing
he/she sings
we sing
you (all) sing
they sing

So it's only with *he/she* that there is a different form: *sings*. In many dialects of English, the -s on the *he/she-form* is not used. In most forms of written English, however, the -s on the *he/she* form should be used. The English language has gradually been losing these suffixes. In many other languages, and in older forms of English too, there is a different ending to go with each subject pronoun. Here's the **conjugation** of *sing* in Old English, where there were four different endings. I'll use the modern version of the pronouns:

I **singe**, you **singest**, he or she **singeth**, we **singath**, you all **singath**, they **singath**

So although the language has eliminated most of the endings used to mark present tense, there is still a present tense form of the verb. It just happens to look like the infinitive in most cases. We know as speakers, though, when it is tensed.

Pick five verbs and give the present tense forms with each of the pronouns: *I, you, he/she, we, you (all), they*.

Example:

I cough	we cough
you cough	y'all cough
he/she coughs	they cough

(The present tense form of the verb is distinct from the *progressive* (which is technically an "aspect" not a "tense." You can learn more about the present participle that is needed to form the progressive in Lesson 1.4g.)

[Teacher note: As mentioned, in some dialects, the present tense -s has “leveled” to be like the other forms, so a speaker might say *cough* across the board, for all subjects: I eat, you eat, he/she eat, we eat, you eat, they eat. It’s important not to suggest that this leveled form is incorrect (it isn’t; it expresses present tense in some dialects) or even that it is informal (since it isn’t necessarily, in some dialects), but to use it as an opportunity to discuss variation and perhaps formal academic language.]