

LESSON 1

Time and Aspect of the Indicative Mood

1.1. Tense

Tense may be regarded as the combination of the Time and Aspect of a Greek verb. In classical usage, there are three Times—Present, Past, Future—and three Aspects—Imperfect, Perfect, Aorist.

The main functions of the Aspects are as follows:

- Imperfect expresses continuous or repeated action.
- Perfect expresses completed action or the state resulting from completed action.
- Aorist expresses momentary action or sums up a whole period as a single action.
- Aspect is not inherent in an action but expresses the point of view of the speaker or writer.

(Palmer regards ‘durative’ as an inadequate description of the function of the Imperfect Aspect and prefers to think of it as the ‘eye-witness aspect’.)

The combination of three Times and Aspects would give a theoretical nine Tenses. But Greek does not have separate forms for each of the nine theoretical possibilities.

1.2. Forms and Functions

By way of illustration, the first person singular forms of the Indicative Active are given in the following list. The Active Voice of $\pi\alpha\upsilon\epsilon\iota\nu$ is normally used transitively (i.e. with a direct Object).

1.2.1. Present Time

Present

παύω	<i>I am stopping</i>
	<i>I stop (repeatedly or regularly)</i>

This Tense form is properly Present Imperfect. However, there is no separate form for Present Aorist. So παύω also covers the meaning ‘I stop’ (momentarily), and the Tense is usually called simply ‘Present’. The Aorist function of the Present is most obvious in the Historic Present usage, where a Present Indicative vividly expresses a past action.

Present Perfect

πέπαυκα	<i>I have stopped</i>
---------	-----------------------

It is generally agreed that, at the earliest stage of its development, the Perfect Aspect expressed a state resulting from previous action. In the classical period, this is especially noticeable with the Present Perfect forms of certain verbs used with Present meaning, for example: οἶδα, ‘I have come to know’, hence ‘I know’; or ἔστηκα, ‘I have taken my stand’, hence ‘I am standing’. By the later classical period, the emphasis on *completed action* had become more prominent and new Perfect forms with this resultative force were invented. But this emphasis had declined again by the first century CE. The Present Perfect and the Past Aorist Indicatives became increasingly interchangeable during the first three centuries CE. By the fourth century CE, the Present Perfect had been superseded by the Present (replacing its stative force) and by the Past Aorist (replacing its resultative force).

1.2.2. Past Time

In the classical period, all three Past Tenses were marked by the augment ε and had endings different to the Present and Future Tenses. Verbs with an initial short vowel in the Present Tense (e.g. ἵκετεύω with short ι) regularly lengthened the vowel in Past Tenses (ἵκέτευον, ἵκέτευσα with long ι).

Past Imperfect

ἔπαυον	<i>I was stopping, I used to stop</i>
--------	---------------------------------------

Past Perfect

ἔπεπαύκη	<i>I had stopped</i>
ἤδη	<i>I had come to know, (hence) I knew</i>
εἰστήκη	<i>I had stood, (hence) I was standing</i>

Past Aorist

ἔπαυσα	<i>I stopped</i>
ἔπολέμησα	<i>I fought</i>

‘Stopping’ is by nature a momentary action. ‘Fighting’ a battle or a war is by nature a continuous action. In the following passage, neither the composition of the account of the Peloponnesian war nor the actual fighting of the war was a momentary action. But both actions are summed up by the complexive use of the Past Aorist Indicatives (ξυνέγραψε, ἐπολέμησαν).

Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος συνέγραψε τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων, ὡς ἐπολέμησαν πρὸς ἀλλήλους ... (Th. 1.1.1.)

Thucydides the Athenian wrote an account of the war of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians, how they fought against each other ...

1.2.3. Future Time**Future**

παύσω	<i>I shall stop (Aor. Aspect)</i>
	<i>I shall be stopping (Imperf. Aspect)</i>

There are not separate forms for Future Imperfect and Future Aorist. The Future is primarily Aoristic in function. Some scholars explain the Future Indicative as derived from an Aorist Subjunctive with a sigma suffix. παύσω is an ambivalent form: ‘I shall stop’ (Fut. Indic.); ‘I am to stop’, ‘let me stop’ (Aor. Subj.). Palmer (1980) prefers to explain the

Future as a desiderative Mood in origin. Alternatively, the Future could be regarded as an Intensive Aspect in function. (Cf. the other common English idiom for expressing futurity: ‘I am going to stop’.)

Future Perfect

πεπαύξω	<i>I shall have stopped</i>
πεπαυκῶς ἔσομαι	<i>I shall have stopped</i> (periphrastic, the usual form)

Actual forms of the Future Perfect Active are rare; they occur especially in two verbs that are regularly used in the Perfect with an Imperfect meaning.

ἔστηξω	<i>I shall have stood, (hence) I shall stand</i>
τεθνήξω	<i>I shall have died, (hence) I shall be dead</i>

Those verbs that form a regular Future Perfect Middle/Passive mostly prefer *either* a Middle *or* a Passive meaning. The Passive meaning is more common.

Emphatic reduplicated Futures such as δεδέξομαι ‘I shall certainly receive’ (Hom.*Il.* 5.238) constituted a model for the formation of Future Perfects from the Present Perfect base. Conversely, Future Perfect forms can sometimes be translated appropriately as emphatic Futures.

1.3. Time and Aspect (Summary)

	Aspect		
Time	Imperfect	Perfect	Aorist
Present	παύω	πέπαυκα	(παύω)
	<i>I am stopping</i>	<i>I have stopped</i>	<i>I stop</i>
Past	ἔπαυον	ἔπεπαύκη	ἔπαυσα
	<i>I was stopping</i>	<i>I had stopped</i>	<i>I stopped</i>
Future	(παύσω)	πεπαύξω	παύσω
	<i>I shall be stopping</i>	πεπαυκῶς ἔσομαι <i>I shall have stopped</i>	<i>I shall stop</i>

In the Lessons and Exercises, the following terminology will be used for the Tenses of the Indicative Mood (Cf. Masterman, 1962, 76).

παύω	Present
πέπαυκα	Present Perfect
ἔπαυον	Past Imperfect
ἔπεπαύκη	Past Perfect
ἔπαυσα	Past Aorist
παύσω	Future
πεπαύξω	Future Perfect
πεπαυκῶς ἔσομαι	Future Perfect (periphrastic)

References

Goodwin (1889), *Syntax of the moods and tenses of the Greek verb*, §§19–84.

Masterman (1962), On grammatical terminology and aspect in particular, *Greece and Rome*, 9, 72–86.

Palmer (1980), *The Greek language*, pp. 261, 292–307, 310–311.

Smyth (1956), *Greek grammar*, §§355–380, 1850–1858, 1875–1965.

EXERCISE 1

Translate the following passages into English or Greek as appropriate, giving particular attention to the Time and Aspect of the Indicative verbs.

- αἰτοῦμαι οὖν ὑμᾶς, ὦ ἄνδρες, εὐνοίαν πλείω παρασχέσθαι ἐμοὶ τῷ ἀπολογουμένῳ ἢ τοῖς κατηγοροῖς ...

αἰτεῖν (Act. and Mid.)	<i>to ask, to request</i>
εὐνοία, -ας, ἡ	<i>goodwill</i>
παρέχεσθαι (Mid.)	<i>to show, to display</i>
ἀπολογεῖσθαι (Mid.)	<i>to defend</i>
κατήγορος, -ου, ὁ	<i>accuser</i>

2. τὰ μὲν γεινόμενα ἠκούσατε, ὦ ἄνδρες, καὶ ὑμῖν οἱ μάρτυρες μεμαρτυρήκασιν·

μὲν	Anticipates a following δέ and should not be translated.
μαρτυρεῖν	<i>to testify (to)</i> (+ Dat.)

3. μετὰ δὲ τὴν δευτέραν ἐσβολὴν τῶν Πελοποννησίων οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι, ὡς ἢ τε γῆ αὐτῶν ἐτέτμητο τὸ δεύτερον καὶ ἢ νόσος ἐπέκειτο ἅμα καὶ ὁ πόλεμος, ἠλλοίωnton τὰς γνώμας ...

δευτέρος, -α, -ον	<i>second</i>
ἐσβολή, -ῆς, ἡ	<i>invasion</i>
ὡς	<i>as</i> (Temporal + Causal)
τε	Anticipates the following καί and should not be translated.
τέμνειν	<i>to ravage</i>
νόσος, -ου, ἡ	<i>plague</i>
ἐπικεῖσθαι (Mid.)	<i>to have been laid upon</i> (The Imperf. Mid. is equivalent to the Perf. Pass. of ἐπιτιθέσθαι.)
ἅμα καὶ	<i>at the same time as</i>
ἠλλοιούω	<i>to change</i> (here Pass. + Acc. of Respect)
γνώμη, -ης, ἡ	<i>attitude</i>

4. οὐ μόνον ἐγὼ ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ πατήρ δόξει ἄδικος εἶναι καὶ τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων στερήσομαι.

δοκεῖν	<i>to seem</i>
ὄντα, -ων, τὰ	<i>possessions, property</i> (Partc.)
στερεῖν	<i>to deprive</i> (here Fut. Mid. in Pass. sense)

5. καὶ μάχη τῇ μὲν πρώτῃ νικᾶται ὑφ' ἡμῶν, τῇ δ' ὑστεραία ἵππευσί τε πολλοῖς καὶ ἀκοντισταῖς βιασθέντες ἀνεχωρήσαμεν ἐς τὰ τεῖχη.

μάχη, -ης, ἡ	<i>battle</i>
μὲν	Cf. 2 above

νικᾶν	to beat, to defeat
ὑπεραῖος, -α, -ον	<i>next</i>
ἵππεύς, -έως, ὅ	<i>horseman; (pl.) cavalry</i> (here personal Dat. of Means)
τε	Cf. 3 above
ἀκοντιστής, -οῦ, ὅ	<i>javelin-thrower</i>
βιάζειν	<i>to overpower</i>
ἀναχωρεῖν	<i>to withdraw</i> (Intr.)
ἔς	<i>inside, within</i> (+ Acc. of motion)
τείχος, -ους, τό	<i>fortification</i>

6. πλεῖστον δῆ, οἶμαι, ἀληθοῦς ἡδονῆς καὶ οἰκείας ὁ τύραννος ἀφεστήξει, ὁ δὲ ὀλίγιστον.

πλεῖστον (neut. Acc.)	<i>most</i> (i.e. <i>furthest</i>) (adv.)
δῆ	<i>so, therefore</i>
οἰκεῖος, -α, -ον	<i>genuine</i>
τύρανος, -ου, ὅ	<i>absolute ruler</i>
ὁ δέ	<i>and he</i> (referring to the philosopher-king)
ὀλίγιστον (neut. Acc.)	<i>least</i> (i.e. <i>least far away</i>)

7. And yet what was I intending, if I informed against my father, as these [men] say, but was entreating my father to stay and suffer something from me?

<i>and yet</i>	καίτοι
<i>to intend</i>	βούλεσθαι
<i>to inform against</i> [men]	μηνύειν κατὰ (+ Gen.) Words in square brackets need not be translated.
<i>to entreat</i>	ἵκετεύειν (+ Acc. and Infin.)
<i>to stay</i>	μένειν
<i>to suffer</i>	πάσχειν
<i>from</i>	ὑπό (+ Gen.)

This text is taken from *Intermediate Ancient Greek Language*,
by Darryl Palmer, published 2021 by ANU Press, The Australian
National University, Canberra, Australia.