The English tenses

Language level:	Elementary to Intermediate (A2-B1)
Learner type:	Young learners; Teens; Adults
Time:	25 minutes
Activity:	Writing sentences
Topic:	Grammar
Language:	The tenses
Materials:	None

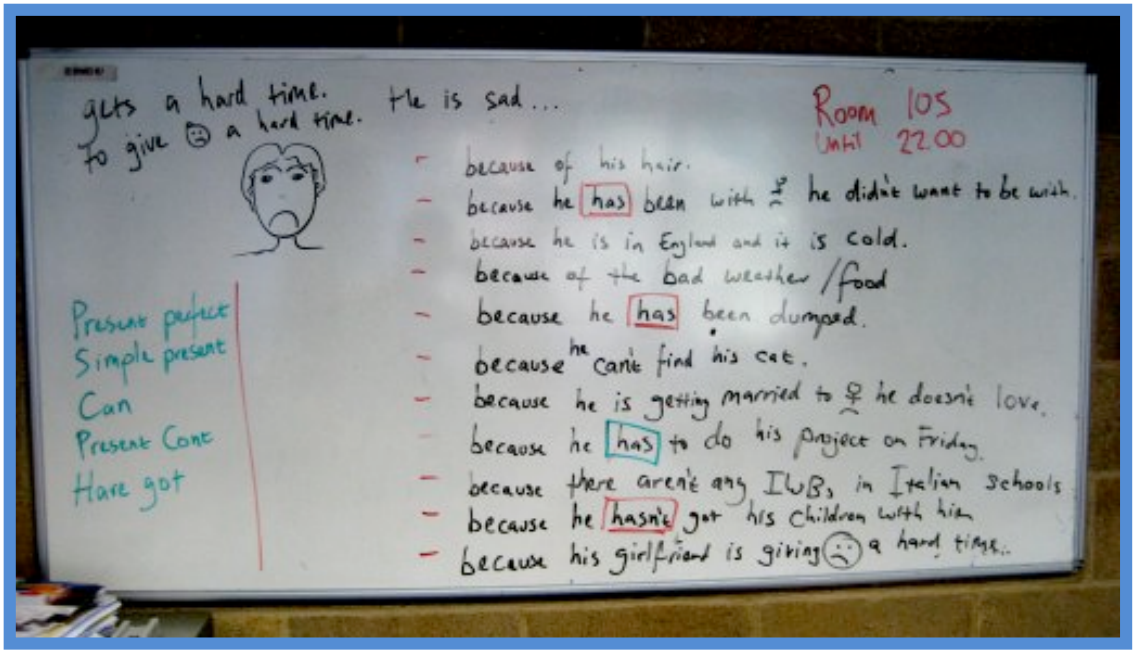
Lesson plan

1. Ask a volunteer students to draw a picture of an unhappy person on the board.

2. Ask your students to give the unhappy person a name and invent details about his or her lifestyle. Ask questions such as: What does he/she do? Where does he/she live? Is he/she married? Etc.

3. Elicit as many reasons as possible from your students to explain why the person is unhappy. Write these on the board. You can make suggestions too. Make sure you get a sentence for each of the following:

- **To be** (e.g. *… because it's Sunday night*)
- **The present tense** (e.g. *… he has to go to work tomorrow*)
- **Present continuous** (e.g. *… it's raining / his girlfriend is giving him a hard time*)
- **Present perfect** (e.g. *… he has lost his cat / he has been dumped*)
- **Will/won't** (e.g. *… his vegetarian wife won't let him eat sausages*)
- **Can/can't** (e.g. *… he can't afford to go on holiday*)
- **Has got** (e.g. *… he's got toothache*)



4. Ask your students to copy the sentences (if they haven't already done so) and then rub the board clean, but leave the unhappy face intact.

5. Now ask your students if they believe in time travel. Tell them that everyone is going to travel exactly one year into the future. Rub out your unhappy person's sad mouth and replace it with a happy one.

Happy Barry

6. Ask your students to close their books and recall (from memory) all the reasons why the person was unhappy a year ago. Write these on the board with the altered language. For example:

- *It was Sunday night*
- *He had to go to work the next day (but he's on holiday at the moment).*
- *It was raining (but now it's sunny).*
- *He had lost his cat (but he found it again).*
- *His vegetarian wife wouldn't let him eat sausages (but they got divorced).*
- *He couldn't afford to go on holiday (but now he's rich).*
- *He had a headache (but he feels great now).*

7. Finally, ask your students to describe the grammatical changes that took place during the transition. Write these on the board (see next page).

Present simple	→	**Past simple**
Present continuous	→	**Past continuous**
Present perfect	→	**Past perfect**
Will	→	**Would**
Can	→	**Could**
Have got	→	**Had**

Follow ups

- Ask students to write a story about the character. What has he been doing during the last year? Why is he so happy?
- Make a note of all the language that arose by photographing the whiteboard. You will then be able to make gap fills or other exercises for students to revise the points in question.

Variation

After step 2, ask students to recall and write down all the questions you asked about the unhappy person.

Comment

English teachers are sometimes asked why the Present Perfect is called the *Present* Perfect when it refers to things that happened in the past. Hopefully, this activity answers that question: Those past actions have an immediate and direct effect on a present state. In this case, Barry is unhappy (now) because:

- He's been fired.
- His dog's been run over.
- He's been arrested for a crime he didn't commit (so he says.)

During the second part of the activity, students are able to compare the Present and Past Perfect, and perhaps this can clarify things further.