

Chapter 15: Introduction to Greek Verbs

Tense/Aspect

Tense in English simply refers to the time when an action took place.

Present: Annette swims.
Past: Annette swam.
Future: Annette will swim.

In the above examples “swims,” “swam” and “swim” can be viewed as a simple event or as an ongoing process of “swimming.” Greek verbs not only indicate *when* an action takes place (time) but *what type of action* (aspect) is taking place. In Greek there are three aspects:

1. Continuous: Ongoing process
2. Undefined: simple event with no comment on whether it is continuous or punctiliar.
3. Perfect: Past action with present effect (no equivalent in English)

English Punctiliar

A punctiliar action is one that occurs at a specific point in time.

Example of Punctiliar: A tidal wave *hit* the boat.
Example of Continuous: A tidal wave *was hitting* the boat.

The Greek undefined aspect can be used to describe a punctiliar action but the verb is not itself punctiliar and can also be used to describe a continuous action.

Five Basic Tenses in Greek

1. *Future*: usually undefined
2. *Present*: may be continuous or undefined
3. *Imperfect*: continuous
4. *Aorist*: undefined (may be continuous or punctiliar)
5. *Perfect*: past action with present effect (no English equivalent)

Voice

“Voice” refers to the relationship between the subject and the verb.

1. Active: subject *does* the action — I hit the ball.
2. Middle: for now think of it as being the same as active.
3. Passive: subject *receives* the action — I was hit by the ball.

Mood

Mood refers to the kind of reality of the action, or how the action of the verb is regarded:

Indicative:	Simply states that something happened, e.g. "Peter prays."
Imperative:	Gives a command or exhortation, e.g. "Pray, Peter!"
Subjunctive:	Expresses a wish, possibility, or potential, e.g. "Peter may pray," or "If Peter prays . . ."

Person

First person is the person(s) speaking ("I," "we").

Second person is the person(s) being spoken to ("you").

Third person is the person(s) or thing(s) spoken about. ("he," "she," "the," "it").

Number

Both English and Greek distinguish between singular (I, you, she, it) and plural (we, you they). Verbs must agree with their subject in both person and number ("He hits the ball" vs "They hit the ball" – *not* "They hits the ball").

Five Parts to Indicate when Parsing a Greek Verb

1. Person: 1st, 2nd, 3rd
2. Number: Singular, Plural
3. Tense: Present, future, Imperfect, Aorist, Perfect
4. Voice: Active, middle, passive
5. Mood: Indicative, subjunctive, infinitive, imperative

Example: λέγω – 1-Sg, Present, Active, Indicative "I say/am saying"

Historical Present

Greek often uses the present tense to refer to an event that actually happened in the past. This is called the "historical present" and is used to add vividness to the narrative or, most often, it is an idiom. It often occurs in narrative in the third person. In these cases the present tense is simply translated by the English past tense (e.g. "he says" becomes "he said").