

Business English tenses review- Upper Intermediate/ Advanced

A: Time Clauses

1. Match at least one of the time clauses 1-11 with each of the sentences a) - j).

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|---|---|
| 1. when I joined this company
in the 1990s | a) I didn't have a lot of experience |
| 2. the other day | b) My boss uses a laptop |
| 3. during a meeting | c) I was looking for a different job |
| 4. recently | d) I worked for my present company's major competitor |
| 5. since January | e) I have been working on this project |
| 6. hardly ever | f) I last made a conference call in English |
| 7. by Tuesday | g) I'm flying to Munich |
| 8. never | h) I'll finish this report |
| 9. for a year | i) I was caught making personal phonecalls |
| 10. in a fortnight's time | j) I've had a lot in my in-tray |
| 11. this week | |

2. Make true sentences about yourself using each of the time clauses.

3. Read out one of your sentences without the time clause and see if the other students can guess which time clause is true for you.

Discussing Grammar

B: Grammatical similarities: Aspect and voice

What are the similarities between these different forms?

- 1a) I can't talk. I'm meeting a client.
 - b) I was just closing the deal when my direct boss walked in and ruined everything.
 - c) My plane will be landing just as yours is taking off.

- 2a) I've been in exactly this situation many times.
 - b) They had already accepted a rival bid by the time we had ours ready.
 - c) They will have increased sales by 50% well before the projected time.

- 3a) A good team is made from good individuals.
 - b) The computer, like so many other inventions, was invented to help us wage war.
 - c) Wine has been produced here since the year dot.

C: Grammatical differences

Why are different tenses used in the contrasting sentences?

- 1a) I work for a well-known multinational
 - b) I'm working on restructuring the company

- 2a) What were you doing when the headhunter called?
 - b) What did you do when the headhunter called?

- 3a) When we arrived, they introduced the main conference speakers
 - b) When we arrived, they were introducing the main conference speakers
 - c) When we arrived, they had introduced the main conference speakers

- 4a) I've worked with several very prestigious clients
 - b) I worked with several very prestigious clients

- 5a) I've been replying to customer enquiries all day
 - b) I've nearly cleared the backlog of enquiries from the Christmas break

Suggested Answers

A 1. Many examples are possible. If students come up with an example that is not clearly wrong or right, ask them to explain how they imagine the circumstances/ situation of the sentence to be.

B1. All the sentences express a temporary action that is in progress at a particular time.

B2. All the sentences connect two different times, e.g. the present and the past for the Present Perfect.

B3. All are passives- i.e. the grammatical subject of the sentence is not the same as the 'agent' - who is doing the action.

C1. The first is seen as generally true or permanent, whereas the second is seen as temporary.

C2. The first is a (temporary) action in progress when something else happened (or interrupted), whereas the second is a simple sequence of events.

C3. Similar to C2, but also with an action that is completed before another happens (Past Perfect)

C4. Contrast between an unfinished time (perhaps 'in my life' or 'this month') with a finished time ('last year' or 'in my last job').

C5. Contrast between a sentence where the action is important (replying) and where the result is important (cleared the backlog). Point out that 'How much?' is usually answered with the Present Perfect Simple and 'How long?' with the Present Perfect Continuous.