Present Simple - Use

When do we use the present simple tense in English?

We use the present simple for:

1. Facts and things that are generally true

For example:

- Water **boils** at 100°C.
- All animals **need** water.
- Doctors **work** with sick people.
- Many students **are** lazy.
- Nothing **is** certain except death and taxes.
- It **doesn't rain** much here in summer.
- What **do** dolphins **eat**?

2. Permanent or long-term situations

For example:

- I **live** in Melbourne.
- He **works** at a post office.
- She **is** a lawyer.
- We **don't have** children.
- **Are** you married?
- **Do** they **speak** Spanish?

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3. Habits or things that happen regularly

Words and phrases that are commonly used in these sentences: ***always***, ***usually***, ***often***, ***sometimes***, ***rarely***, ***never***, ***in the morning/afternoon/evening***, ***every day***

For example:

- Frank **is** always late.
- They often **walk** to work.
- I **shower** in the morning.
- Frank never **showers**.
- I **don't go** to the gym every day.
- When **does** she usually **call** you?

4. Stative verbs

Stative verbs, also known as state verbs, are verbs that we use to express states or conditions rather than actions. We usually use them for emotions, senses, feelings, preferences, opinions, possessions and measurements. Stative verbs are usually used in simple tenses (as opposed to continuous tenses).

For example:

- I **love** Thai food.
- You **seem** happy.
- Frank **hates** studying.
- The bag **weighs** 10 kg.
- We **don't understand** the question.
- **Do** they **believe** in ghosts?
- Who **owns** that house?

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5. Narration (stories and jokes) and commentary

Note: We also use other tenses for narration and commentary, such as the present continuous.

For example:

- The story **takes** place in Los Angeles.
- The dog **gets** lost, **has** adventures and then **returns** home at the end of the movie.
- A man **walks** into a bar and **sits down**.
- What **happens** at the end of the book?
- Johnson **takes** the ball and scores!

6. Instructions and procedures

Note: We also often use the imperative for instructions and procedures.

For example:

- You **press** the button and then you **wait** until the light turns green.
- You **pour** the milk in and **stir** gently.

7. Rules and laws

For example:

- The game **finishes** after 60 minutes.
- Smoking **is** not allowed in public buildings.

8. Newspaper headlines

For example:

- President **visits** Japan
- Company **opens** new factory

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9. Scientific and academic writing to describe theories, diagrams and processes

For example:

- The study **explains** some of the causes of climate change.
- This diagram **shows** the results.

10. The zero conditional

For example:

- If you **heat** ice, it **melts**.
- Plants **die** if you **don't water** them.

11. The first conditional

For example:

- If Ethel **studies** hard, she'll pass the exam.
- You'll miss the train if you **don't hurry**.

We sometimes use the present simple to talk about the future. That is the case in the following situations:

12. Timetables and schedules

Note: This is usually when a timetable or schedule is set by an organisation (these are not personal plans). Here we use the present simple most of the time, but occasionally people use "will + verb" (formal language) or the present continuous (informal language).

For example:

- Tomorrow I **start** work at ten.
- The shop **opens** at 8:00 am on Monday.
- That bus **leaves** at 12:15.
- What time **do** you **finish** today?
- When **does** his flight **arrive**?
- What day **does** the conference **end**?

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13. In sentences about the future after conjunctions like *when*, *after*, *before*, *until* and *as soon as*

Note: We do not use "will + verb" here. It is sometimes possible to use the present perfect instead of the present simple in these types of sentences.

For example:

- She'll see the email when she **arrives**. *(not* when she will arrive*)*
- After you **do** your homework, you can play video games. *(not* after you will do*)*
- I'll wash up before I **go**. *(not* before I will go*)*
- Let's wait until they **leave**. *(not* until they will leave*)*
- Please call me as soon as you **get** home. *(not* as soon as you will get*)*

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