

Grammar notes: present tenses

Present simple

The present simple is used for:

permanent states:

I **am** English (and I always will be English).

I **work** in Valencia (I do now and will do for the foreseeable future).

I **teach** English.

habits and routines:

I **drive** to work every day (it's part of my daily routine).

I **don't wear** white shoes (it's my habit not to).

I **like** going to the cinema at weekends.

permanent truths and facts:

The sun **rises** in the east and **sets** in the west.

Water **boils** at 100°C (212°F in case you wanted to know).

New technology **makes** it easier to learn English.

It isn't always easy to see where one category ends and the next begins, but getting the verb into the right category isn't the objective here. Just remember that the present simple is used more than anything for facts and/or habits and/or things that are permanent. The category doesn't matter.

Present continuous

The present continuous is used for:

actions happening at the moment of speaking:

I'm **sitting** in front of the computer.

The phone's **ringing**.

I'm **trying** to think of another example to put here.

actions happening around the moment of speaking:

I'm **learning** French (not at this moment, but I've got a class tomorrow).

I'm **doing** a lot of revision for my exams (but not right now).

I'm **seeing** a lot of my brother at the moment (but he's not here now).

descriptions:

People **are sitting** on the café terrace.

The traffic **is making** a lot of noise.

She's **wearing** a red dress.

temporary situations:

I'm **staying** with my grandparents while my parents are away.

My brother **is using** the metro because his car is being repaired.

I'm **sleeping** in the spare room because I'm decorating my bedroom.

Remember that we use the continuous form in English more than you use it in Spanish. If something sounds strange to you, it doesn't necessarily mean it's wrong!

Comparison of simple and continuous

You should use the present simple to talk about things you consider to be facts:

Do you **get on with** your parents? (generally)
I think my brother **is** a pain in the neck (always, not just now).

Use the present continuous if you consider the action or event to be temporary:

Are you **getting on** with your parents now? (you had an argument last week)
My brother's **being** really nice at the moment (and this is not normal).

Both forms can sometimes be used to talk about the same thing, but there will be a difference in meaning:

My brother **lives** in France (because his wife is French and they don't like England).
My brother's **living** in France (because his company has sent him there for six months).

There are some verbs that you don't usually use in the continuous form, just as in Spanish. Generally speaking they're verbs that describe states and not actions, such as these:

verbs describing thought processes and opinions:
think, believe, remember, know, forget, agree, disagree...

verbs describing emotions:
want, like, love, hate, adore, detest...

verbs describing the senses:
see, hear, taste, feel, smell...

This doesn't mean that it's impossible to use these verbs in the continuous. It just means that it's unusual and would probably be very specific in a particular situation.

Some comparisons with Spanish

The present simple is more common in Spanish than it is in English. The best way to avoid making mistakes is to remember what we use each tense for in English. If you think of what you want to say in Spanish and then translate literally you'll find it more difficult to get the right tense. Here are some examples:

Imagine walking into a pub and seeing a friend you thought was on holiday in Portugal. You would probably ask *¿Qué haces aquí?*, but in English we would say *What **are you doing** here?* because the question refers to this moment. If you ask *What **do you do** here?*, you're asking about the work that person does.

When you buy a newspaper, or if the phone is ringing, you might say *Lo cojo yo*. In English we would say *I'll get it* because we're offering to do something and therefore have to use 'will'.

If you're talking to a friend about what they're going to do for their holiday next year, you could ask *¿Con quién vas?*, but in English it has to be *Who **are you going with**?* because we're talking about a future arrangement (or intention).