

Czech Verbs

In English, we have lots of tenses, which have to do with when an action takes place (or took place or will take place, etc.). Often these tenses work together to place one event in context with another event, relative to it. Take a look at all these possible tenses (maybe there are more) in English:

PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
I did	I do	I will do
I was doing	I am doing	I will be doing
I have done		I will have done
I had done		I will be doing
I have been doing		I'm going to do/I'm gonna do
I had been doing		I'm fixin' to do/I'm about to do
I used to do/I would do		

*The Czech equivalents of Engl *I would do*, *I would have done*, which might be called conditional or subjunctive, will be dealt with later.

Now, Czech is much simpler with regard to tense, there is only one form of past tense, one present tense, and two forms of the future tense. For practical purposes, it's only the present and the past that you have to think about, as far as endings are concerned. First, let's take a look at the 3 conjugations (sets of verbal endings), which apply to all Czech verbs (well, there are just a few exceptions).

	I	II	III
INF	-at	-it	-ovat/-at/-nout/others
1sg	-ám	-ím	-u
2sg	-áš	-íš	-eš
3sg	-á	-í	-e
1pl	-áme	-íme	-eme
2pl	-áte	-íte	-ete
3pl	-ají	-í, (-ejí/ějí)	-ou

Exx.	dělat/udělat dávat/dát hledat poslouchat říkat	mluvit prosit umět (-ějí) rozumět (-ějí) koupit promíjet (-ejí) přednášet (-ejí) slyšet/uslyšet věřit vidět/uvidět vyprávět (-ějí) vysvětlit ztrácet (-ejí)/ztratit	studovat děkovat psát číst prominout kupovat poslechnout pracovat říct (říci) vysvětlovat
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Confusion?

- 1) verbs with INF in -et/-ět: is the 3pl in -í or -ejí/-ějí
- 2) what do do with type III
- 3) what is the connection between the INF form and the conjugated forms?



Notes:

- learn the INF and 3pl/oni form to get the most information, easiest way
- type III is the hardest in the sense of comparing the conjugated forms with the infinitive
- most -at/-át INF belong to type I, but beware, maybe they are type III
- type III sometimes have more literary/high style endings

1 sg/3pl in -u/-ou	but more literary endings in -i/-í
děkuju/děkujou	děkuji/děkují (these endings with -ovat verbs are common)
píšu/píšou	píši/píší (the literary endings here are rarely seen)
- add ne- directly to the form of the verb for negation

The Czech equivalents of the English table above would be:

PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
dělal jsem	dělám	budu dělat
udělal jsem		udělám

So, there are only 3 conjugations (and the endings aren't all that different) and it's fairly obvious which conjugation verbs belong to. And there are only three tenses. So, what's the catch?

ASPECT. What's aspect? Well, this is kind of tough. Basically, every Czech verb comes in pairs of imperfective aspect and perfective aspect.

PERFECTIVE verbs are more limited, specified

— goal, result oriented, action seen as a whole at a single point in time

IMPERFECTIVE verbs are more general

— a process, repeated/frequent actions, the ability (or lack of ability) to perform an action

PERFECTIVE

I wrote Marie a letter.

Napsal-PERF jsem Marii dopis.

IMPERFECTIVE

I was writing Marie a letter, when the phone rang.

Psal-IMPF jsem Marii dopis, když zazvonil-PERF telefon.

I wrote Marie a letter every day.

Psal jsem Marii dopis každý den.

I wrote well.

Psal jsem dobře.

Almost all Czech verbs come in pairs; usually the forms are related:

1) imperfective has no prefix, perfective has a prefix

dělat/udělat 'do, make'

2) imperfective has one suffix, perfective has a different suffix

kupovat/koupit 'buy'

poslouchat/poslechnout 'listen; obey'

vysvětlovat/vysvětlit 'explain'

ztrácet/ztratit 'lose'

3) completely different forms altogether (quite rare)

brát/vzít 'take'

How does this connect to tense?

- imperfective verbs have past, present, and future tense forms
- perfective verbs only have past and future forms
- the conjugated form of imperfective verbs is PRESENT, the conjugated form of perfective verbs is FUTURE. Think about this, it will make sense!

Auxiliary or Helping Verbs

Past Tense

<i>form with L</i>	<i>present tense of být 'be'</i>
-l, -la, -lo	+ jsem
-l, -la, -lo	jsi/(-s)
-l, -la, -lo	—
-li, -ly, -la	jsme
-li, -ly, -la	jste
-li, -ly, -la	—

*word order is important here with these auxiliary forms of být 'be'

Imperfective Future Tense

future of být 'be'

budu	
budeš	
bude	+ Imperfective INF
budeme	
budete	
budou	