

Extension exercises

Chapter 13: The present | Comments

Exploring English

Responses to this question will probably depend on who you speak to and what they talk about. You may find that it is not always immediately clear why the speaker chooses one tense rather than another. You may also find that the explanations you arrive at may challenge some of the 'simpler' rules of thumb we teach in the initial stages of learning. Depending on who you speak to, you might also come across non-standard forms (for example, **I speaks*, **He don't like ...*, **We ain't going ...*).

Course materials

Responses to this question will depend on the materials you choose and will probably be affected by:

- the quality of the materials.
- the levels they are intended for and the assumptions that they make about what the learners already know.
- the first language background of the learners they are intended for (for example materials produced for Brazil might be influenced by the fact that Brazilian Portuguese has a form like the present continuous, which is also quite similar to it in meaning).

At lower levels, it is probably inappropriate for materials to teach more than one use of a particular form at a time. At higher levels the material may present useful exercises in which learners identify and account for the uses of different forms in context.

The rules of thumb given to learners vary both in terms of how accurate they are, and how much they have been simplified. For example, the present perfect is sometimes treated in materials as though it is an intermediate tense between present and past, with only one use. In some cases you may feel you would want to be more (or less) precise than the material is.

Materials vary considerably in terms of the texts and examples which are used and the opportunities they provide for practice. These differences often reflect different cultural values (for example, whether or not 'discovery learning' is considered useful and appropriate), as well as the reasons people are learning English (for example, if it is primarily to pass an examination which doesn't require speaking or writing, practice may be restricted to very controlled exercises).