Present Tenses

CEFR C2 · The present at the limits: aspectual nuance, corpus, style and voice

WS1 Aspect, Coercion & Boundaries · WS2 Corpus, Register & Variation · WS3 Style, Voice & Tense-Shifting · WS4 Scholarly Analysis & Writing · Answer Key

Worksheet 1: Aspect, Coercion & Boundaries

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: When Aspect and Aktionsart Collide

A verb's inherent **Aktionsart** (state, activity, accomplishment, achievement) interacts with grammatical **aspect**. Putting a stative or punctual verb in the progressive **coerces** a new reading — iterative, ingressive, temporary, or vivid. The present perfect's compatibility with adverbials exposes its "extended-now" semantics and the so-called *present-perfect puzzle* (why **I have seen him yesterday* is barred in Standard English).

Aktionsart	Coerced in progressive → reading	Example
State	temporary / dynamic	I'**m understanding** more each day. (process)
Achievement (punctual)	iterative or ingressive	The bus '**s stopping**. (about to)
State (perception)	deliberate activity	You'**re seeing** things. (imagining)
Perfect + definite past	blocked in StE	*I have seen him yesterday. → I saw him…

Part A – Theoretical Analysis

1. Explain, in terms of **aspectual coercion**, why "I'm loving it" is felt as marked/temporary while "I love it" is neutral — and why the marked form has nonetheless spread.
2. State the **present-perfect puzzle**: why does English bar "*I have arrived yesterday" while "I have arrived" and "I arrived yesterday" are both fine? Frame your answer using the "extended now" (the perfect locates an event within a period that includes speech time).
3. "The train leaves at nine" (scheduled future) uses the present simple, but "*The train is leaving at nine tomorrow" is fine while "*The train leaves right now" (as live commentary) is odd for an in-progress event. Account for the division of labour between simple and progressive here.

Score: _____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Corpus, Register & Variation

Name: _____ *Date:* _____ *Level: C2 (CEFR)*

Reference: What Corpora Show About the Present

Corpora reveal that the progressive has expanded over recent centuries, especially with stative verbs and in informal registers; that the present perfect is more frequent in BrE than AmE, where the past simple encroaches (*already/just/yet* with the preterite); and that the historic present clusters in oral narrative and sports commentary. Register, dialect and mode each leave a measurable fingerprint.

Pattern	Corpus tendency
stative progressives	rising; informal; brand/idiom (*I'm loving it*)
perfect vs preterite	BrE favours perfect; AmE admits preterite with *yet/already*
historic present	oral storytelling, commentary, jokes, plot summary
be being + adj	temporary behaviour; more common in speech
performatives	legal, ceremonial, explicit-speech-act registers

Part A – Diagnose from the Syntax/Register

#	Sentence	Register / variety & evidence
1	"Did you finish the report yet?"	
2	"And he picks it up, he turns, he scores!"	
3	"We are not currently anticipating delays."	
4	"I'm not understanding your point."	

Part B – Standardise / Localise

Give the more formal/BrE-standard variant and the informal/AmE variant.

1. hot-news event, BrE: _____ / AmE: _____
2. stative verb, neutral vs marked-informal: _____

Part C – Register-Corpus Map

Place each in its most likely corpus: *hereby resolves · is being difficult · has just resigned · walks in and goes · leaves at 09:15 · already left*

Corpus	Forms
Legal / ceremonial	
Journalism (BrE)	
Oral narrative / commentary	
Timetable / technical	

Informal / AmE spoken	

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: Style, Voice & Tense-Shifting

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Reference: The Present as a Stylistic Instrument

Skilled writers shift between present and past for effect: the historic present injects immediacy; a sudden switch to the past can mark closure or distance; the "prophetic" or gnomic present universalises; free indirect style blends a character's present-tense consciousness with narration. Control — legibility of the shift and recoverability of the norm — is the C2 mark.

Effect	Device	Example
Immediacy	historic present	She opens the letter. Her hands shake.
Closure / distance	shift to past	…and then, quite simply, it ended.
Universalising	gnomic present	Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.
Consciousness	free indirect present	What now? She has to decide, and fast.
Suspense	progressive	The clock is ticking; no one is moving.

Part A – Name the Effect

1. "History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes." _____
2. "He steps onto the stage. The lights dim. This is it." _____
3. "For years they searched. Then, one winter, they stopped." _____
4. "She's smiling now, but is she really happy? Who knows." _____

Part B – Shift with Control

Rewrite each, introducing a deliberate tense-shift for the effect named; note the recoverable norm.

#	Neutral (past)	Shifted version + effect
1	He walked in and everyone fell silent. (→ historic present for drama)	
2	They celebrated all night, and eventually the party ended. (→ shift to past for closure)	
3	The truth is that power changes people. (→ gnomic present, aphoristic)	

Part C – Pastiche

Write a short paragraph (4–5 sentences) that opens in the historic present for immediacy, then shifts to the past simple for closure. Annotate the shift point and its effect in a line beneath.

#	Line

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6	

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Scholarly Analysis & Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: C2 (CEFR)

Part A – Critical Text Analysis

> Tense, we say, marks time; and yet the English present marks almost everything but. It reports the timeless — water boils, markets clear, the heart wants what it wants. It resurrects the past in the mouths of storytellers, who know that "he turns and he sees her" outruns any preterite. It even colonises the future, where a timetable insists the train departs at noon regardless of the hour. What, then, does the "present" present? Not time, exactly, but presence: the speaker's claim that a thing is so, vividly, now, before us — a claim the perfect complicates by folding the past into that same now, and the progressive by holding the moment open, unfinished, still becoming.

1. Classify every present form in the passage (deictic, gnomic/generic, historic, scheduled-future, perfect, progressive) and justify each classification.
2. "the heart wants what it wants" is gnomic. Analyse how the present simple universalises, and why the past would fail here.
3. The final sentence claims the perfect "folds the past into… now" and the progressive "holds the moment open". Evaluate these aspectual characterisations against a formal account (e.g. extended-now for the perfect; imperfective/unbounded for the progressive).
4. Assess the passage's own tense management as rhetoric: how does its shifting use of the present enact its thesis?

Part B – Extended Scholarly Writing

Write the opening two paragraphs (220–260 words) of a scholarly essay on: "The English present is defined less by time than by aspect and stance." Requirements — include and underline: (1) one **gnomic/generic present**; (2) one **historic present**; (3) one present form with **future** reference; (4) one precise **aspectual term** (imperfective, telic, stative, extended-now, coercion) used correctly; (5) two **epistemic hedges** calibrated to each claim; (6) one **conjunct** that maps the argument's logic precisely.

#	Line
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Features: _____ / 6 Word count: _____ Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — C2 Level, Present Tenses

Worksheet 1 – Part A (model)

1 "love" is stative, so the progressive coerces a bounded, temporary, experiential reading ("enjoying right now"); this marked nuance suited advertising and informal speech, and frequent exposure (brand slogans, social media) normalised it — a case of a marked form spreading by usage. · 2 The perfect places the event within an "extended now" — a period stretching up to and including speech time; a definite past adverbial like *yesterday* denotes a span excluded from now, so it clashes with the perfect's now-inclusive frame. Bare "I have arrived" is fine (no clashing adverbial); "I arrived yesterday" is fine (preterite + past adverbial). · 3 Scheduled events are treated as fixed facts → present simple (timetable). Live, in-progress events are unbounded/imperfective → progressive ("the bus is stopping"). A punctual/settled schedule resists the progressive for the "now" reading; a genuinely unfolding event resists the simple.

Worksheet 2 – Part A (model)

1 AmE informal — preterite with *yet* ("Did you finish… yet?"). · 2 sports commentary / oral narrative — historic present sequence. · 3 corporate/formal — progressive + hedging *currently*, agentless caution. · 4 informal/marked — stative *understand* in the progressive.

Worksheet 2 – Part B (model)

1 BrE: "They've just resigned." / AmE: "They just resigned." · 2 neutral "I understand" vs marked-informal "I'm understanding (more and more)".

Worksheet 2 – Part C

Legal/ceremonial: hereby resolves. · Journalism (BrE): has just resigned. · Oral narrative/commentary: walks in and goes. · Timetable/technical: leaves at 09:15. · Informal/AmE spoken: already left. (*is being difficult* also fits informal speech.)

Worksheet 3 – Part A

1 gnomic/aphoristic present · 2 historic present (immediacy/suspense) · 3 shift to past for closure · 4 free indirect present (consciousness).

Worksheet 3 – Part B (model)

1 He walks in and everyone falls silent. (norm: past narration) · 2 They celebrate all night; then, at last, the party ended. (shift marks closure) · 3 Power changes people. (gnomic generalisation of a specific claim).

Assess intentionality: the shift must be legible and the unmarked tense recoverable. A tense that wobbles without effect is an error, not a device.

Worksheet 4 – Part A (model)

1 "marks", "reports", "resurrects", "colonises" (deictic/generic authorial present); "water boils, markets clear, the heart wants" (gnomic/generic); "he turns and he sees her" (historic); "the train departs at noon" (scheduled future); "the perfect complicates", "folding" — the perfect referenced; "holding the moment open… still becoming" (progressive/imperfective). · 2 The simple present states a timeless generalisation with no reference time; the past ("the heart wanted") would pin it to a particular occasion and destroy the universal, proverbial force. · 3 A sound answer maps "folds the past into now" onto the extended-now/current-relevance analysis of the perfect, and "holds the moment open, unfinished" onto imperfective/unbounded aspect — noting the characterisations are impressionistic but broadly consistent with the formal accounts. · 4 The passage practises its

thesis: it uses generic, historic and scheduled-future presents in turn, so its own prose demonstrates the present doing "everything but" mark present time.

Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Rubric

Criterion	Descriptor at C2	Marks
Gnomic present	Universalising use, precise	0–6
Historic present	Vivid narration, controlled shift	0–5
Future reference	Present form with future meaning, correct	0–5
Aspectual accuracy	Term used correctly, no overclaiming	0–5
Epistemic calibration	Two hedges matched to claim strength	0–5
Argument & length	220–260 words; contestable claim developed	0–5

The C2 benchmark is conscious orchestration: a student who switches into the historic present and can explain, in a footnote, why immediacy serves the point has demonstrated mastery. Aspectual choices a native reader would not notice straining are the final target.