

VERB TENSES

Verb tenses indicate when a verbal action happens: in the past, the present, or the future. There are four tenses for the past, the present, or the future:

- Simple
- Progressive: a form of the verb *to be* + *-ing* form (=present participle) of the verb
- Perfect: a form of the verb *to have* + *-ed* form (past participle) of the verb
- Perfect progressive: a form of the verb *to have* + *been* + *-ing* form (present participle) of the verb

	Present	Past	Future
Simple	I walk.	I walked.	I will walk.
Progressive	I am walking	I was walking.	I will be walking.
Perfect	I have walked.	I had walked.	I will have walked.
Perfect Progressive	I have been walking.	I had been walking.	I will have been walking.

The **SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE** is used to express the following:

- Present action or condition: *Cthulhu rises from the sea. He is angry.*
- General truth: *Cthulhu growls when he is angry.*
- Habitual action: *Cthulhu rises from the ocean every night.*
- Events in the near future: *Lovecraft signs books at the bookstore tomorrow.*
- Literary or timeless truth: *H.P. Lovecraft uses scary imagery.*

The **PRESENT PROGRESSIVE TENSE** is used to describe an activity in progress, either at the very moment of speaking (*Look! Cthulhu's smashing something!*) or in a more general present (*The case of the blood-thirsty cult is under investigation*).

Note that verbs of emotion are never used in the progressive tense: ☹ *Wilcox is hating Cthulhu.* (The same goes for the McDonald's slogan *I'm loving it*; it might be catchy, but it's grammatically wrong).

The **PRESENT PERFECT TENSE** is used to describe the following:

- An activity that began in the past and is still going on: *Cthulhu has been gone for eons. Cthulhu has not risen from the sea in 200 years. We have waited for Cthulhu ever since we heard his name.* (watch for expressions using "since" or "for" or phrases indicating a time period)
- An activity that took place in the past with effects reaching into the present: *Cthulhu has found a new planet to live on (...and he still lives there). Cthulhu has stopped eating people.*

NOTE that if you use the **past tense with "for,"** you indicate that the action has now stopped:

Cthulu was gone for 200 years (but now he's back).

He lived in the sea (but now he lives elsewhere).

The **PRESENT PERFECT PROGRESSIVE** is used for an action that started in the past and continues in the present, and will most likely continue in the future. It emphasizes the continuity of an action, and is thus sometimes used to express the writer's disgruntlement with this action.

It seems Inspector Legrasse has been hiding all these years (I wish he'd show up!)

I have been reading H.P. Lovecraft all my life (and I don't intend to stop.)

The **SIMPLE PAST TENSE** (often combined with past time indicators: *yesterday, last summer, in 1999,* or a subordinate clause starting with *when*) is used for the following:

- An action completed in the past: *Wilcox created a sculpture last summer.* (Often a *time indicator*—*yesterday, last summer, three years ago, in 1999, etc.*—will tell you that an action was completed in the past)
- A past condition: *Wilcox was crazy when he made his sculpture.*
- A past habit: *Cthulhu ate people for years* (but he no longer does).; **note the difference to the present perfect tense:** *Cthulhu has eaten people for years (and he still does).*

The **PAST PROGRESSIVE TENSE** is used to describe an action in the past that took place over a period of time before it was interrupted by a short action (expressed in simple past tense):
Cthulhu was sleeping when the boat passed by. Somebody was sitting in the boat when Cthulhu grabbed it.

The **PAST PERFECT TENSE** is used to describe an action that happened before another action in the past: *Inspector Legrasse investigated after he had discovered the mysterious disappearances. The man went crazy after he had seen Cthulhu.*

The **PAST PERFECT PROGRESSIVE TENSE** is used to describe an ongoing past action that was ended by a short action ... just like the Past Progressive Tense. The difference between the two tenses is that the Past Perfect Progressive Tense emphasizes the continuity of the action that is interrupted. Often, you find this tense used with time-indicator phrases featuring “for”: *I had been reading “The Call of Cthulhu” for an hour when my phone rang.* (also correct: *I was reading “The Call of Cthulhu” when my phone rang.*)

We had been running from Cthulhu for a good while when we heard growling right behind us. (also correct: *We were running from Cthulhu when we heard growling right behind us.*)

The **SIMPLE FUTURE TENSE** is used for an action that will occur in the future. Often (but not always) it is accompanied by a time indicator: *Cthulhu will rise this week. Miskatonic University will open next semester.*

The **FUTURE PROGRESSIVE TENSE** is used for an action that will continue for some time in the future. Again, this tense is often accompanied by a time indicator: *Once you hear the call of Cthulhu, you will be unable to stay sane! As soon as you disturb Cthulhu, you will regret it!*

The **FUTURE PERFECT TENSE** is used to describe an action in the future that will be completed by a specified time (often given by a time indicator featuring “by”): *By the time you start attending Miskatonic University, I will have finished working on my B.A. By Friday, you will have heard the call of Cthulhu!*

Similarly, the **FUTURE PERFECT PROGRESSIVE TENSE** is used to describe an action that will be completed by a specified time in the future (given by a time indicator). As is the case with all perfect progressive tenses, the future perfect progressive tense emphasizes the continuity of the action: *In June, I will have been attending Miskatonic University for three years. By the time I graduate from Pickman Art Institute, I will have been creating statues of Cthulhu for four years.*

► Did you like the sample sentences? You can get more in H.P. Lovecraft’s “The Cthulu Mythos” series of stories (specifically “The Call of Cthulhu,” “The Horror in the Clay,” and “The Madness from the Sea.”)