

# Writing about the Present

## WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

**DISCUSS** Look at the photo and read the caption. Discuss the questions.

1. Do students in your school conduct research outside of class? If so, what kind of research do students do?
2. How can conducting research help a student choose a major?

**FIND THE ERRORS** This paragraph contains two errors with present or present progressive verbs. Find the errors and correct them. Explain your corrections to a partner.

## DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH

### Choosing a Major

<sup>1</sup>Many students in their first year of university study has difficulty choosing majors. <sup>2</sup>Fortunately, there are some steps students can take to help them make the right choice. <sup>3</sup>First, students can meet with an academic advisor. <sup>4</sup>Because academic advisors are familiar with all the majors offered at the university, they are providing helpful information to guide students toward a specific field of study. <sup>5</sup>Next, students can visit the university career center and meet with a career advisor. <sup>6</sup>Career advisors are knowledgeable about the type of major needed for a specific career. <sup>7</sup>Career advisors also administer skills inventories and career interest tests to help students identify possible careers. <sup>8</sup>Finally, students can ask their professors for advice. <sup>9</sup>Professors are able to share their experiences and offer valuable insights into what studying a specific major requires in terms of skills, abilities, and effort. <sup>10</sup>After taking these steps, students are usually ready to select a major in their second year of academic study.

Student biologists look for the endangered smoky madtom, a species of catfish.

## 1.1 Simple Present

Subject	Verb	Example
I / you / we / they	verb	Environmental engineers <b>work</b> on the protection of the environment and human health.
he / she / it	verb + -s	The government agency <b>wants</b> nuclear testing to continue as planned.

## 1.2 Present Form of Be

Subject	Verb	Example
I	<i>am</i>	I <b>am</b> a citizen of both Spain and Colombia.
he / she / it	<i>is</i>	The company's main office <b>is</b> in Rome.
you / we / they	<i>are</i>	Strong teachers <b>are</b> essential for preparing students for higher education.

## 1.3 Present Progressive

Subject	Verb	Example
I	<i>am + verb + -ing</i>	With this research, I <b>am attempting</b> to prove the effectiveness of the new medication.
he / she / it	<i>is + verb + -ing</i>	Panama <b>is building</b> a larger canal.
we / you / they	<i>are + verb + -ing</i>	Because of the weak economy, small businesses <b>are growing</b> very slowly.

## 1.4 Present Perfect

Subject	Verb	Example
I / you / we / they	<i>have + past participle</i>	The Csango people <b>have lived</b> in Romania's Moldova region for over a thousand years.
he / she / it	<i>has + past participle</i>	Russian pianist Yevgeny Kissin <b>has given</b> concerts since he was a child.

### Notes

- Contractions are almost never used in academic writing.
- See Appendix 4, Irregular Verbs, on page 220 for examples of irregular past participles.

## 1.5 Negative Present Forms

Form	Examples
<i>do / does not + base form of the verb</i>	This article reports on one business that <b>does not have</b> any employees.
<i>be + not</i>	Many workers <b>are not</b> comfortable in their jobs.
<i>be + not + verb + -ing</i>	The main researcher for NASA's mission to Mars <b>is not planning</b> to visit the planet.
<i>have / has + not + past participle</i>	The Himalayan mountain climbers <b>have not seen</b> their families since late last year.

### Note

Contractions with *not* are rare in academic writing.

### ACTIVITY 1

Fill in the blank with the correct form of the verb in parentheses: simple present, present progressive, or present perfect. Use *not* when it is given.

- The earth \_\_\_\_\_ (*become, present progressive*) warmer, so scientists are worried about the future of the planet.
- Aircraft mechanics \_\_\_\_\_ (*wear, simple present*) headphones at work because the planes are so loud.
- The documentary on pollution \_\_\_\_\_ (*receive, present progressive*) a lot of attention from critics.
- The volunteers \_\_\_\_\_ (*not, travel, present perfect*) since the war began.
- I \_\_\_\_\_ (*preview, simple present*) upcoming chapters before the instructor's lecture, and it always makes me more prepared for class.
- The latest legislation \_\_\_\_\_ (*not, help, present progressive*) students with their huge college loans.
- The indigenous tribes \_\_\_\_\_ (*want, always, present perfect*) a land of their own.
- The singer \_\_\_\_\_ (*be, present*) also a well-known environmental activist.

# Common Uses

## 1.6 Using Simple Present

The simple present is commonly used in academic writing. It is used:

1. to write about general truths and facts that are not limited to a specific time	It <b>takes</b> about 12 hours for your body to digest a meal.
2. to write about a repeated or habitual action	Every fall, Canadian geese <b>fly</b> south for the winter.
3. to cite a source	Sleep researchers <b>say</b> that most people dream four to six times per night.
4. to give details about information from a book, poem, or film • We use simple present because an event in a book or film remains the same every time we read or see it. This is called the literary present.	In "The Story of an Hour," Mrs. Mallard <b>learns</b> of her husband's death, but she <b>does not feel</b> sad.

Note

Stative (non-action) verbs describe a state, rather than an action. They usually take the simple present form of the verb. Note the most common ones below.

be (exist)    consist of    dislike    realize    seem    want  
belong to    depend on    include    recognize    understand

## 1.7 Using Present Progressive

The present progressive is not as commonly used in writing as other verb forms. However, it is used:

1. to describe events in real time	In some countries, people <b>are paying</b> more taxes than ever before.
2. to write about the continuation of an event	Temperatures <b>are continuing</b> to rise because of global warming.

## 1.8 Using Present Perfect

The present perfect is used to write about past events that are still relevant now. It is used:

1. to write about an event that happened in the past and continues until now • Use <i>since</i> with a specific date or time. Use <i>for</i> with a period of time.	Alaska <b>has been</b> a U.S. state <b>since</b> 1959. Alaska <b>has been</b> a U.S. state <b>for</b> more than 50 years.
2. to write about a very recent past event that is important to the current discussion	The government <b>has passed</b> a new tax law that will have an immediate impact on citizens.

### ACTIVITY 2

Fill in the blank with the correct simple present, present progressive, or present perfect form of the verb in parentheses. Use *not* when given. More than one answer may be possible.

- In his poem "The Raven," author Edgar Allen Poe \_\_\_\_\_ (*use*) numerous symbols to express loneliness.
- Global sea levels \_\_\_\_\_ (*rise*) rapidly since the beginning of the 21st century.
- Historians \_\_\_\_\_ (*begin*) to study some alternative causes of World War I.
- Unfortunately, people from developing countries \_\_\_\_\_ (*not, have*) the same opportunities as those in wealthier nations to start small businesses.
- In that country, government regulations \_\_\_\_\_ (*not, allow*) politicians to accept contributions from private companies.
- As governments spend more money on cancer research, medical professionals \_\_\_\_\_ (*conduct*) more extensive studies on possible cures.
- Because people's desire to explore space is stronger than ever, astronomers \_\_\_\_\_ (*work*) on a new super telescope.
- In his book *The Art of Happiness*, the Dalai Lama \_\_\_\_\_ (*state*) that we can train in happiness much like we can train in any other skill.

# Common Errors

## Common Error 1.1 Does the verb agree with the subject?

The people of Northern Africa ~~speaks~~ <sup>speak</sup> French, Arabic, and some Italian.

The family ~~are~~ <sup>is</sup> emigrating from the country because of the war.

Students in Canada ~~has~~ <sup>have</sup> studied a second language for many years.

**REMEMBER:** The verb must agree with the subject.

## ACTIVITY 3 Common Error 1.1

Read each sentence. Underline the verb form that correctly completes each sentence.

1. Some nutritionists (*define / defines*) the United States as a “Fast Food Nation.”
2. Research has shown that pollution and asthma (*is / are*) related.
3. Since 1990, environmentalists (*has developed / have developed*) amazing tools to improve recycling methods.
4. In this year’s national report, the biggest increase in crime (*does not involve / do not involve*) violent physical crime but computer crime.
5. Social media companies (*has continued / have continued*) to experience significant growth.
6. In many western countries, the treatment of children with disabilities (*is not / are not*) different from the treatment of able-bodied children.
7. The new in-house exercise programs (*has benefited / have benefited*) both the employees of the company and the company itself.
8. Experts in business (*considers / consider*) honesty one of the most important qualities of a leader.

## Common Error 1.2 Do you need simple present or present progressive?

Naan, a common Indian bread, ~~is tasting~~ <sup>tastes</sup> delicious because it is cooked over a fire.

**REMEMBER:** Stative verbs are usually in the simple present.

## ACTIVITY 4 Common Error 1.2

Read each sentence. Underline the verb form that correctly completes each sentence.

1. Private airline companies (*take / are taking*) the place of national airlines.
2. Recent research (*shows / is showing*) that trees belong to a type of social network.
3. People who are not comfortable with technology sometimes (*do not understand / are not understanding*) the instructions on software packages.
4. Tourists (*visit / are visiting*) Hong Kong in record numbers these days.
5. If an experiment sample size is too small, the size (*ruins / is ruining*) the results.
6. Environmental scientists are concerned because icebergs (*melt / are melting*) at a very fast rate.
7. Teachers report that the new art education program (*improves / is improving*) students’ critical thinking skills.
8. According to some sociologists, pure democracy (*does not exist / is not existing*) in the world today.

## Common Error 1.3 Do you need simple present or present perfect?

The number of biomedical engineers ~~increases~~ <sup>has increased</sup> significantly since 2005.

**REMEMBER:** With the adverbs of time *for* or *since*, use the present perfect. Do not use the simple present.

## ACTIVITY 5 Common Error 1.3

Fill in the blanks with the correct simple present or present perfect form of the verb in parentheses.

1. Economists \_\_\_\_\_ (*study*) the possibility of an upcoming depression for more than 10 years. In fact, many of them \_\_\_\_\_ (*believe*) that things will become worse before they become better.
2. Today, only 35,000 people in Canada \_\_\_\_\_ (*speak*) one of the Inuit languages. They have spoken these languages for centuries, but now the languages \_\_\_\_\_ (*be*) at risk.

3. Scientists say that tomatoes \_\_\_\_\_ (*qualify*) as fruits, not vegetables. Today, approximately 7,500 tomato varieties \_\_\_\_\_ (*exist*) around the world.
4. This radio station is vital because it \_\_\_\_\_ (*focus*) primarily on news reports. It \_\_\_\_\_ (*share*) information with millions of listeners in the United States.
5. Scientists \_\_\_\_\_ (*understand*) the significance of the environmental problem because they \_\_\_\_\_ (*study*) its effects for the past three decades.
6. Recent studies \_\_\_\_\_ (*show*) that eating too much red meat is unhealthy. Many doctors and dietitians \_\_\_\_\_ (*recommend*) eating between five and six ounces per day.
7. For over 30 years, the disaster of the space shuttle *Challenger* \_\_\_\_\_ (*remain*) in the consciousness of the American public. Most people \_\_\_\_\_ (*remember*) what they were doing at the time of the explosion in 1986.
8. According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, individuals \_\_\_\_\_ (*adopt*) almost 3 million shelter animals each year. While the number is high, many abandoned pets still \_\_\_\_\_ (*need*) a good home.



# Academic Vocabulary

## Verbs Frequently Used in Simple Present in Academic Writing

argue	change	define	increase	require
believe	come	illustrate	indicate	show

Source: Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies 2008–)

### ACTIVITY 6 Vocabulary in Academic Writing

Use the academic vocabulary in the simple present to complete each sentence. In some sentences, more than one answer is possible.

Subject Area	Example from Academic Writing
Economics	1. Economists often _____ about the cause of a stock market crash.
Paleontology	2. Recent findings _____ that giant alligators lived in North Africa thousands of years ago.
Criminal Justice	3. The statistics _____ a decrease in violent crime over the past few years.
Business	4. Many business experts _____ that low interest rates are very important for continued economic growth.
Literature	5. Robert Frost's language in "Directives" _____ symbolism perfectly.
Anthropology	6. Anthropologists _____ anthropology as the study of humanity.
Science / Engineering	7. Career opportunities in biomedical engineering _____ every year.
Science	8. The word "science" _____ from the Latin <i>scientia</i> , meaning knowledge.
Physics	9. Physics _____ a very strong understanding of mathematics, especially calculus.
Computer Science	10. Cloud computing, or online data storage, _____ the way people and computers interact.

# Put It Together

## ACTIVITY 7 Review Quiz

**Multiple Choice** Choose the letter of the correct answer.

1. Tataouine \_\_\_\_\_ a region of Tunisia where the original *Star Wars* was filmed.  
a. is                      b. are                      c. has been                      d. are being
2. Because the number of people who die from cancer is increasing, doctors \_\_\_\_\_ to find the cure.  
a. race                      b. races                      c. is racing                      d. are racing
3. Internships give students valuable work experience, but university students who have internships while they are studying \_\_\_\_\_ a lot of free time.  
a. does not have      b. do not have      c. is not having      d. are not having
4. Anthropologists who want to learn more about ancient man typically \_\_\_\_\_ to the frozen area of the Alps for their research.  
a. travels                      b. travel                      c. is traveling                      d. are traveling
5. Psychologists these days \_\_\_\_\_ the connection between income level and happiness.  
a. research                      b. researches                      c. have researched                      d. are researching

**Error Correction** One of the five underlined words or phrases is not correct. Find the error and correct it. Be prepared to explain your answer.

6. According to film critics, there are several reasons why fans love the *Star Wars* films.  
One reason is the portrayal of the main characters. The other has been the conflict between the characters. Finally, fans are very happy with the actors.
7. The idea of the power of positive thinking is around for decades. Basically, positive thinking involves thinking good thoughts. Using positive thinking leads to pleasant feelings. These thoughts help both the psychological and physical self.
8. The Druze people is a religious group in the Middle East. Even though their numbers are small, their community has banded together for centuries. Although there are communities in other countries, most are in Lebanon.



The sun rises over the Arno River in Florence, Italy.

## ACTIVITY 8 Building Greater Sentences

Combine these short sentences into one sentence. You can add new words and move words around, but you should not add or omit any ideas. More than one answer is possible, but these sentences require the simple present. (See Appendix 1, Building Greater Sentences, page 216, for tips on how to do this activity.)

1. a. Florence is a city.  
b. Florence is an Italian city.  
c. Florence is famous.  
d. It is the birthplace of the Renaissance.

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2. a. The U.S. Constitution is a document.  
b. It is fairly long.  
c. It is easy to understand.

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3. a. Music therapy is helpful.  
b. Music therapy helps people.  
c. These people have depression.  
d. Research has shown this.

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## ACTIVITY 9 Steps to Composing

Read the paragraph. Then follow the directions in the 10 steps to edit the information and composition of this paragraph. Write your revised paragraph on a separate sheet of paper. Be careful with capitalization and punctuation. Check your answers with the class.

### DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH

#### The Human Heart

<sup>1</sup>The human heart is an amazing organ. <sup>2</sup>It is responsible for pushing blood inside the circulatory system. <sup>3</sup>The left side of the heart pumps blood to the entire body. <sup>4</sup>The right side pumps blood to the lungs to receive oxygen. <sup>5</sup>Our lungs do two things: they receive oxygen when we inhale and remove carbon dioxide when we exhale. <sup>6</sup>Inside the lungs, the respiratory system interacts with the circulatory system. <sup>7</sup>Then the blood moves to the right side of the heart into a filling chamber, which is called the right atrium. <sup>8</sup>With each individual heartbeat, blood moves from the right atrium into a pumping chamber. <sup>9</sup>After that, the blood picks up oxygen. <sup>10</sup>Once the blood picks up oxygen, it pushes back to the heart, filling another chamber, which is called the left atrium. <sup>11</sup>Doctors want to expand their research into the blood circulation of the heart in order to have a better understanding of both the heart and the blood that pumps through our veins. <sup>12</sup>The functions of the heart are truly amazing.

1. In sentence 1, change *an* to *probably the most*.
2. In sentence 2, change *it* to *this organ*.
3. In sentence 2, change the word *inside* to *throughout*.
4. Combine sentences 3 and 4 using *while*. Make any other necessary changes.
5. In sentence 5, change *our lungs* to *each lung*.
6. In sentence 6, change the *respiratory system* to *individuals' respiratory systems*.
7. In sentence 7, change *moves* to *flows*. We usually use this verb when referring to blood.
8. In sentence 10, the phrasal verb *picks up* is repetitive. Change *picks up* to *collects*.

9. Sentence 11 ends with the phrase *in order to have a better understanding of both the heart and the blood that pumps through our veins*. Move this phrase to the beginning of the sentence to improve sentence variety. Pay attention to punctuation.
10. In sentence 12, change the phrase *the functions of the heart* to *the way the heart functions*.

## ACTIVITY 10 Original Writing

On a separate sheet of paper, write a descriptive paragraph (at least six sentences) about the characteristics of a particular person or thing. Use at least two examples of the simple present and one example of present perfect, and underline them.

Here are some examples of how to begin.

- *A good leader possesses three main characteristics.*
- *In order to be a successful student, one should do three things.*
- *A smart phone has several important functions.*