

## Nuance of Tense in Present Indicative Greek Verbs

Grammarians classify nuances of tense in present indicative Greek verbs using a variety of descriptive, technical labels. The grammars differ in the details. The list below is a collection from several intermediate and advanced Greek reference grammars. It is important to note that these categories derive from usage and context; they do not exist because of some preset grammatical rule or principle. Thus, nuance of tense is identified in any particular case *only* by the nature of the verbal idea and contextual factors. In some cases it is also quite possible that the verbal idea and context allow for interpretation in more than one category. In such cases translations and commentaries may differ in their treatment of the tense nuance.

- 1. Descriptive present;** action going on at the present time, generally to be translated by the **progressive** (periphrastic = form of “to be” plus verb) form in English.  
1 John 2:8: and the true light already *is shining*.  
Matt 8:25: Lord, save! We *are perishing*!
- 2. Progressive present; Present of past and present combined;** action begun in the past and continuing into the present.  
John 15:27: *You have been* with me from the beginning. (Lit. You *are* with me...).  
Luke 15:29: all these years *I have been serving you*. (Lit. I *serve/am serving* you)
- 3. Simple “Point” present;** no idea of duration or continuance; **Aoristic** present.  
Matt 5:22: everyone who *is angry* with his brother shall be guilty before the court.
- 4. Present of customary action;** not necessarily action occurring at the immediate present; action that habitually occurs or may be reasonably expected to occur.  
Heb 3:4: For every house *is built* by some one.
- 5. Iterative present;** expresses action that recurs at successive intervals; present of repeated action.  
Luke 18:12: *I fast* twice a week.
- 6. Present of general truth;** expresses an action true for all time, used in generalizations; **Gnomic** or **Proverbial** present.  
John 7:52: Search, and see that no prophet *arises* out of Galilee.
- 7. Conative present;** action begun, attempted, or intended; **Inceptive**, **Volitive**, or **Tendential** present.  
John 10:32: I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them *are you stoning Me*?
- 8. Present of anticipation; Present for future;** used when a future event is thought of as certain, or near certain, to occur; especially prevalent in prophecy. (In Classical Greek, **Oracular** present).  
John 14:28: *I am going away* and *am coming* to you (i.e. I will go and will come).  
1 Cor 16:5: ...for *I am going through* Macedonia. (See verse 8!)
- 9. Historical present;** used when a past event is viewed with the vividness of a present occurrence; found often in Mark. (Related to this nuance in Classical Greek is the **Annalistic** present, used to report historical facts or incidents).  
Mark 14:17: And when it was evening, *he comes* with the twelve.
- 10. Present in reported speech referring to past;** similar to Historical present.  
Matt 2:22: But when he heard that Archelaus *was reigning* over Judea... (Lit. *reigns*)
- 11. Present for perfect**  
1 Cor 11:18: *I hear* that there are divisions among you.