

2 Verbs Rarely Found in Continuous Forms

There are certain verbs which are rarely found in the Continuous forms. For example, early in our study of English we realise (even if we do not learn the rule) that the verb *to be* is used in the Present Simple whether we are talking about something which is going on now or something which is habitual:

I am late now.

I am often late.

We can therefore say that *to be* is a verb not usually found in the Continuous form (except, of course, in the passive).

There are several verbs of this kind. They describe states or feelings which are thought to continue indefinitely. It is advisable to acquaint oneself thoroughly with these verbs. They are more easily remembered if we think of them as falling into six groups:

1. *Verbs for states over which we have no control*

see I see that it is raining again.

(Compare *look*, e.g. *He is looking at a map*. Seeing is a state over which we have no control once we have our eyes open, but we can choose to look or not look.)

It is only when the verb *see* describes what happens to us when we have our eyes open that it is not used in the continuous forms. It can have several other meanings and for these the continuous forms can be used:

The manager *is seeing* the applicants. (interviewing)

The tourists *are seeing* the ancient monuments this morning. (touring)
hear I *hear* the rain falling. *Listen* is used about a voluntary action, e.g. *I am listening to the radio.*)

feel (when intransitive)

This blanket *feels* very damp.

taste (when intransitive)

This meat *tastes* good.

smell (when intransitive)

His breath *smells* bad.

2. Verbs for ideas

know

He now *knows* as much about the subject as you do.

understand

We *understand* what he is talking about.

think (that)

I *think (that)* it is time for us to leave. (Compare

think of, e.g. *He is thinking of his future.*)

believe

I *believe* what he is saying is true.

disbelieve

She *disbelieves* her own father.

suppose

I *suppose* you are right.

doubt

I *doubt* if he will succeed.

agree

We *agree* with his suggestion.

disagree

We *disagree* with his point of view.

realise

They *realise* they cannot win the game.

imagine

I *imagine* you will succeed.

consider (that)

His teacher *considers* him a good student. (Compare

consider when it means *think over*, e.g. *He is still considering what action he should take.*)

notice

I *notice* that you have been promoted.

recognise

Britain now *recognises* the new regime.

forget

I *forget* his name.

remember

I *remember* what he said.

recall

I *recall* the actual words of the speaker.

3. Verbs for liking and disliking

like

I *like* the book I am reading.

dislike

I *dislike* this painting.

love

He *loves* his children.

hate

He *hates* flattery.

detest

She *detests* people who are unkind to animals.

despise

He *despises* this man because he is a coward.

prefer

We *prefer* to go without him.

forgive

I *forgive* you for the unpleasant things you have said.

trust I *trust* you do not object.
distrust I *distrust* this man.

4. Verbs for wishing

wish He *wishes* to leave as early as possible.
want They *want* more than they are entitled to.
desire The Company *desires* to recruit a branch manager.

5. Verbs for possession

possess He *possesses* well over a thousand books.
have He *has* more money than he needs. (The rule applies only when *have* means *possess*. In other cases the Continuous can be used, e.g. *We are now having lunch*.)
own His father *owns* several acres of land.
belong to This book *belongs to* John Brown.

6. Certain other verbs

be He *is* very patient. (The Continuous can be used if we wish to describe a state which is only temporary. For example, we can say: He *is not being* very patient over this matter. The Simple is used to describe a characteristic that is thought of as being permanent.)
appear She *appears* to be more intelligent than she is. (Only when *appear* means *seem*. When it means *come into view*, the Continuous is possible, e.g. *Leaves are now appearing on the trees*.)
seem This *seems* to be the book I should read.
mean He doesn't know what you *mean*.
please (usually in passive) He *is pleased* with the news.
displease (usually in passive) We *are displeased* with her.
differ The two brothers *differ* in many respects.
matter His opinion *matters* to me.
depend His future now *depends* on the decision of the judge.
resemble He *resembles* his father.
deserve He *deserves* the medal.
refuse He *refuses* to take part in our game.
result His failure *results* from his laziness.
suffice What we have *suffices*.
consist of The course *consists of* twenty lessons.
contain The tin *contains* an ounce of tobacco.
hold This torch *holds* two batteries. (Only when *hold* means *contain*.)
fit Now that it has been altered this jacket *fits* him.
suit The blue dress she is wearing *suits* her.

The previous verbs are occasionally found in the Continuous forms. This is especially true in colloquial English. If the word 'always' (or a word of similar meaning) is used to imply frequent repetition which meets with the disapproval of the speaker (as in the examples on page 3), a Continuous tense can be used with some of the above verbs.

He is always forgetting his books.

He is always foreseeing disaster.

With this exception, it is generally advisable for a student at this level to avoid using the above verbs in Continuous forms.

EXERCISE 9

Change the infinitives in brackets to either the Present Simple or the Present Continuous tense:

- 1 Now we (know) more about the use of the Continuous tenses.
- 2 They no longer (resemble) each other.
- 3 The bicycle which he (use) today (belong) to me.
- 4 Now that it is too late he (want) to go to the cinema.
- 5 I (doubt) if he will come.
- 6 You (understand) what he is talking about?
- 7 That student (deserve) a prize he has worked so hard.
- 8 What he (mean) is not clear to me.
- 9 They (work) hard when they (have) to.
- 10 I (not remember) his name, but I (think) my brother will be able to tell you.
- 11 The exercise we (do) now (appear) to be easy but it (contain) some tricky sentences.
- 12 Now that you have given me an example I (see) what you (mean).
- 13 This room (smell) very stuffy this morning.
- 14 His future (matter) very much not only to himself but also to his family.
- 15 The ice-cream we are eating (taste) very good.
- 16 I (know) now that he (understand) what I (mean).
- 17 Our landlord now (own) five houses.
- 18 He still (consider) what should be done.
- 19 The doctor (feel) the patient's pulse at this moment.
- 20 He (love) his children and (prefer) to spend money on school fees rather than on himself.
- 21 Oladele and Segun (not agree) about how they should share the reward.
- 22 He now (realise) he has made a mistake and (think) of resigning.
- 23 He always (doubt) my word and this makes me angry.
- 24 We (add) another room to our house which already (consist of) seven rooms.
- 25 Although the event happened thirty years ago, he still (recall) it clearly.
- 26 His opinion (not matter).

- 27 The letter which I (read) (appear) to have been written by an educated person.
- 28 He now (feel) that there is little hope of success.
- 29 Today the average schoolboy (know) more about science than most scientists did two hundred years ago.
- 30 I (believe) that he (think) of his failure in the examination and that is why he (have) such a miserable expression on his face.

9 The Conditional Tense and Conditional Sentences

The distinction between *should* and *would* in the Conditional tense is disappearing. Most people now use *would* for all persons, although purists insist on *should* with I and we. (See p. 17 for a similar note on *shall* and *will*.)

The chief use of the Conditional tense is in a main clause when a condition is made in a dependent clause or an infinitive phrase:

We would be able to start the game if my brother came.

(Main clause)

(Conditional clause)

To leave school now *would be* a mistake.

(Infinitive phrase)

(Conditional clause)

Sometimes the condition is understood and not expressed. A very common instance of this – and one that leads to many mistakes – is in expressions like:

I would like to introduce our speaker.

Here the words *if I have your permission*, or *if you will allow me to* are understood although they would not normally be expressed. *I would like*, *I should like* and *I'd like* are polite ways of saying *I wish* and can never be shortened to *I like*.

Three Kinds of Condition

The difficulty with this tense is that there are three main kinds of condition requiring different tense sequences. Consider these three sentences:

If Tom goes to London, he will study law.

If Tom went to London, he would study law.

If Tom had gone to London, he would have studied law.

The *first* sentence implies that it is quite possible that Tom will go to London.

This is known as an **open** or **likely** condition.

The *second* sentence implies that Tom is unlikely to go to London. This is known as an **unlikely** condition.

The *third* sentence is purely hypothetical. The sentence implies that Tom did not go to London and did not study law. This is known as an **unfulfilled or rejected condition**.

The above three sentences contain the tenses that are typical of the three kinds of condition. In table form these tenses are:

Kind of Condition	Tense in Conditional Clause	Tense in Main Clause
open	present	future
unlikely	past simple	conditional
rejected	past perfect	perfect conditional

Since the tense shows the sense there are many possible variations on these tense sequences. It is advisable, however, to be very careful about using sequences other than those shown above.

Avoid the common mistake of thinking that the Conditional tense is used in the conditional clause. The Conditional and Perfect Conditional are found only in main clauses for Unlikely and Rejected conditions respectively. If you come across a sentence like:

If he *would* come with me, I should be very glad.

The *would* of the conditional clause is being used in a special way to mean *was willing*.

Note that conditional sentences containing a Past Perfect can begin with *had* followed by the subject; in this case no *if* is used:

Had he seen the hole, he would not have fallen into it.

Other words introducing conditional clauses and requiring the above tense sequences are: *even if, suppose that, supposing that, assuming that, on condition that, provided that, as long as.* *Unless* means almost the same as *if not* but is rather more emphatic. *Unless* is extremely rare in Rejected conditions.

A singular subject of a conditional clause can take *were*:

If he *were* ill, who would take his place?

Was would not be incorrect. A very common use of *were* with a singular subject is in the expression *if I were you*. (Used in this way *were* is not the plural but a relic of a verb form called the subjunctive, now happily almost vanished from the language.)

EXERCISE 26

Change the infinitives in brackets to the most suitable tenses:

- 1 If the weather had been finer, the match (take place).

- 2 If the rains come early next year, there (be) a good harvest.
- 3 If he gets married this year, he (need) a higher salary.
- 4 He (visit) the dentist if he had toothache.
- 5 If the servant hadn't swept the floor, the master (be angry).
- 6 The crop would have been harvested before now if there (be) good weather.
- 7 If his brother had been driving, the accident (not happen).
- 8 If he is fit, he (play) for the school team on Saturday.
- 9 The electricity supply would fail if the workers at the power station (go on strike).
- 10 The architect would have designed a more expensive house if the owners (agree) to pay.
- 11 The captain will travel in the referee's car if there (be) no room on the bus.
- 12 The headmaster would announce a holiday if he (have) the permission of the Ministry.
- 13 There (be) a shortage of water next month unless it rains.
- 14 If he read the newspaper, he (know) an agreement has been signed.
- 15 If he (pass) the examination, he will be promoted.
- 16 If the gardener does not water the flowers, they (die).
- 17 His father would have visited the school if he (know) his son was in trouble.
- 18 If he referred to the dictionary more often, he (not make) so many spelling mistakes.
- 19 The editor of the school magazine will accept your article if you (shorten) it.
- 20 If he didn't work so hard, he (not be) so successful.
- 21 Our history teacher will not give us a test unless he (suspect) we have not read the last chapter.
- 22 He would leave school this term if he (find) a good job.
- 23 The student (be expelled) if he had stolen the encyclopaedias.
- 24 A war (break out) if the United Nations had not intervened.
- 25 If he knew his father was ill, he (go) home at once.
- 26 If he knows there will be a test next week, he (spend) the weekend revising.
- 27 If the main speaker (make) a convincing speech, the motion would have been carried by a large majority.
- 28 If our team won the match next Saturday, we (be) the league champions.
- 29 The Secretary-General of the United Nations (fly) to the scene of the conflict if he thought his presence would help.
- 30 Had there been a bed available, my brother (go) into hospital last week.