

Perfective / Imperfective Verbs

You may have noticed by looking through your 501 Verbs book that there are two forms of verbs: Perfective & Imperfective. What does that mean? Don't worry, it is easy! Use the following examples to learn how to use these verbs correctly.

Perfective verbs: An action will be completed or has been completed. Used in future and past tenses.

Imperfective verbs: An action is done on a regular basis, progressively, or is currently being done. It hasn't yet or doesn't come to completion. Used in present and past tense.

Imperfective

Perfective

I read (present) the Bible. / Я читаю Библию. You read the Bible on a regular basis, not only once then stop, it is a progressive action. It is imperfective present tense.	I will read the magazine. / Я прочитаю журнал. You will read the magazine once in it's entirety, but you will not keep reading it continuously. It is perfective future tense.
I read (past) the Bible. / Я читала Библию. You read the Bible in the past regularly, but sadly you stopped. It is imperfective past tense.	I read (past) the magazine. / Я прочитала журнал. You read the magazine, the action has been completed entirely. It is perfective past tense.

We speak Russian. / Мы говорим по русски. We speak Russian on a regular/progressive basis, not only once. It is imperfective, present tense.	We will speak today. / Мы поговорим сегодня. We will speak with each other today/have a conversation and finish it. It is perfective, future tense.
We spoke Russian. / Мы говорили по русски. We spoke Russian on a regular/progressive basis, not only once. It is imperfective, past tense.	We spoke today. / Мы поговорили сегодня. We spoke with each other today and finished our conversation. It is perfective past, tense .

Imperfective & Present Tense

I read (present) the Bible. / Я читаю Библию. I am reading the Bible right now. Present tense is always in the imperfective form. It is imperfective, present tense.	I am reading the magazine. / Я читаю журнал. I am reading the magazine right now. Present tense is always in the imperfective form. It is imperfective, present tense.
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Other languages use the concept of perfective and imperfective verbs and it makes a lot of sense. A good example of this can be found in the Reference Bible - Genesis 1:1, 21 - and the information the footnote of verse 21 references (Appendix 3C). You will notice that the verb "create" is used in both the perfective and imperfective states.

In English our actions are understood to be perfective or imperfective based on the context of our conversation, however sometimes, certain thoughts are more clear in Russian because this concept is used, the meaning is explained in a more precise manner. You will notice this in time.