

The Romans and time relationships

To the Romans, time was a relationship, not a static thing. The Romans saw it as a reflection of what was going on at a particular moment, and how that moment interacted with other moments. We, however, think of time as a commodity: we gain time, lose time, spend time, waste time, buy time, etc. We are more likely to see it as static, where something happens, and then another thing happens, and while they might be related, the tenses we use are less involved.

So how can you teach indirect statement/discourse, if our concept is so far from the Romans? It's easy if you omit the present infinitive! (Of course, you can't do that.) After all, the perfect infinitive naturally belongs in the past (rough statement: you can always translate the perfect infinitive as "had xed") and the future infinitive is always in the future. It's the present that confuses students, since it happens at the same time as the main verb.

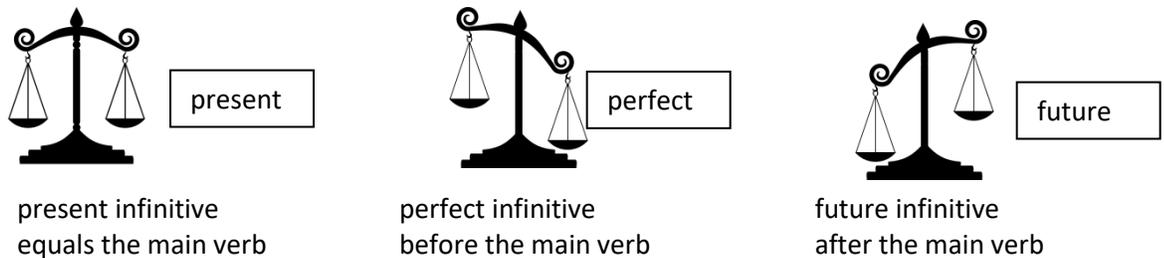
So here are some ideas about how to present the concept of the time and the sequence of tenses. I have used them all at one time or another, so they are "student tested." They are in no particular order; pick and choose as seems best to you.

1. chart

main verb	subordinate verb = infinitive
same time as main verb	present
before/prior time	perfect
later/after	future

This is the old standard, and does leave something to be desired, as you need to explain it carefully.

2. seesaw/scale



3. emotional

The present infinitive is very agreeable and will go along with whatever the main verb wants.

The perfect infinitive is perfectly happy to live in the past.

The future infinitive always looks ahead to the future.

4. physical

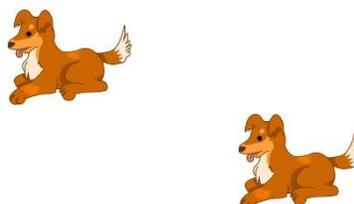
Take 2 stuffed animals (or if your school has a mascot, use 2 of them) and hold one in each hand.

As you give examples of the sentences, move the animals so the students see that the

present: both animals are equal/level



perfect: second animal is lower than the first, or moved back from the first



future: second animal is higher/ahead of the first



5. physical/motion

Take 3 students and make one the present, one the perfect (haha) and one the future.

On the board, put a time line (because this is what they understand).

As you give examples of sentences with time relationships, move the students along the time line.

Or: put the perfect student in the past corner of the room, the present student in front of the room and the future student out the door, or in the other corner, etc.

One of these will work!