



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G3

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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1. The Praying Hands

Back in the fifteenth century, in a tiny village near Nuremberg, lived a family with eighteen children. Eighteen! In order merely to keep food on the table for this mob, the father and head of the household, a goldsmith by profession, worked almost eighteen hours a day at his trade. He also did any other paying job he could find in the neighbourhood. Despite their seemingly hopeless condition, two of his children had a dream. They both wanted to pursue their talent for art, but they knew full well that their father would never be financially able to send either of them to Nuremberg to study at the Art College. After many long discussions at night in their crowded bed, the two boys finally worked out a deal. They would toss a coin. The loser would go down into the nearby mines and, with his earnings, support his brother while he attended the Art College. Then, when that brother who won the toss completed his studies, in four years, he would support his brother at the Art College, either with sales of his artwork or, if necessary, also by labouring in the mines. They tossed a coin on a Sunday morning after church. Albrecht Durer won the toss and went off to Nuremberg. Albert went down into the dangerous mines and, for the next four years, financed his brother, whose work at the Art College was almost an immediate sensation. Albrecht's etchings, his woodcuts, and his oils were far better than those of most of his professors, and by the time he graduated, he was beginning to earn considerable fees for his commissioned works. When the young artist returned to his village, the Durer family held a festive dinner on their lawn to celebrate Albrecht's triumphant homecoming. After a long and memorable meal, punctuated with music and laughter, Albrecht rose from his honoured position at the head of the table to drink a toast to his beloved brother for the years of sacrifice that had enabled Albrecht to fulfil his ambition. His closing words were, "And now, Albert, blessed brother of mine, now, it is your turn. Now you can go to Nuremberg to pursue your dream, and I will take care of you. "All heads turned in eager expectation to the far end of the table where Albert sat, tears streaming down his pale face, shaking his lowered head from side to side while he sobbed and repeated, over and over, "No ...no ...no ...no."

Finally, Albert rose and wiped the tears from his cheeks. He glanced down the long table at the faces he loved, and then, holding his hands close to his right cheek, he said softly, "No, brother. I cannot go to Nuremberg. It is too late for me. Look ... looks what four years in the mines have done to my hands! The

bones in every finger have been smashed at least once, and lately, I have been suffering from arthritis so badly in my right hand that I cannot even hold a glass to return your toast, much less make delicate lines on parchment or canvas with a pen or a brush. No, brother ... for me, it is too late."

More than 450 years have passed. By now, Albrecht Durer's hundreds of masterful portraits, pen and silver-point sketches, watercolours, charcoals, woodcuts, and copper engravings hang in every great museum in the world, but the odds are great that you, like most people, are familiar with only one of Albrecht Durer's works. More than merely being familiar with it, you very well may have a reproduction hanging in your home or office.

One day, to pay homage to Albert for all that he had sacrificed, Albrecht Durer painstakingly drew his brother's abused hands with palms together and thin fingers stretched skyward. He called his powerful drawing simply "Hands," but the entire world almost immediately opened their hearts to his great masterpiece and renamed his tribute of love "The Praying Hands."

The next time you see a copy of that touching creation, take a second look. Let it be your reminder, if you still need one, that no one – no one – ever makes it alone!

Remember, it is not the burdens of life that weigh us down; it is how we handle them.

2. Are Examinations Necessary?

Examinations are formal tests that students take to show their knowledge and intelligence of a particular subject to obtain a qualification within a specific time frame. They enable the teachers to get feedback or to know how well the students have understood the subject. A good result, besides encouraging the students, makes the teacher as well as the parents happy. The effort of the teacher is rewarded when students pass an examination with good marks. Thus, a teacher's **dedication** towards the profession of teaching is also judged through examinations. Parents take pride in their children when they perform well in the examinations.

Education is supposed to be knowledge-oriented but nowadays students don't learn to acquire knowledge, rather they study only intending to pass or score good marks on tests. The teachers themselves teach students with the objective that the students have to pass the examination. Students take their studies seriously only when it is time for them to appear in the examinations. Examinations make them work hard because every student wants to score good marks. Examinations help the teachers and the parents in analysing the amount of labour put in by the students in gaining knowledge.

However, there are certain **flaws** in the examination system. The system of education in India is based on the pattern set up by the British. The knowledge imparted is restricted to the curriculum framed. Students are taught according to the prescribed syllabus and little beyond. When students are unable to grasp a particular subject, they seek private tuition or enrol themselves in a coaching institute.

Students **tend** to learn their subjects by heart, without applying their minds. As such, enable many students to pass examinations though, they retain little of what they crammed. Most students anticipate examinations with anxiety. They, at a very young age, begin to feel the tension and stress of examinations.

Class XII is meant to be the culmination of years of preparatory learning to decide on vocation choices, but Class XII for the vast majority of students ends up being a stressful journey into the unknown. The Boards, the competitive tests, the three hours allotted to shape a life—it has become a system that focuses on pointing out the inadequacies rather than highlighting the abilities of students. Despite scoring good marks in examinations, students fail to get admission to their desired course and/or college.

Examinations are just the first in a series of tests that initiate students into a fiercely competitive world. But the importance attached to them is unreasonably high. During the examination period and till the result is declared, not only the students but also their parents remain tense. It is regarded as nothing less than a do-or-die situation.

Students do not get enough time for games and are unable to pursue their hobbies due to the burden of examinations. This affects their health adversely. Failure in examination lowers the **self-esteem** of the students and generates a negative self-image in their minds. Today, some schools utilise the services of psychologists and counsellors to help students cope with the pressure of examinations.

The anxiety of not being able to score well enough to get into a good college is causing many psychological disorders in children. Some children even commit suicide after failing the Board Examinations.

The emphasis on marks scored is not the only factor creating stress in the examinees. Students are disillusioned with the examination system because corrupt practices have become a common affair. Leakage of question papers, copying and cheating in the examination halls, and bribing the authorities to tamper with and alter the marks, all undermine the credibility of the examination system. The prevailing education system does little to equip students with skills and training that may enhance their career prospects.

To overcome the shortcomings present in our educational system, many Education Commissions were set up from time to time to suggest changes in the pattern. Acting on their suggestions, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and other State Boards of Secondary Education decided to introduce a separate stream of **vocational** education. According to educational experts, ongoing evaluation is more effective than board examinations. To evaluate a student's performance continuously during the whole year, periodic tests may be held regularly. This could make the examination system more acceptable and practical. However, many people consider these qualifications to be second-rated.

The aim of education should be to build the student's character and personality. It should widen their **sphere** of knowledge. The educational system should not only be theoretical and academic but also equip the students with the necessary skills and intelligence to face the tough battle of life.

Students should not be encouraged to learn by **rote**. Projects and term papers may add soul and substance to the student's knowledge base. When History, Geography and Mathematics are reduced to mere digits on a mark sheet, they cease to inspire or give joy.

The method of teaching as well as of assessing needs to be overhauled. It should be designed to ensure a healthy, inspiring and joyful process of learning for the students. Students require a less burdensome and stress-free learning experience which is enjoyable and refreshing.

Nevertheless, the system of examination, which has been operational for decades, cannot be changed overnight. It will take considerable time and effort to change the system. While this **transition** takes place, unfair practices like cheating in the examination hall and leakage of question papers should be controlled. It must also be seen that the answer sheets of students are properly assessed by the teachers so that fair evaluation takes place. These measures will build the credibility of our education system and we may, then, be able to strengthen the knowledge base of our manpower that can take the nation to greater heights.

Vocabulary

- 1. Dedication:** devotion or commitment - The head teacher thanked the staff for their hard work and dedication.
- 2. Tend:** be inclined or directed to – Nowadays, girls tend to do better in exams than boys.
- 3. Cramming:** learning a lot just before an exam - It would take two or three months of cramming to prepare for the XII Exam.
- 4. Self-esteem:** self-worth or a good opinion of one's own character and abilities – Teachers ought to build their students' self-esteem.
- 5. Vocational:** of or relating to qualifications and preparation needed for a particular job - The school near us offers vocational programs in welding, electrical work, and building maintenance.
- 6. Sphere:** range of interest or domain – His sphere of interest is very limited.
- 7. Rote:** the process of learning something by repeated study rather than by understanding - You cannot fully understand a subject through rote learning.
- 8. Transition:** the process or a period of change from one state or condition to another - This course is useful for students who are in transition from one training programme to another.
- 9. Flaw:** fault or defect or weakness – You are strong when you know your weaknesses. You are beautiful when you appreciate your flaws. You are wise when you learn from your mistakes.

3. The Bear Facts

The school offers vocational programs in welding, electrical work, and.



The word “bear” can conjure up a variety of images—from a sweet teddy to the untamed force of a grizzly bear. There are actually seven species of bear and many subspecies. Their size, appearance, habitat, and diet differ greatly. The polar bear and grizzly bear are the indisputable kings of the bears.

The largest of the bears is the polar bear. It roams the harsh Arctic, undaunted by the cold. The key to its survival there lies in its coat. Over a dense underfur lie long hairs that get matted when wet and help keep the skin dry. Seals are its main prey, and ice floes provide a base of operations on its incessant quest for food.

The grizzly has immense physical strength and mobility. Once these bears roamed much of North America, but due to human intrusion, they have retreated to mainly northern remote areas. Though easily capable of knocking down a bison, this bear prefers to indulge in berries and roots. And yes, this brown bear does steal honey from bees’ nests.

Despite their differences, these two kinds of bears are so closely related that the two can interbreed and produce fertile hybrid offspring.

4. Grammar Page

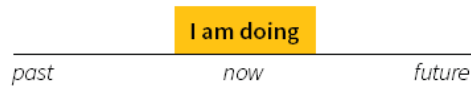
Unit
3

Present continuous and present simple 1 (I am doing and I do)

A Compare:

present continuous (I am doing)

We use the continuous for things happening at or around the time of speaking. The action is not complete.



- The water **is boiling**. Be careful.
- Listen to those people. What language **are they speaking**?
- Let's go out. It **isn't raining** now.
- 'I'm busy.' 'What **are you doing**?'
- I'm **getting** hungry. Let's go and eat.
- Kate wants to work in Italy, so she's **learning** Italian.
- The population of the world **is increasing** very fast.

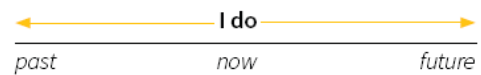
We use the continuous for *temporary* situations (things that continue for a short time):

- I'm **living** with some friends until I find a place of my own.
- A: You're **working** hard today.
B: Yes, I have a lot to do.

See Unit 1 for more information.

present simple (I do)

We use the simple for things in general or things that happen repeatedly.



- Water **boils** at 100 degrees Celsius.
- Excuse me, **do you speak** English?
- It **doesn't rain** very much in summer.
- What **do** you usually **do** at weekends?
- I always **get** hungry in the afternoon.
- Most people **learn** to swim when they are children.
- Every day the population of the world **increases** by about 200,000 people.

We use the simple for *permanent* situations (things that continue for a long time):

- My parents **live** in London. They have lived there all their lives.
- Joe isn't lazy. He **works** hard most of the time.

See Unit 2 for more information.

B I always do and I'm always doing

I **always do** something = I do it every time:

- I **always go** to work by car. (*not* I'm always going)

I'm **always doing** something = I do it too often or more often than normal.

For example:



I'm **always losing** them = I lose them too often, or more often than normal.

- Paul is never satisfied. He's **always complaining**. (= he complains too much)
- You're **always looking** at your phone. Don't you have anything else to do?