Success Center
Directed Learning Activity (DLA)

Understanding the
Simple Present and
Present Progressive Tenses

G015.1
Directed Learning Activity – Understanding the Simple Present and Present Progressive Tenses

Description: In this Directed Learning Activity (DLA), you will learn how to use the simple present tense and the present progressive tense correctly. Explanation and application of rules through practice exercises will guide you in correct usage of these tenses.

Prior Knowledge: It would be helpful to understand how to write a basic sentence. If you need to review this concept, please complete the DLA “Basic Sentence Structure” before attempting this activity. Knowing both the form and spelling of third-person singular verbs with the simple present would also be helpful.

Materials: An envelope full of flashcards.

Step One: Assessing Prior Knowledge

On the lines below, explain what you already know about these topics. Please do not look ahead or look for a definition in a book or on the Internet. If you are unsure of the answers, simply write that you do not know.

1) When do you use the simple present tense?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2) When do you use the present progressive tense?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3) What time expressions could be used with the simple present tense?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4) What time expressions could be used with the present progressive tense?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Step Two: Understanding the Functions of the Simple Present and Present Progressive Tenses

Understanding when and how to use the verb tenses correctly requires paying attention to both the function and form of the tenses. In other words, when are you supposed to use the simple present and present progressive tenses, and what do these tenses look like? Knowing which verb tense to use when speaking and writing will improve your communication skills in English. The chart below shows when to use the simple present and present progressive tenses and commonly used time expressions for each verb tense.

**FUNCTIONS OF THE SIMPLE PRESENT AND PRESENT PROGRESSIVE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIMPLE PRESENT FUNCTIONS</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A habitual or repeated action.</td>
<td>1. <em>He brushes</em> his teeth twice a day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time expressions:</strong> always, often, usually, sometime, rarely, never, once a day/week/month/year every day/week/month/year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. General timeless truths and customs.</td>
<td>2. <em>The earth goes</em> around the sun once a year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use with <em>stative</em> verbs.</td>
<td>3. <em>This book belongs to her.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A <em>stative</em> verb describes a state rather than an action, and it is not usually used in progressive forms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESENT PROGRESSIVE FUNCTIONS</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Temporary event or action in progress at the moment or in the general present time.</td>
<td>1. <em>He is studying</em> for his test right now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time expressions:</strong> now, right now, at the moment, this week/month/semester/year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Trends.</td>
<td>2. <em>These days, teenagers are wearing</em> skinny jeans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time expressions:</strong> these days, nowadays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercise 1: Read the sentences below. Write the verb tense and its function on the blank line.

**Example:** Thomas *walks* to school every morning. *Simple present – habit*

1. They *are studying* right now. ________________________________
2. Reality shows *are becoming* popular these days. ________________________________
3. Dogs *bark*. ________________________________
4. Trees **produce** oxygen.

5. I always **go** to the gym before school.

Exercise 2: Write your own sentence for each of the verb functions below.

**Example:** *Simple Present (Habit)*  
*I wake up at 6:00 AM every morning.*

1. **Simple Present (Habit)**

2. **Simple Present (General timeless truth)**

3. **Simple Present (Stative verb)**

4. **Present Progressive (Temporary event or action in progress)**

5. **Present Progressive (Trend)**

Exercise 3: Underline the verb in the appropriate tense – simple present or present progressive – and then write its function on the blank line.

**Example:** I _____ to the dentist twice a year.

a. am going
b. go
Explanation: **Use the simple present for habits.**

1. Automobile makers _____ smaller cars these days.

a. are designing
b. design
Explanation: 

2. Maria _____ French this semester.

a. is studying
b. studies
Explanation: 

3. Most Asian cultures _____ chopsticks to eat food.
   a. are using
   b. use
   Explanation: ________________________________________________________________

4. My baby brother _____ right now.
   a. is crying
   b. cries
   Explanation: ________________________________________________________________

5. Ahmed _____ a headache right now.
   a. is having
   b. has
   Explanation: ________________________________________________________________

6. SooJin _____ two cars.
   a. is owning
   b. owns
   Explanation: ________________________________________________________________

7. The sun _____ in the east.
   a. is rising
   b. rises
   Explanation: ________________________________________________________________

8. The sun _____ at the moment.
   a. is shining
   b. shines
   Explanation: ________________________________________________________________

9. Anna usually _____ on Fridays.
   a. is exercising
   b. exercises
   Explanation: ________________________________________________________________

10. Anna _____ at the gym right now.
    a. is exercising
    b. exercises
    Explanation: ________________________________________________________________

---

**Step Three: Forming the Simple Present and Present Progressive Tenses**

In addition to understanding the function of verbs, it is also important to form them correctly. The form of a verb tense refers to what the verb tense looks like. Learning to use the correct form of a verb tense takes time and practice. Make or buy some flashcard cards to practice. Write the forms (affirmative, negative, yes/no question, and wh-question) on flashcards and review them on a regular basis to help you pay attention to form. When reviewing with flashcards, say the sentences aloud.
**FORMS OF THE SIMPLE PRESENT AND PRESENT PROGRESSIVE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AFFIRMATIVE</th>
<th>NEGATIVE AND NEGATIVE CONTRACTION</th>
<th>YES/NO QUESTION AND SHORT ANSWER</th>
<th>WH- QUESTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple Present</td>
<td>*I/*you/*they/<em>we walk</em></td>
<td>*do not/<em>don’t walk</em></td>
<td><em>Do/Does + subject + base verb?</em></td>
<td><em>Wh- word + do/does + subject + base verb?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>He/she/it walks</em></td>
<td>*does not/<em>doesn’t walk</em></td>
<td><em>Do you walk to school?</em></td>
<td><em>Why do you walk to school?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Progressive</td>
<td>*I/*you/*they/<em>we are walking</em></td>
<td>*are not/<em>aren’t walking</em></td>
<td><em>Is/Are + subject + verbing?</em></td>
<td><em>Why are they walking?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>He/she/it is walking</em></td>
<td>*is not/<em>isn’t walking</em></td>
<td><em>Are they walking?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exercise 4:** Write the negative, negative contraction, *yes/no* question and answer, and *wh-* question forms for each of the sentences in bold below.

**Example:** She works every day.

(negative)  
(negative contraction)  
( *yes/no* question)  
( *short answer*)  
( *wh-* question)  

**She does not work every day.**  
**She doesn’t work every day.**  
**Does she work every day?**  
**Yes, she does.**  
**Where does she work?**

1. They work every day.  
(negative)  
(negative contraction)  
( *yes/no* question)  
( *short answer*)  
( *wh-* question)  

2. They are working.  
(negative)  
(negative contraction)  
( *yes/no* question)  
( *short answer*)
Exercise 5: Practice with Flashcards

Take out the flashcards in the envelope that you checked out with this DLA. Read the sentence on the front of the card. Before flipping the card over, say aloud or write down the forms (negative, negative contraction, yes/no question, short answer, and wh-question).

Exercise 6: Complete each sentence with the correct form of the verb in bold. Choose the simple present or present progressive form of the verb, depending on the function of the sentence.

Examples: She (like/no) does not like cats. She (like) likes dogs.

1. I (study) ____________________________ English every day.
2. They (study/no) ____________________________ every day.
3. He (eat) ____________________________ in the cafeteria right now.
4. He always (eat) ____________________________ French fries with his hamburger.
5. She (eat/no) ____________________________ breakfast before 8:00 a.m.
6. Americans (eat) ____________________________ more junk food these days.
Step Four: Writing with the Simple Present and Present Progressive Tenses

Now that you have practiced choosing and using the appropriate functions and forms of the simple present and present progressive tenses in individual sentences, it is time to apply what you have learned by writing a longer passage. Study the short paragraphs below and then write your own paragraphs about yourself. Focus on the form and function of the simple present and present progressive tenses.

Jack’s Daily Activities and Vacation Schedule

Every day, Jack usually wakes up at 6:00 am. After he gets out of bed, he takes a shower and then reads the newspaper. At 7:00, he eats breakfast and then brushes his teeth. He leaves for work by 7:30 a.m. From 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Jack works as an accountant at H & R Block.

This week, Jack is on vacation in Costa Rica. He is waking up at 10:00 a.m. He is not eating breakfast. Instead, he is surfing at the beach. He is eating a huge meal at noon. After eating, he is swimming and surfing in the water again. Jack is having fun on vacation.

Exercise 7: For paragraph one, write at least four sentences about your daily routines. In the second paragraph, imagine that you are on vacation. Write about your temporary activities while on vacation.

(Paragraph One: Daily Routines)

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

(Paragraph Two: Vacation Schedule)

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________
Step Five: Assessing What You Have Learned About Present Tenses

Before you meet with a tutor to review this DLA, summarize the most important points that you have learned about the simple present and present progressive tenses on the lines below.

For Further Practice:


2. University of Victoria English Language Centre (Simple Present: Negatives and questions) - http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/330/grammar/presnq.htm


5. University of Victoria English Language Centre (Present Simple or Present Continuous) - http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/330/grammar/simcon.htm

6. English Language Study Cards for ESL & EFL Learners Grammar Box by LV International (2010). You may check out these flashcards from the Language Success Center.
G015.1 – Understanding the Simple Present and Present Progressive Tenses

PRINT STUDENT NAME ___________________________ STUDENT # ___________________________

Tutor Feedback:

______The student can describe the functions of the simple present tense.

______The student can describe the functions of the present progressive tense.

______In Step One, the student answered the “Assessing Prior Knowledge” prompts.

______In Step Two, Exercise 1, the student chose the correct verb tense and function.

______In Step Two, Exercise 2, the student could write a sentence using the appropriate function.

______In Step Two, Exercise 3, the student chose the correct verb tense and provided an appropriate written explanation for choosing the verb.

______In Step Three, Exercise 4, the student correctly provided the negative, contraction, yes/no question, short answer, and wh- question forms for each sentence.

______In Step Three, Exercise 5, the student can provide the correct forms for each sentence on the flashcards.

______In Step Three, Exercise 6, the student chose the correct verb tense and used correct form for each sentence.

______In Step Four, Exercise 7, the student wrote at least four sentences for each paragraph with the correct verb tense and form.

______In Step Six, the student completed the “Assessing What You Have Learned About the Present Tenses” section.

Additional Comments: ___________________________ ________________

PRINT INSTRUCTOR/TUTOR NAME ___________________________ DATE ___________________________

INSTRUCTOR/TUTOR SIGNATURE ___________________________

STUDENT – DO NOT FORGET TO TURN THIS SHEET IN AT THE FRONT DESK!
You may not get credit for completing this DLA if you fail to leave this sheet with the front desk receptionist.