

## Putting Perfect Tenses in the Spotlight

The perfect tenses tack *has*, *have*, or *had* onto a verb. Each perfect tense — past perfect, present perfect and future perfect — also has a progressive form, which includes an *-ing* verb. The difference between plain perfect tense and progressive perfect is subtle. The progressive perfect is a bit more immediate than the plain form and refers to something that's ongoing or takes places over a span of time. In many sentences the plain and progressive forms may be interchanged. Here's when to use the perfect tenses:

- ✓ **Past perfect places one event in the past before another event in the past.** The verb in "Mike had dumped his dirty laundry in his mother's basement long before she decided to change the front-door lock" is *had dumped*, which is in past perfect tense. In the sentence "Christy, Mike's mother, had been threatening a laundry strike for years, but the beginning of mud-wrestling season pushed her to the breaking point," *had been threatening* is a past perfect progressive-tense verb.
- ✓ **Present perfect links the past and the present by describing an action or state of being that began in the past and is still going on.** In the sentence "Despite numerous reports of sightings around the world, Kristin has stayed close to home," the verb *has stayed* is in present perfect tense. In "Kristin has been living within two miles of the Scottish border for the last decade," *has been living* is a present perfect progressive-tense verb.
- ✓ **Future perfect implies a deadline sometime in the future.** In the sentence "Before sundown, David will have toasted several dozen loaves of bread," *will have toasted* is in future perfect tense. The verb in "By the time you turn on the television, *Eye on Cooking* will have been covering the toasting session for two hours, with six more to go," is *will have been covering*, which is in future perfect progressive tense.

Practice, especially with these verbs, makes perfect. (Perfect tense, get it?) Try this example and then plunge ahead. The verb you're working on appears as an *infinitive* (the basic, no-tense form) at the end of the sentence. Change it into the correct tense and fill in the blank.

- Q.** Kristin \_\_\_\_\_ an acceptance speech, but the Spy of the Year title went to Hanna instead. (*to prepare*)
- A.** **had prepared.** With two events in the past, the *had* signals the prior event. The preparing of the speech took place before the awarding of the title, so *had prepared* is the form you want.
- 16.** Mike \_\_\_\_\_ on thin ice for two hours when he heard the first crack. (*to skate*)
- 17.** Diane \_\_\_\_\_ Mike for years about his skating habits, but he just won't listen. (*to warn*)
- 18.** After Mike \_\_\_\_\_ an hour in the emergency room, the doctor examined him and announced that the skater was free to go. (*to wait*)
- 19.** After today's skating trip ends, David \_\_\_\_\_ a total of 1,232 hours for his friend and \_\_\_\_\_ countless outdated magazines in the emergency room family area. (*to wait, to read*)



20. Grace \_\_\_\_\_ to speak to Mike ever since he declared that "a little thin ice" shouldn't scare anyone. (*to refuse*)
21. Mike, in a temper, pointed out that Grace's motorcycle \_\_\_\_\_ him to the hospital even more frequently than his skates. (*to send*)
22. In an effort to make peace, Kristin \_\_\_\_\_ quietly to both combatants before the conflict escalates. (*to speak*)
23. Despite years of practice, Tim \_\_\_\_\_ success only on rare occasions, but he keeps trying to resolve his brother's conflicts anyway. (*to achieve*)
24. At times Tim's conflict-resolution technique \_\_\_\_\_ of violent finger pokes in the fighters' ribs, but he is trying to become more diplomatic. (*to consist*)
25. After Mike \_\_\_\_\_ that his brother's wisest course of action was to "butt out," Tim simply ignored him. (*to declare*)

## Hitting Curveballs: Irregular Forms

Designed purposely to torture you, irregular verbs stray from the usual *-ed* form in the past tense. The irregularity continues in a form called the *past participle*. You don't need to know the terms; you just need to know what words replace the usual *-ed* verb configurations (*sang* and *sung* instead of *singed*, for example).



You can't memorize every possible irregular verb. If you're unsure about a particular verb, look it up in the dictionary. The definition will include the irregular form.

Here's a set of irregular problems to pickle your brain. Fill in the blanks with the correct irregular form, working from the verb (actually, the infinitive, the basic form of the verb family) indicated in parentheses. Check out the following example.

**Q.** With one leg 3 inches shorter than the other, Natalie seldom \_\_\_\_\_ into first base, even when the team was desperate for a base hit. (*to slide*)

**A.** *slid*. No *-ed* for this past tense! *Slid* is the irregular past form of *to slide*.

26. If you discover a piece of pottery on the floor, look for Natalie, who has \_\_\_\_\_ many vases because of her tendency to dust far too emotionally. (*to break*)

27. Once Natalie \_\_\_\_\_ with sadness at her first glimpse of a dusty armchair. (*to shake*)

28. David, a duster himself, \_\_\_\_\_ a manual of daily furniture maintenance. (*to write*)

29. The manual, entitled *Dust or Die*, \_\_\_\_\_ to the top of the best-seller list. (*to rise*)

30. Nearly all the copies had been \_\_\_\_\_ by fanatical cleaners. (*to buy*)

31. David once dusted the fire alarm so forcefully that it went off; the firefighters weren't amused because David had \_\_\_\_\_ the fire alarm a little too often. *(to ring)*
32. The fire chief promptly \_\_\_\_\_ to speak with the mayor about David's false alarm. *(to go)*
33. The mayor has \_\_\_\_\_ an investigation into a new category of offenses, "False Dust Alarms"; almost immediately, David \_\_\_\_\_ to protest. *(to begin)*
34. "I have \_\_\_\_\_ to a new low," sighed David. "I hear that Natalie has \_\_\_\_\_ a new hobby. Maybe I can get one too." *(to sink, to find)*
35. Natalie \_\_\_\_\_ David to a fly-catching meet, and soon his interest in grime \_\_\_\_\_ the dust. *(to take, to bite)*
36. Natalie, inspired by fly catching, \_\_\_\_\_ a tapestry with a delicate fly pattern. *(to weave)*
37. David, worried about Natalie's enthusiasm for winged pests, \_\_\_\_\_ help. *(to seek)*
38. "Leave the flies," \_\_\_\_\_ David. *(to say)*
39. "Never!" Natalie declared as she \_\_\_\_\_ her coffee. *(to drink)*
40. David soon \_\_\_\_\_ up on Natalie and her new hobby. *(to give)*
41. Every day when Natalie \_\_\_\_\_, she thought about flies. *(to wake)*
42. Her friends avoided the fly cage, which \_\_\_\_\_ in her yard. *(to stand)*
43. Natalie \_\_\_\_\_ hours watching WNET, which \_\_\_\_\_ fly-catching tips. *(to spend, to give)*
44. Eventually, Natalie \_\_\_\_\_ to realize that fly catching \_\_\_\_\_ too much. *(to come, to cost)*
45. She and David \_\_\_\_\_ a new hobby. *(to choose)*
46. They \_\_\_\_\_ miniature houses out of paper that had been \_\_\_\_\_ out. *(to build, to throw)*
47. First, David \_\_\_\_\_ a floor plan for each house. *(to draw)*
48. Next, Natalie \_\_\_\_\_ "logs" from twisted paper strips. *(to make)*
49. Unfortunately, David \_\_\_\_\_ some dog food near the houses, and his dog \_\_\_\_\_ them. *(to leave, to eat)*
50. Natalie \_\_\_\_\_ betrayed and \_\_\_\_\_ with David about what Natalie called his "criminal carelessness." *(to feel, to fight)*

