



A COMPACT ARRANGEMENT OF ENGLISH TENSES

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Abstract:

There have been a wide range of books, journal articles, educational notes, etc. for many decades and all over the world about English grammar since it has been a global language. The literature abounds with materials treating English tenses in many different approaches. In this article, English tenses are structurally outlined and systematically tabulated, with all persons and all forms. The structural matrix of English tenses is based on four time and four aspect components, thus resulting the sixteen tenses in total. One single example sentence is utilised throughout the work for educational sake. With their compactness, the arranged tables have the potential to provide a first approach easy resource and so be helpful for new learners of English tenses, especially in the company of visual graphics, as recommended in the paper.

Keywords: English tenses, English grammar

1. Introduction

One of the issues in learning a foreign language is getting lost in so many scattered working documents. Therefore, it is important to look at the subjects from above, before diving into details.

This paper aims to arrange all of the English tenses in a structurally compact form, in full tables, potentially helpful for new learners to see the big picture as a first approach. Before attempting to construct English tense tables, all verbs in modern English are outlined in Table A., [1].

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Table A: English Verb Forms

V ₁	V ₂	V ₃	V ₀	V ₀₁	V ₀₂
*write	wrote	written	write	to write	writing
*play	played	played	play	to play	playing
*cut	cut	cut	cut	to cut	cutting
<i>English has thousands of such verbs as above (main verbs)</i>					
**am/is/are	was/were	been	be	to be	being
**do	did	done	do	to do	doing
**have	had	had	have	to have	having
***shall	should	-	-	-	-
***will	would	-	-	-	-
***can	could	-	-	-	-
***may	might	-	-	-	-
***must	-	-	-	-	-
***ought	-	-	-	-	-

Note: *: main verbs; **: both main and auxiliary verbs; ***: modal auxiliary verbs.

Given the above verb forms, the following Structural Matrix of the sixteen English tenses is designed based on four-time and four-aspect components, as in Table B., [2], [3].

Table B: Structural Matrix of the Sixteen English Tenses (see “Notes” at the end)

	Present	Past	Future	Future in the Past
Simple	 V ₁	 V ₂	 will + V ₀	 would + V ₀
Contin.	 am/is/are + V ₀ + ing	 was/were + V ₀ + ing	 will be + V ₀ + ing	 would be + V ₀ + ing
Perfect	 have/has + V ₃	 had + V ₃	 will have + V ₃	 would have + V ₃
Per. Con.	 have/has been + V ₀ + ing	 had been + V ₀ + ing	 will have been + V ₀ + ing	 would have been + V ₀ + ing

2. Literature

There has been a wide range of books, journal articles, educational notes, etc. for many decades and all over the world, about English, because it has been a global language. Therefore, the literature abounds with materials treating English tenses in many different approaches. To give a few examples, some deal with twelve English tenses [5], and some with sixteen English tenses [6]. Ferikoğlu A. designed a time-aspect visual graphics system to illustrate sixteen English tenses [3]. The present paper treats all of the English tenses in full tables, with all sentence forms and with all persons, over the same simple example sentence.

3. Material and Methods

All of the sixteen English tenses are systematically tabulated below, with all persons and all forms. For educational sake, a single example is drilled throughout the tables. Some well-established abbreviations such as *haven't* instead of *have not*, and *won't* instead of *will not*, etc. are deliberately avoided for the sake of systematicism in casting the tables. It is recommended here to study the content of the tables together with the paper in [3]. For simplicity, objects, adverbs, etc. are all omitted from the tables.

Table 1: Simple Present Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I write (a letter every day, etc.)	I do not write
You write	You do not write
He writes	He does not write
She writes	She does not write
It writes	It does not write
We write	We do not write
You write	You do not write
They write	They do not write
Positive Question	Negative Question
Do I write	Do not I write
Do you write	Do not you write
Does he write	Does not he write
Does she write	Does not she write
Does it write	Does not it write
Do we write	Do not we write
Do you write	Do not you write
Do they write	Do not they write

Table 2: Simple Past Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I wrote	I did not write
You wrote	You did not write
He wrote	He did not write
She wrote	She did not write
It wrote	It did not write
We wrote	We did not write
You wrote	You did not write
They wrote	They did not write
Positive Question	Negative Question
Did I write	Did not I write
Did you write	Did not you write
Did he write	Did not he write
Did she write	Did not she write
Did it write	Did not it write
Did we write	Did not we write
Did you write	Did not you write
Did they write	Did not they write

Table 3: Simple Future Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I will write	I will not write
You will write	You will not write
He will write	He will not write
She writes	She will not write
It will write	It will not write
We will write	We will not write
You will write	You will not write
They will write	They will not write
Positive Question	Negative Question
Will I write	Will not I write
Will you write	Will not you write
Will he write	Will not he write
Will she write	Will not she write
Will it write	Will not it write
Will we write	Will not we write
Will you write	Will not you write
Will they write	Will not they write

Table 4: Simple Future in the Past Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I would write	I would not write
You would write	You would not write
He would write	He would not write
She would write	She would not write
It would write	It would not write
We would write	We would not write
You would write	You would not write
They would write	They would not write
Positive Question	Negative Question
Would I write	Would not I write
Would you write	Would not you write
Would he write	Would not he write
Would she write	Would not she write
Would it write	Would not it write
Would we write	Would not we write
Would you write	Would not you write
Would they write	Would not they write

Table 5: Present Continuous Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I am writing	I am not writing
You are writing	You are not writing
He is writing	He is not writing
She is writing	She is not writing
It is writing	It is not writing
We are writing	We are not writing
You are writing	You are not writing
They are writing	They are not writing
Positive Question	Negative Question
Am I writing	Am not I writing
Are you writing	Are not you writing
Is he writing	Is not he writing
Is she writing	Is not she writing
Is it writing	Is not it writing
Are we writing	Are not we writing
Are you writing	Are not you writing
Are they writing	Are not they writing

Table 6: Past Continuous Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I was writing	I was not writing
You were writing	You were not writing
He was writing	He was not writing
She was writing	She was not writing
It was writing	It was not writing
We were writing	We were not writing
You were writing	You were not writing
They were writing	They were not writing
Positive Question	Negative Question
Was I writing	Was not I writing
Were you writing	Were not you writing
Was he writing	Was not he writing
Was she writing	Was not she writing
Was it writing	Was not it writing
Were we writing	Were not we writing
Were you writing	Were not you writing
Were they writing	Were not they writing

Table 7: Future Continuous Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I will be writing	I will not be writing
You will be writing	You will not be writing
He will be writing	He will not be writing
She will be writing	She will not be writing
It will be writing	It will not be writing
We will be writing	We will not be writing
You will be writing	You will not be writing
They will be writing	They will not be writing
Positive Question	Negative Question
Will I be writing	Will not I be writing
Will you be writing	Will not you be writing
Will he be writing	Will not he be writing
Will she be writing	Will not she be writing
Will it be writing	Will not it be writing
Will we be writing	Will not we be writing
Will you be writing	Will not you be writing
Will they be writing	Will not they be writing

Table 8: Future Continuous in the Past Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I would be writing	I would not be writing
You would be writing	You would not be writing
He would be writing	He would not be writing
She would be writing	She would not be writing
It would be writing	It would not be writing
We would be writing	We would not be writing
You would be writing	You would not be writing
They would be writing	They would not be writing
Positive Question	Negative Question
Would I be writing	Would not I be writing
Would you be writing	Would not you be writing
Would he be writing	Would not he be writing
Would she be writing	Would not she be writing
Would it be writing	Would not it be writing
Would we be writing	Would not we be writing
Would you be writing	Would not you be writing
Would they be writing	Would not they be writing

Table 9: Present Perfect Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I have written	I have not written
You have written	You have not written
He has written	He has not written
She has written	She has not written
It has written	It has not written
We have written	We have not written
You have written	You have not written
They have written	They have not written
Positive Question	Negative Question
Have I written	Have not I written
Have you written	Have not you written
Has he written	Has not he written
Has she written	Has not she written
Has it written	Has not it written
Have we written	Have not we written
Have you written	Have not you written
Have they written	Have not they written

Table 10: Past Perfect Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I had written	I had not written
You had written	You had not written
He had written	He had not written
She had written	She had not written
It had written	It had not written
We had written	We had not written
You had written	You had not written
They had written	They had not written
Positive Question	Negative Question
Had I written	Had not I written
Had you written	Had not you written
Had he written	Had not he written
Had she written	Had not she written
Had it written	Had not it written
Had we written	Had not we written
Had you written	Had not you written
Had they written	Had not they written

Table 11: Future Perfect Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I will have written	I will not have written
You will have written	You will not have written
He will have written	He will not have written
She will have written	She will not have written
It will have written	It will not have written
We will have written	We will not have written
You will have written	You will not have written
They will have written	They will not have written
Positive Question	Negative Question
Will I have written	Will not I have written
Will you have written	Will not you have written
Will he have written	Will not he have written
Will she have written	Will not she have written
Will it have written	Will not it have written
Will we have written	Will not we have written
Will you have written	Will not you have written
Will they have written	Will not they have written

Table 12: Future Perfect in the Past Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I would have written	I would not have written
You would have written	You would not have written
He would have written	He would not have written
She would have written	She would not have written
It would have written	It would not have written
We would have written	We would not have written
You would have written	You would not have written
They would have written	They would not have written
Positive Question	Negative Question
Would I have written	Would not I have written
Would you have written	Would not you have written
Would he have written	Would not he have written
Would she have written	Would not she have written
Would it have written	Would not it have written
Would we have written	Would not we have written
Would you have written	Would not you have written
Would they have written	Would not they have written

Table 13: Present Perfect Continuous Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I have been writing	I have not been writing
You have been writing	You have not been writing
He has been writing	He has not been writing
She has been writing	She has not been writing
It has been writing	It has not been writing
We have been writing	We have not been writing
You have been writing	You have not been writing
They have been writing	They have not been writing
Positive Question	Negative Question
Have I been writing	Have not I been writing
Have you been writing	Have not you been writing
Has he been writing	Has not he been writing
Has she been writing	Has not she been writing
Has it been writing	Has not it been writing
Have we been writing	Have not we been writing
Have you been writing	Have not you been writing
Have they been writing	Have not they been writing

Table 14: Past Perfect Continuous Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I had been writing	I had not been writing
You had been writing	You had not been writing
He had been writing	He had not been writing
She had been writing	She had not been writing
It had been writing	It had not been writing
We had been writing	We had not been writing
You had been writing	You had not been writing
They had been writing	They had not been writing
Positive Question	Negative Question
Had I been writing	Had not I been writing
Had you been writing	Had not you been writing
Had he been writing	Had not he been writing
Had she been writing	Had not she been writing
Had it been writing	Had not it been writing
Had we been writing	Had not we been writing
Had you been writing	Had not you been writing
Had they been writing	Had not they been writing

Table 15: Future Perfect Continuous Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I will have been writing	I will not have been writing
You will have been writing	You will not have been writing
He will have been writing	He will not have been writing
She will have been writing	She will not have been writing
It will have been writing	It will not have been writing
We will have been writing	We will not have been writing
You will have been writing	You will not have been writing
They will have been writing	They will not have been writing
Positive Question	Negative Question
Will I have been writing	Will not I have been writing
Will you have been writing	Will not you have been writing
Will he have been writing	Will not he have been writing
Will she have been writing	Will not she have been writing
Will it have been writing	Will not it have been writing
Will we have been writing	Will not we have been writing
Will you have been writing	Will not you have been writing
Will they have been writing	Will not they have been writing

Table 16: Future Perfect Continuous in the Past Tense

Affirmative	Negative
I would have been writing	I would not have been writing
You would have been writing	You would not have been writing
He would have been writing	He would not have been writing
She would have been writing	She would not have been writing
It would have been writing	It would not have been writing
We would have been writing	We would not have been writing
You would have been writing	You would not have been writing
They would have been writing	They would not have been writing
Positive Question	Negative Question
Would I have been writing	Would not I have been writing
Would you have been writing	Would not you have been writing
Would he have been writing	Would not he have been writing
Would she have been writing	Would not she have been writing
Would it have been writing	Would not it have been writing
Would we have been writing	Would not we have been writing
Would you have been writing	Would not you have been writing
Would they have been writing	Would not they have been writing

Notes:

Simple Present Tense uses the auxiliary verb DO for questions and negation, except when am/is/are is the main verb. Simple Past Tense uses the auxiliary verb DID for questions and negation except when was/were is the main verb. All other tenses make questions by drawing the auxiliary to the head.

4. Conclusion

All English tenses are arranged systematically in tables with all forms, affirmative, negative, and questions, over a simple example. Although some forms of these tenses are rarely used, they are provided for the sake of completeness. With their compactness, the resulting tables have the potential to be helpful for new learners of English tenses, especially in the company of time-aspect visual graphics, as in [3]. In addition, for a systematic treatment of English verbals (V_3 , V_{01} , V_{02} , V_{03} verb forms in Table A.) a reference to [4] is recommended.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

The author of this article received his B.Sc. in Electronics and Communications Engineering from Istanbul Technical University in 1982, his M.S. degree in Electronics and Computer Education from Marmara University in 1992, and his Ph.D. degree in Electronics and Communications Engineering department from Istanbul Technical University in 1996. After an academic life of 35 years at Sakarya University and Sakarya University of Applied Sciences, he retired in 2020. On the other hand, the author has spent years, not less than for his academic career in engineering, about activities such as studying, exploring, learning, and teaching languages in general. In this context, he has shared some of his opinions in the articles [3], [4] and [7].

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