

Special uses of the simple present tense

We have already learned that the simple present tense is used to talk about habits and long lasting situations. In a few cases, this tense form is also used to talk about the future. For example, the simple present tense can be used to talk about scheduled future events.

Dad's train arrives at 3.30.

The next semester begins in June.

Simple present tense in subordinate clauses

The simple present tense is used to talk about the future in subordinate time clauses introduced by conjunctions such as when, before, after, as soon as etc.

I will give you a call when I am ready. (NOT I will give you a call when I will be ready.)

You will have to finish that report before you leave. (NOT You will have to finish that report before you will leave.)

We will dispatch the material as soon as we receive the payment. (NOT We will dispatch the material as soon as we will receive the payment.)

Note that this construction has the same structure as the First Conditional. In the First Conditional, too, we use a future tense (usually simple future) in the main clause and a simple present tense in the subordinate clause introduced by if.

I will make a cake if I have time. (NOT I will make a cake if I will have time.)

Simple present tense in timelines

In timelines the simple present tense is often used to talk about events that took place in the past.

1847 Edison is born in Milan on February 11.

1854 His family moves to Port Huron, Michigan.

1859 Edison gets a job as a train boy on the Grand Trunk Railroad where he sells newspapers and candy. He sets up a chemistry lab and a printing press on the train.

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Note that the simple present tense is used in this timeline even though the events took place more than 150 years ago.