



## Basic Grammar Unit 1

These materials are only suitable for use in the Basic Grammar class. There is some information, there are some tasks, but they only make sense when used as the basis for thinking and discussing in class. The content of each unit has been drawn from a variety of sources: from various grammar books and my own ideas and teaching experience. At the beginning of the term I hand out a bibliography with details of all the grammar books I have drawn on. These books are indicated only with an abbreviation here.

### Unit 1 Talking about the present.

(1) What does that mean?

What do you understand by “the present” and “now”?

Think tank:

When I first came to Germany I thought peppermint tea was awful. Now I think it tastes OK.

Every week we sit here and think about English grammar .....

This week we re thinking about the present.

On Saturdays she goes shopping at the market and buys piles of fruit and veg.

The President's car is going past me now.

Mohammed Ali (Axel Schulz) hits two straight lefts to the chin.

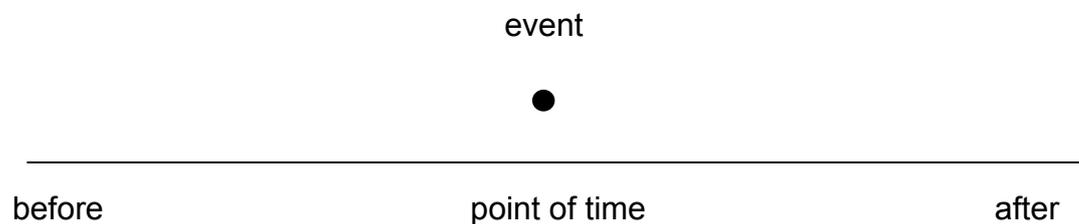
What kind of present time do the underlined verbs in the present tense imply?

Why are some in the present simple form and others in the present progressive?

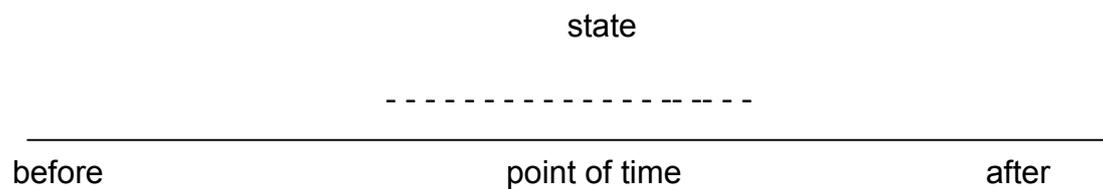
How would you express these sentences in German?

(2) Before we go on any further, we need to consider the idea of events and states.

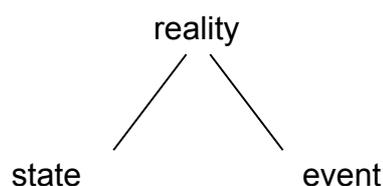
An event is a single occurrence with a definite beginning and end, involving a change, a result or an achievement. Examples: get, come, go, find. (CGE)



A state is a situation which continues over a period whose beginning and end need not be defined, and which is normally not thought of as involving a change/result/achievement. Examples: be, live, stay, know. (CGE)



So we can think of verbs as expressing either a state or an event.



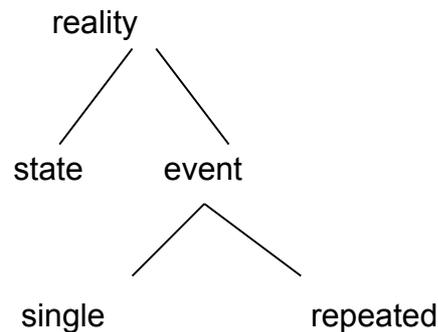
There are verbs which have two identities. They can express both a state and an event. If you look up the verb “have” in the Cobuild you will find that it can mean two very different things.

- 1) He has a really ugly old rusty bath. (Here “have” expresses a state = there is in his possession.)
- 2) He has a bath once a year. (Here “have” expresses an event = he takes a bath, cleans himself.) 😊

So you can’t always just look at a verb and say, Oh, that’s a state, or That’s an event. You need a context.

Similarly, in Unit 2 you will see that there are nouns with dual membership of the count/uncount classes - with different meanings. Example: “a man” (count noun) has a different meaning (= ein Mann) from “man” (uncount noun) (= die Menschheit).

(3) We have distinguished between a state and an event. We can also distinguish between a single event and a repeated event

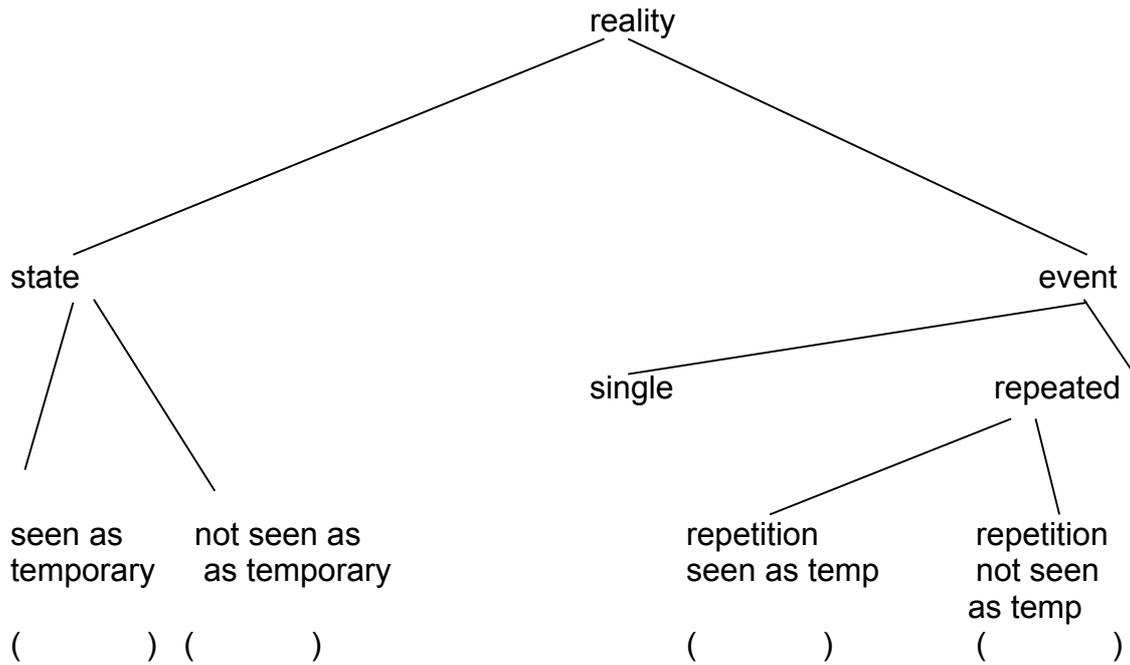


If we use a past tense we can see this distinction between state and single event and repeated event clearly:

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| State:                | The film was wonderful. I was blissfully happy (for hours) |
| Single event:         | I broke my favourite cup yesterday.                        |
| Repeated event/habit: | My little brother broke things nearly every day.           |

(4) How else might we look at states and events?

We could introduce the ideal of “temporariness”.



So how can we express states and repeated events as being “temporary” or “not temporary”?

The answer is: by using the ..... for “seen as temporary” and the ..... for “not seen as temporary”.

You can put the correct form of the verb in the brackets above.

But what does “seen as temporary” mean??

Paul says of his Mum: “Mum smokes too much.” Present simple implies that he sees this as a longer-term habit.

Paul’s older sister says: “Mum’s smoking a lot these days. I suppose she’ll cut down again once the pressure’s off at work.” Present progressive implies that this habit is seen as temporary.

Temporary habits can last a loooooong time; the essential thing is that if the speaker thinks of them as temporary then the progressive is used.

(5) We have distinguished between:

- state/event;
- single event /repeated event;
- seen as temporary/ not seen as temporary.

Take a look at the diagram again. What’s missing? Why is there no branch of the tree under single event - yet?

Is it possible to distinguish between a single present event seen as temporary / not seen as temporary?

I don't think so. It causes a short circuit in my brain.

But we can distinguish between a single present event which is seen as..... and a single event which is seen as .....

Any ideas?

Who would want to/need to put into words a single event happening in front of their eyes? Or something they are themselves doing, right at that moment?

Maybe (crazy) teachers in a Beginners English Class: "I am now going to the window. I am opening the window ..."

But who else?

All four texts below describe events going on right in front of the speaker.  
(Source: CGI)

There is, believe it or not,

- an assassination
- a royal ceremony
- a royal funeral
- a boxing match

(These texts are all old, but very special.)

Think for a moment about these four events. In what ways are they different?  
Similar?

1) The assassination of J F Kennedy

It appears as though something has happened in the motorcade route, something, I repeat, something has happened in the motorcade route. There's numerous people running up the hill alongside Elm Street there by the Simmons Freeway. Several police officers are rushing up the hill at this time. Stand by ..... just a moment please ..... Something has happened in the motorcade route ..... Stand by please. Parkland Hospital ..... there has been a shooting ..... Parkland Hospital has been advised to stand by for a severe gunshot wound. The President's car is now going past me. The limousine is now travelling at a very high rate of speed, secret service men standing up in the limousine. They're armed with submachine guns. It appears as though someone in the limousine might have been hit by the gunfire.

(154 words)

2) Trooping the Colour

Led by the Colonel of the Grenadier Guards, Her Royal Highness Princess Elizabeth riding away from us now slowly across the great parade ground, the sun, shining on the golden accoutrements that she wears over her scarlet tunic, her golden belt, her blue garter sash, and on the blue Garter sash of the Duke of Gloucester who rides his grey horse to her left. And behind her, reformed, a part of the Royal Procession, but only a small part, because pride of place, the honour of place now, behind Her Royal Highness comes to the Foot Guards, who, this complicated ceremony ended, now follow her on their way back towards Buckingham Palace.

(112 words)

3) The Funeral of King George VI

For the last time the guards of honour come to the present, and as they do so, and while the music of the "Funeral March" rings out, slowly the Royal Train, very slowly makes its way from Paddington. Standards again lowered into the dust. The bayonets glinting in the winter sunshine. Every man here standing facing this train at the salute as slowly it passes from Paddington Station.

(67 words)

4) World Heavyweight Boxing Championship 1938 – Schmeling v. Louis

..... And Joe Louis is in the centre of the ring, Max going around him. Joe Louis lets fly with two straight lefts to the chin, as the men clinch Joe Louis tries to get over two hard lefts and Max ties him up, and they break away clean. On the other side of the ring now, Max with his back to the ropes: and Louis hooks a left to Max's head quickly and shoots over a hard right to Max's head, Louis – a left to Max's jaw, a right to his head: Max shoots a hard right to Louis. Louis with the old one-two, first the left and then the right. He has landed more blows in this one round than he landed in any five rounds of the other fight ..... Now Max is backing away against the ropes. Louis is following him and watching for that chance. He is crowding Schmeling.

(152 words)

In these texts, which are all simultaneous commentaries, you will find present simple, present progressive and present perfect. Underline them in the texts.

Count them out, but before you put them in the box below stop and think about which of these present simples / present progressives really express **an ongoing event**.

	Present simple	Present progressive	Present perfect
Text 1			
Text 2			
Text 3			
Text 4			

Take into account the length of each text. Do any patterns emerge?

Why do you think this is??

- The present perfect seems to be used when the speaker can see the results of an event rather than the event itself and when the event is finished before the speaker has time to describe it.  
Can you find any examples?.....
- With the present progressive and present simple there seem to be some conventions, some fixed expectations of style. Where?
- Apart from that, it seems like the speaker uses present simple to express .....  
and present progressive to express.....

(NB It is possible for the same incident to be expressed by either the simple or the progressive, depending on the speaker's point of view. (cf page 4)

“The plane takes off, and disappears into the clouds.”

This sees the take off as a clearly defined instantaneous event in a series. The plane taxis onto the runway, stands still, takes off, disappears into the clouds.

“The plane is taking off.”

This sees the event as having duration, and not yet completed. The take off is a process, or extended event, whose end is not yet in sight. It leaves the way open for some change in the event, e.g. a sudden decision by the pilot to cut the engines.)

So, now we can distinguish between a single event which is seen as instantaneous and a single event which is seen as having duration.

Your task now is to draw the expanded diagram yourselves, here:

(6) So, now you know how these two different forms, present simple and present progressive, express different things, depending on whether it is a matter of a state, or a single event, or a repeated event.

The term “aspect” is also used instead of “form”: the simple aspect, the progressive aspect, as aspect has to do with the way we see states and events.

However our diagram is not quite finished yet. Unfortunately, there are some restrictions on the use of the progressive. Even though your logic tells you that something is a temporary state and you want to use the progressive form to express this, for example

\* “I am not understanding this stuff about states and events”

a native speaker would find this progressive form strange.

Note that the asterisk\* means that this is not acceptable language.

The grammarians, who have had plenty time to puzzle about this and come up with a practical rule, decided to classify those verbs which don't seem to be used with the progressive as State or Stative Verbs. Read about them in the GCE and CGE and try to remember them.

Check what the GCE (roughly pages 95 – 96 in my edition) and the CGE (new edition from page 74 on) have to say about State Verbs and Event Verbs (also called Dynamic verbs). What subcategories do they have? These two grammar books have slightly different categories. Which set of categories makes most sense to you?

Don't just photocopy the pages. Read, take notes, makes diagrams. Bring your information to class.

Which of the two grammar books explains best why it is possible to say both of the following?

He is horrible

He is being horrible

(7) Now we can expand our diagram again. You can go back to the diagram you drew yourselves and add the final branches.

Here are some sentences taken out of context, on purpose. Use your completed diagram to help you interpret them. What context / contexts could they have? What would they mean?

1. He limps.
2. He's limping.
3. What does he do?
4. What is he doing?
5. I think you are very cruel.
6. I think you are being very cruel.
7. He goes to work by bus.
8. He's going to work by bus.
9. Here comes the bride.

10. What are you thinking?
11. What do you think?
12. Look, it's raining.
13. She's smelling the roses.
14. Do you like roses?

Now try these, again without a context. Decide whether it should be present simple or progressive, or under what circumstances both are possible.

1. Fast food is / is being a good example of this principle.
2. (Speaker): I see / am seeing I have / am having my usual audience of attentive students today.
3. My family lives / is living in Spain, so I have / am having no roots or connections here.
4. I never entertain / am never entertaining. It's just not my life style.
5. First you press / are pressing the start button, then you check / are checking the volume control.
6. The clock chimes / is chiming.
7. He can't come to the phone. He has / is having a shower.
8. All food contains / is containing some percentage of poison.
9. I don't want / am not wanting any medicine, thanks.
10. Do you mind / are you minding waiting a moment?
11. Just look at her. She jumps / is jumping up and down like a rubber ball!
12. Ow, that hurts / is hurting!

(8) Some more notes, based on CGE

The uses of the present simple, with reference to the present (based on CGE)

a) Unrestricted present state

I'm Fiona.  
How many languages do you speak?  
Spaghetti is the best food in the world.  
I live in Konstanz.

The present simple is used with verbs expressing states to indicate an unrestricted present, stretching into the past and into the future.

b) Instantaneous present event

I declare the meeting closed.  
Axel Schulz swings a right at .. and ...  
Now I take this card from the pack and place it under the hat ..  
I put the herbs and parmesan in this bowl, add a drop of olive oil and ...

The use of the present simple with an event verb to express a present event is rather specialized. It occurs in formal declarations, some kinds of sports commentaries, demonstrations, stage directions. Anything else?  
It signifies an event simultaneous with the present moment, so it is not needed very often. In most of the cases where it is used the event probably does not take place at the precise instant when it is expressed in words. It is subjective rather than objective simultaneity that is conveyed.

c) Present habit

The sun rises in the East.  
She cuts her hair herself. (it saves money)  
She always walks to work. (fitness freak)

The habitual or iterative present represents a series of individual events, which as a whole make up a state stretching back into the past and possibly forward into the future. In other words, a present habit is practically the same as a present state.

The habitual present (c) is used much more often than the instantaneous present.

So you can compare (a) and (c) – look for similarities, and contrast them with (b)

The uses of the present progressive, with reference to the present (based on CGE)

a) Temporary present state

She's living in a hostel at the moment.

The progressive emphasises the limited duration, the temporariness of the state.

NB. The progressive form cannot be used to mark the temporariness of a state if the verb belongs to the State Verb class (see above).

b) Present event

I'm making some coffee. Would you like a cup?

(Boat race) Oxford are rowing well. They're taking the lead now.

(Ice skating championships) Torville and Dean are skating magnificently. Any minute now they will be finished, and sure of a medal.

With single events the effect of the progressive is to emphasise the durational aspect of the event, also its potential incompleteness.

c) Temporary present habit

He's only walking to work while the buses are off.

She's taking Judo lessons this winter.

The progressive emphasises the temporariness of the habit.

So compare a) and c) – look for similarities, and contrast with b).

Summary:

“The progressive aspect refers to activity in progress, and therefore suggests not only that the activity is temporary (i.e. of limited duration), but that it need not be complete.” (CGE p69)

(9) What we need now is to put the information on the present simple alongside that on the present progressive, so that we can contrast the use of the two forms.

Fill in the boxes with your own good examples.

Present simple	Present progressive
State Unrestrictive	State Limited duration (temporary)
I'm Fiona. She <b>lives</b> in Konstanz	<b>0</b> She <b>is living</b> in a hostel at the moment
Single Event Instantaneous	Single Event Durative, potentially incomplete
I <b>declare</b> the meeting closed <b>0</b> I <b>put</b> some olive oil in, then <b>add</b> the herbs	<b>0</b> I'm <b>making</b> some coffee. Like some? <b>0</b>
Repeated Event Iterative, habitual	Repeated Event Iterative, habitual, but of limited duration, temporary
He <b>cycles</b> to work.	He's <b>cycling</b> to work while his car's away for repair.

(10) Summary:

Using the present simple/ present progressive to talk about the present.

PRESENT

Napier heads the ball to Paterson  
and it's a goal!

ROUND ABOUT THE PRESENT

The Chinese team are running well,  
they're taking over the lead .....  
I'm making some coffee. Would you  
like some?  
He's being awfully silly about it. He's  
not the only one whose girlfriend's  
walked out.  
He's only walking to work while the  
buses are off.  
FC Bayern aren't playing so well this  
season.

UNRESTRICTED PRESENT

I live in Konstanz.  
She knows a lot.  
She always walks to work - she's a  
fitness freak.  
Ice melts when heated.

My originals have graphics - dots and wavy lines etc. to indicate  
instantaneous present, unrestricted present and so on. Do yours?

(11) Task

Put the words in brackets into the text, choosing the most appropriate form of the verb:

A: (you, see)..... that woman over there? She  
(keep)..... stopping people and asking them  
questions.  
(you,think).....she (ask).....for  
directions?  
B:No,I(expect).....she(make).....a survey.  
A: What (you, mean)?How (you, make)..... a survey?  
B: You (stop)..... a lot of people, (ask)..... a set of  
questions, and (note) the answers down. You (need) a lot of patience.

Julie (stir)..... a sauce in a pan and Kate  
(stand).....beside her holding a cookery book.  
Kate :Why (you, boil) .....it, Julie. Here it (say) “simmer” .  
Julie:Stop fussing!  
I(think,not).....it(matter).....if you  
(cook).....it quickly. But I (know, not).....why  
it (get,not).....thick. This kind of sauce ..... (not,  
usually, take) so long to thicken ..... Maybe you're right .....

A: What's that dreadful noise?  
B: It's the neighbours. They (always, drill) .....

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