

How to Use Smart Fingers Technique in Teaching English Tenses

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Abstract: This article informs how to use Smart Fingers technique in teaching English tenses. The Smart Fingers technique is a new teaching English tenses technique which will help teachers or students to learn and master 16 English tenses fast due to its simplicity in its implementing. Meanwhile, tense itself is a part of grammar material that is often avoided by several English learners as it is very complicated lesson. In fact, English sentences used in daily activity and especially academic field consist of tenses. Thus, smart fingers technique becomes an alternative technique to overcome that problem. The use of this technique is so simple, just need fingers of hands. This article also discusses the kinds, functions of Smart Fingers and their achievement indicators. There are five kinds of Smart Fingers technique, namely Smart Fingers (SF) "Memorizing Tenses", SF "Naming Tenses", SF "Auxiliary Verbs", SF "Verbs vs To Be", SF "Smart Short Tenses". Each kind of Smart Fingers technique has different functions and achievement indicators.

Keywords: Smart Fingers Technique, Tenses.

Introduction

Language as a tool of communication has an important role in human life. It can help people delivering their idea and expression to communicate with others. English as an international language has become a main language and even a subject in several countries which must learn and use. In order to be correct and appropriate in using English, it is needed a rule and pattern, called grammar. By using English grammar correctly, the language will be tidy and be able to be understood well in communication. It is in line with grammarian's opinion, for instance, Leibniz as cited in Harmer, says , "A language is acquired through practice, it is merely perfected through grammar." In addition, Ur argues, "Grammar is a set of rules that define how words (or parts of words) are combined or changed to form acceptable

units of meaning within a language.” In short, grammar is a rules or system in English which has function to set the sentences and available to be accessed in language use.

Commonly, there are two kinds of grammar. They are prescriptive and descriptive grammars which have different definitions. Decapua argues, “Prescriptive grammar is the grammar taught in school, discussed in newspaper and magazine columns on language, or mandated by language academies such as those found in Spain or France.” It attempts to tell people how they should use appropriate languages like what, how, and why they should say something.

In contrast, Decapua says, “. . . descriptive grammar means saying that everything is right and nothing is wrong. What we must consider is the purpose for which a speaker is using language.” Commonly it can be found when adult native speakers actually use their language in their daily activities. In this article, it is focused on prescriptive grammar, because its grammar is formal form and taught in school.

Discussion

A. Tenses

One of the lessons that taught in grammar is tense. Tense has an important role in mastering English. By knowing and understanding kinds, formulas and functions of tenses, it can help students to use English well. According to Kreidler, “Tense is a system of contrast that locates the general meaning of the proposition in the past, present, or future, from the time-perspective of the speaker.” In addition, Nordquist states that tense is the time of a [verb](#)'s action or state of being, such as present or past. Meanwhile, Angela Downing and Philip Locke state, “Tense is the grammatical expression of the location of the events in time.”

In short, it can be concluded that tense is the grammatical expression of the location of the event in time, such as past, present or future.

English has 16 kinds of tenses. Every tense has name, formula, and function which are different. English tenses are divided into two parts, they are fundamental and branch tenses. The fundamental tense consists of Present, Past, Future and Past Future. Meanwhile, the branch tense consists of Simple, Continuous/Progressive, Perfect, and Perfect Continuous.

Table 1.1 The Names of 16 English Tenses

No	Tenses	No	Tenses
1	Simple Present Tense	9	Simple Future Tense
2	Present Continuous Tense	10	Future Continuous Tense
3	Present Perfect Tenses	11	Future Perfect Tense
4	Present Perfect Continuous Tense	12	Future Perfect Continuous Tense
5	Simple Past Tense	13	Simple Past Future Tense
6	Past Continuous Tense	14	Past Future Continuous Tense
7	Past Perfect Tense	15	Past Future Perfect Tense
8	Past Perfect Continuous Tense	16	Past Future Perfect Continuous Tense

Based on the table 1.1, it is clear that English has 16 tenses. Meanwhile, the fact in the field, every tense has two kinds of sentences, they are verbal and nominal sentences. The verbal

sentence is a sentence which contains *Verb* and does not use *To Be*, except in *progressive* form. In contrast, the nominal sentence is a sentence which contains *Non-Verb* (adjective, adverb, noun, etc) and uses *To Be*. Here is the explanation of tenses formulas in verbal and nominal sentences

Table 1.2 The List of Tenses Formulas in Verbal and Nominal Sentences

Verbal	Nominal
S + V-1 + O/C	S + Tobe 1 + NV
S + Tobe 1 + V-ing + O/C	S + Tobe 1 + being + NV
S + have/has + Verb-3 + O/C	S + have/has + been + NV
S + have/has + been + V-ing + O/C	S + have/has + been + being + NV
S + will + V-1 + O/C	S + will + be + NV
S + will + be + V-ing + O/C	S + will + be + being + NV
S + will + have + V3 + O/C	S + will + have + been + NV
S + will + have + been + V-ing + O/C	S + will + have + been + being + NV
S + V-2 + O/C	S + To be 2 + NV
S + Tobe 2 + V-ing + O/C	S + Tobe 2 + being + NV
S + had + V-3 + O/C	S + had + been + NV
S + had + been + V-ing + O/C	S + had + been + being + NV
S + would + V-1 + O/C	S + would + be + NV
S + would + be + V-ing + O/C	S + would + be + being + NV
S + would + have + V-3 + O/C	S + would + have + been + NV
S + would + have + been + V-ing + O/C	S + would + have + been + being + NV

The table 1.2 shows that all formulas of nominal sentences use *To Be*, but unfortunately, most of the English books or dictionaries do not write and discuss these formulas. The books just write and discuss the formulas of verbal sentences.

B. Teaching Techniques of Grammar

Sandra McKay's (1985) as cited in Brown, classifies some sample techniques for teaching grammar:

1) Charts

Charts and graphs are useful devices for practicing patterns, clarifying grammatical relationships, and even for understanding sociolinguistic and discourse constraints.

2) Objects

Objects brought into the classroom not only liven up the context but provide a kinesthetic, hands-on dimension to your teaching. By engaging students in communication with each other, you stimulate them to practice conversation rules and other discourse constraints.

3) Maps and drawings

Maps are practical and simple visual aids in a classroom. Useful for jigsaw, information-gap, and other interactive techniques, they can also serve to illustrate certain grammatical structure.

4) Dialogues

Dialogues are an age-old technique for introducing and practicing grammatical points.

5) Other written texts

At a very simple, mechanical level, a short paragraph can become an exercise in processing selected verb tenses, discourse rules for paragraphing and sequencing ideas can also be attended to.

Based on the previous explanation, it can be concluded that the techniques of teaching grammar are varies, and they have possibility to develop, so that the goal of teaching and learning process can be reached easily. In consequence, the the writer is going to try developing teaching techniques of grammar especially tenses lesson by using fingers named **Smart Fingers technique**.

C. Smart Fingers Technique

1. The Definition of Technique

Harmer argues, "A method is the practical realisation of an approach. It includes various procedures and techniques as part of their standard fare." Meanwhile, procedure is an ordered sequence of techniques. On the other hand, technique is the manner in which technical details are treated or basic physical movements are used. Moreover, Anthony (1963) as cited in Brown says that method is an overall plan for systematic presentation of language based upon a selected approach.

Then, approach is a set of assumptions dealing with the nature language, learning, and teaching. Meanwhile, technique is the specific activities manifested in the classroom that were consistent with a method and therefore were in harmony with an approach as well.

In addition, Harmer says that common technique when using video or film material is called *silent viewing*. This where the teacher plays the video with no sound. Likewise the finger technique is used by some teachers; they hold up their hands and allocate a word to each of their five fingers.

All in all, a method is the practical realization of an approach which has plan for systematic presentation based upon on selected approach. Meanwhile, technique is the specific activities manifested in the classroom that were consistent with a method and therefore were in harmony with an approach as well. And then **finger technique** is also used by teachers to teach English.

2. The Definition of Smart Fingers Technique

Smart Fingers technique is a technique which is used of teaching English tenses by using fingers. It is a new technique that will help teachers in teaching tenses, so the students are able to understand and master English tenses fast. The implementation of this technique is very simple, because it just uses fingers. In addition, the functions of this technique are helping the sudents to memorize, understand, and using 16 English tenses fast and easily. In this technique, there are two terms that used to point right and left hands. The terms are "Center" for right hand, and "Branch" for left hand. Besides, each finger has its name based on the kinds of Smart Fingers.

3. Kinds of Smart Fingers Technique

This section discusses several kinds of Smart Fingers technique related to their functions and use. Sudirman says that there are five kinds of Smart Fingers technique, they are as follows:

1) Smart Fingers, “Memorizing Tenses”.

It is first kind of Smart Fingers technique which is related to its name, and it has function to memorize the names of 16 tenses. As said in the previous section that there are terms which used for pointing the right and left hand and then each finger has its name itself, here is the explanation of them:

- a) Right hand is called “Center” has four parts that used by four fingers, namely index finger for *Present*, middle finger for *Past*, ring finger for *Future* and little finger for *past Future*.
- b) Left hand is called “Branch” has four parts that used by four fingers as well, they are index finger for *Simple*, middle finger for *Continuous*, ring finger for *Perfect*, and the last little finger for *Perfect Continuous*.

2) Smart Fingers, “Naming Tenses”.

It is the second kind. Based on its name, this kind has function to give the tense names on the sentence. The use of this kinds is same with the previous one, still using fingers, but has different terms on the fingers. Here is the explanations of them:

- a) Right hand is called “Center” has five parts that used by five fingers, namely thumb finger for *Present*, index finger for *Past*, middle finger for *Perfect*, ring finger for *Continuous* and little finger for *Future*. To make easy memorizing their names, they are shortened in P3CF (Present, Past, Perfect, Continuous, and Future).
- b) Left hand is called “Branch” has five parts that used by five fingers as well, they are thumb finger for *Verb 1 (V-1)*, index finger for *Verb 2 (V-2)*, middle finger for *Verb 3 (V-3)*, ring finger for *Verb-ing (V-ing)*, and the last little finger for *Verb Modals (V-M)*.

3) Smart Fingers, “Auxiliary Verbs”.

It is the third kind of Smart Fingers technique. Its function is to help students or people who want to make a sentence in negative and interrogative forms. Center (C) has terms which is same with the second kind of Smart Fingers that uses *P3CF* for the fingers terms. However, for the branch (B), it is different, in this kind, B has five terms for five fingers, they are thumb finger for *Do/does and To Be 1*, index finger for *Did To Be 2*, middle finger for *Have/has and Been*, ring finger for *To Be and Being* and the last little finger for *Will/Shall and Be*.

4) Smart Fingers, “Verb VS Tobe”.

It is used to make a verbal and nominal sentences. Verbal sentence is a sentence which contains Verb as predicate. In this sentence, there is not “To Be” auxiliary verb, except in Continuous/Progressive tense. Meanwhile, nominal sentence is a sentence which contains “To Be” as predicate. This kind will help students to know and understand the name of tenses and their formulas. Here is the explanations of them:

a) Right hand is called “Center” has five parts that used by five fingers, namely thumb finger for *Verb-1*, index finger for *Verb-2*, middle finger for *V-3*, ring finger for *V-ing* and little finger for *V-Modal*. The center function is as Verbal sentence.

b) Left hand is called “Branch” has five parts that used by five fingers as well, they are thumb finger for *To Be 1*, index finger for *To Be 2*, middle finger for *Been*, ring finger for *Being*, and the last little finger for *Be*. The branch function is as Nominal sentence.

5) Smart Fingers, “Smart Short Tenses”.

It is the last kind of Smart Fingers technique. Its function is to change tense forms from Present into Past forms. Here is the explanations of them:

a) Right hand is called “Center” has five parts that used by five fingers, namely thumb finger for *To Be 1*, index finger for *Verb-1*, middle finger for *Do/Does*, ring finger for *Have/Has* and little finger for *Modal-1*. The Center function is as Present forms.

b) Left hand is called “Branch” has five parts that used by five fingers as well, they are thumb finger for *To Be 2*, index finger for *Verb- 2*, middle finger for *Did*, ring finger for *Had*, and the last little finger for *Modal-2*. The Branch function is as Past forms.

4. How to Use Smart Fingers Technique in Teaching Tenses

1) Smart Fingers, “Memorizing Tenses”

The use of this kind is combining the parts in the Center (C) and Branch (B), the explanations of it are as follow:

a) Present Tense

Index finger (C) combined with index finger (B), middle finger (B), ring finger (B) and little finger (B), so gained four names of tenses, they are *Simple Present Tense*, *Present Continuous Tense*, *Present Perfect Tense*, and *Present Perfect Continuous Tense*.

b) Past Tense

Middle finger (C) combined with index finger (B), middle finger (B), ring finger (B) and little finger (B), so gained four names of tenses, they are *Simple Past Tense*, *Past Continuous Tense*, *Past Perfect Tense*, and *Past Perfect Continuous Tense*.

c) Future Tense

Ring finger (C) combined with index finger (B), middle finger (B), ring finger (B) and little finger (B), so gained four names of tenses, they are

Simple Future Tense, Future Continuous Tense, Future Perfect Tense, and Future Perfect Continuous Tense.

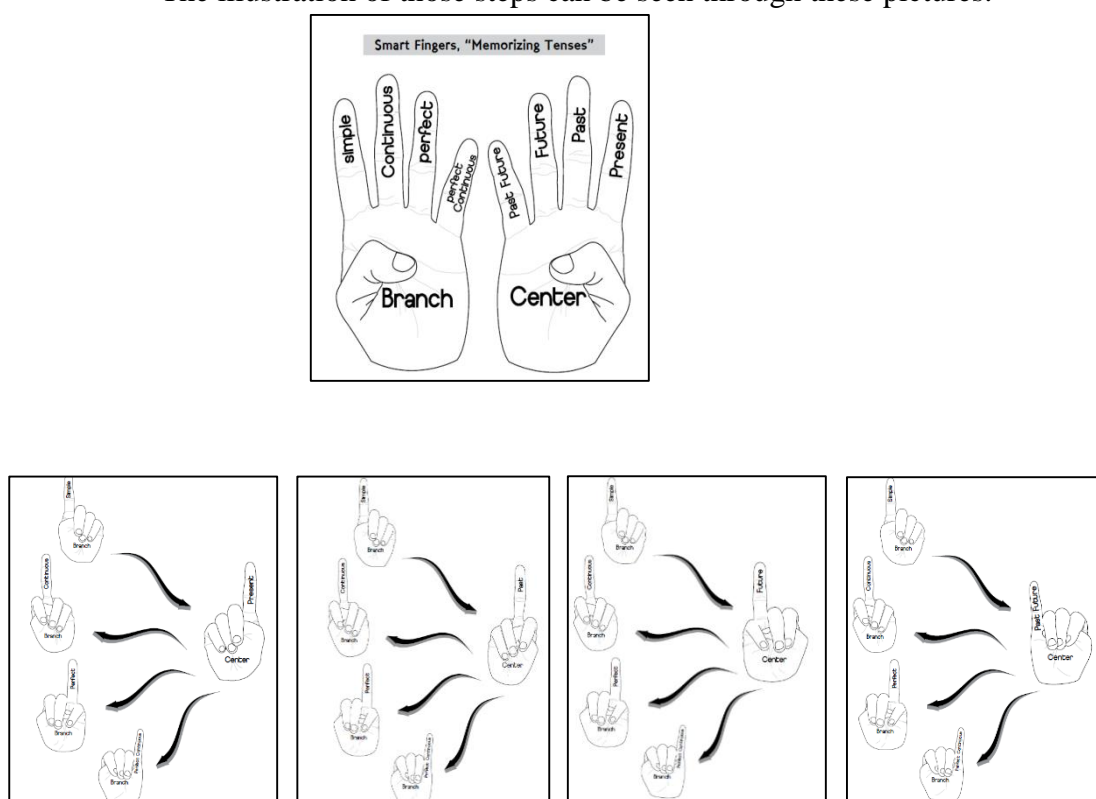
d) Past Future Tense

Little finger (C) combined with index finger (B), middle finger (B), ring finger (B) and little finger (B), so gained four names of tenses, they are *Simple Pas Future Tense, Past Future Continuous Tense, Pas Future Perfect Tense, and Past Future Perfect Continuous Tense.*

In this kind 1, the students are asked to follow instruction demonstrated by teacher. Here is the instruction of it:

Index finger (C) combined with index finger (B), middle finger (B), ring finger (B) and little finger (B), so gained four names of tenses, they are *Simple Present Tense, Present Continuous Tense, Present Perfect Tense, and Present Perfect Continuous Tense.*

The illustration of those steps can be seen through these pictures.



Picture 1.1 The Steps of Smart Fingers, “Memorizing Tenses”

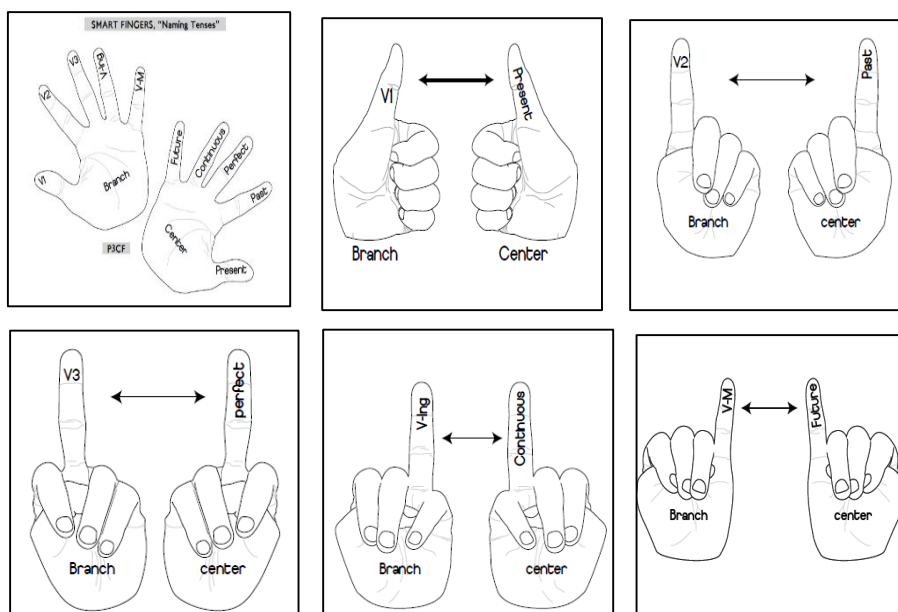
2) Smart Fingers, “Naming Tenses”

The use of this kind is very simple. It is just combining the fingers which have same names in each hand. For example, thumb finger (C) and thumb finger (B), it means that, if in the sentence there is *Verb 1* (positive form), it is indicated that the name of the sentence is *Simple Present tense*, the word “Simple” here added because the sentence only has one verb. Here is the explanation of the use of Smart Fingers, “Naming Tenses”:

- If the sentence has one verb, so its tense name must be begun by “Simple” word.
- If the sentence has two or three verbs, so its tense name must be adjusted with the verbs sequence.
- If the sentence has ‘Modal Verbs’ (will, would, shall, should etc), so its tense name must be begun by “Future” or “Past Future”. In this kind 2, the students are asked to follow instruction demonstrated by teacher. Here is the instruction of it:

Combining the fingers which have same names in each hand. For example, thumb finger (C) and thumb finger (B), it means that, if in the sentence there is *Verb 1* (positive form), it is indicated that the name of the sentence is *Simple Present tense*, the word “Simple” here added because the sentence only has one verb.

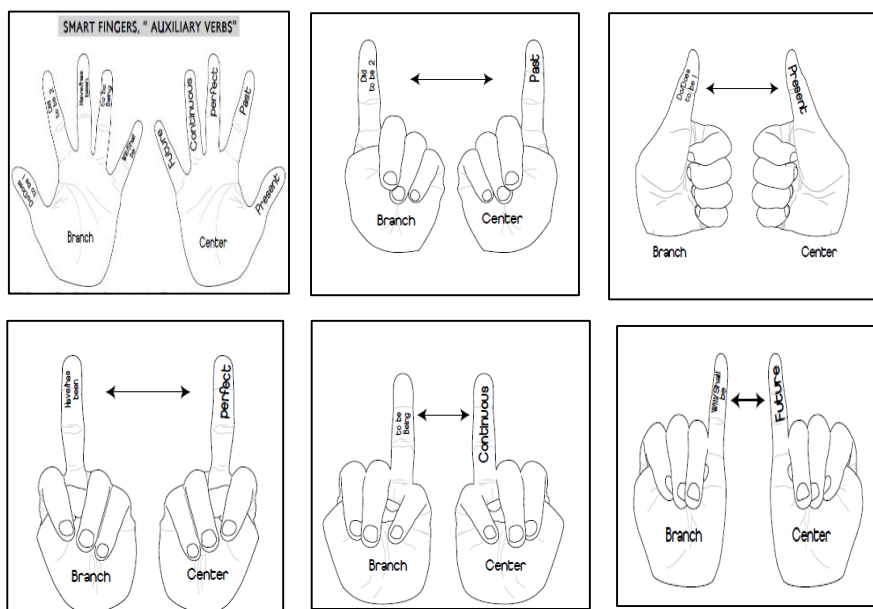
The illustration of those steps can be seen through these pictures.



3) Smart Fingers, “Auxiliary Verbs”

The use of this kind is same as the second one (Smart Fingers, “Naming Tenses”). It is just combining the fingers which have same names in each hand. For example, index finger (C) is paired with index finger (B). It means that if there is “Did” or “To Be 2 (was,were)” indicated the tense name of the sentence is *Simple Past tense*. Meanwhile, the center’s terms are the same with Smart Fingers, “Naming Tenses”, but the branch’s terms are different. The students are asked to follow instruction demonstrated by teacher. Here is the instruction of it:

The illustration of those steps can be seen through these pictures.



Picture 1.3 The Steps of Smart Fingers, “Auxiliary Verbs”

4) Smart Fingers, “Verb VS Tobe”

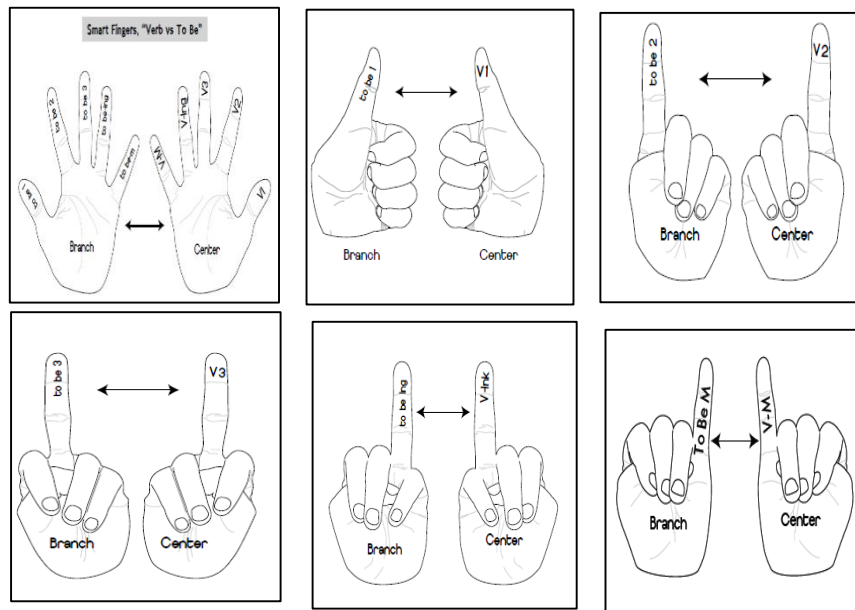
This Smart Fingers, “Verb VS To Be’ is useful to change tense forms from verbal sentence into nominal sentence. By mastering this kind, students will change 16 tenses formulas into 32 tenses formulas. 16 tenses formulas are for verbal sentences, and 16 tenses formulas are for nominal sentences, so the number of formulas in English tenses are 32 formulas.

The use of this kind is same with the previous one that is just combining the fingers which have same names in each hand. For example, middle finger (C) is paired with middle finger (B). It means that if there is *Verb-3*, the

students can change it into *Been*. So the formula is changing but the name of tense is not.

The use of this kind is same with the previous one that is just combining the fingers which have same names in each hand. The students were asked to follow instruction demonstrated by teacher. Here is the instruction of it:

The illustration of those steps can be seen through these pictures.

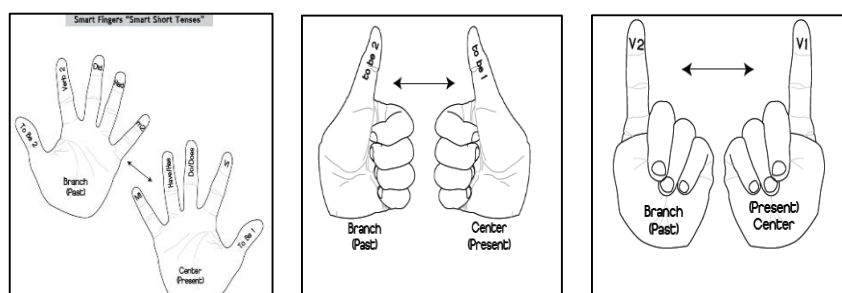


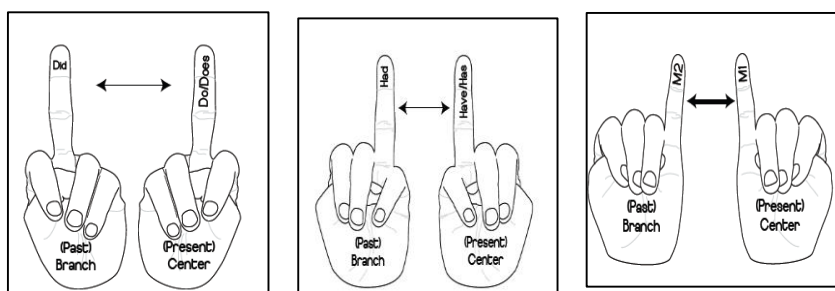
Picture 1.4 The Steps of Smart Fingers, "Verbs VS To Be"

5) Smart Fingers, "Smart Short Tenses"

The use of this kind is the same as the previous one that is just combining the fingers that have same names in each hand. For example, ring finger (C) is paired with ring finger (B). It means that if there is *Have/Has*, the students can change it into *Had*. So the formula and name of tenses are changing. By mastering this type, students are hoped to know 16 English tenses and have ability to make their formulas by one step without seeing an English dictionary.

The students were asked to follow instruction demonstrated by teacher. Here is the instruction of it:





Picture 1.5 The Steps of Smart Fingers, “Smart Short Tenses”

5. The Indicators of Students’ Achievement Relates with the Kinds of Smart Fingers Technique

Table 1.3 the Indicators of Students’ Achievement Relates to the Kinds of Smart Fingers Technique

No	Indicators	Types				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The student is able to memorize <i>16 tenses names</i> without a pen in ten minutes.	√	×	×	×	×
2	The student is able to determine <i>the names of tenses used in a sentence</i> by once sight.	×	√	×	×	×
3	The student can understand the <i>functions of Auxiliary Verbs</i> .	×	×	√	×	×
4	The student is capable of using <i>Modality</i> in appropriate sentence.	×	×	√	×	×
5	The student has ability to differentiate between <i>Verbal and Nominal sentences</i> .	×	×	×	√	×
6	The student can make <i>16 English tenses formulas</i> without using an English dictionary.	×	×	×	√	×
7	The student is able to change <i>present forms</i> into <i>past forms</i> through one step.	×	×	×	×	√

Note: √ = Yes

X = No

The data of table 1.3 explain that there is relationship between students’ achievement indicators and tricks of Smart Fingers technique. Here is the explanation of them:

- Kind 1, Smart Fingers, “Memorizing tenses” relates to the first indicator (the student is able to memorize *16 tenses names* without a pen in ten minutes).
- Kind 2, Smart Fingers, “Naming tenses” relates to the second indicator (The student is able to determine *the names of tenses used in a sentence* by once sight).

- Kind 3, Smart Fingers, “Auxiliary Verbs” relates to the third and fourth indicators (The student can understand the *functions of Auxiliary Verbs* and the student is capable of using *Modality* in appropriate sentence).
- Kind 4, Smart Fingers, “Verbs VS To Be” relates to the fifth and sixth indicators (The student has ability to differentiate between *Verbal and Nominal sentences* and the student can make *16 English tenses formulas* without using an English dictionary)
- Kind 5, Smart Fingers, “Smart Short tenses” relates to last indicator (The student is able to change *present forms* into *past forms* through one step.)

Conclusion

Smart Fingers technique is an easiest technique in teaching and mastering English tenses. Its usage is so simple and easy, only using fingers of hands. It has five kinds based on their functions, namely Memorizing Tenses, Naming Tenses, Auxiliary Verbs, Verbs vs To Be, Smart Short Tenses. Besides, the those five kinds of Smart Fingers technique have various achievement indicators. Those indicators help learner to measure and evaluate their tenses mastery. It is advisable to teacher to use this technique in teaching tenses. By using and sharing the implementation of Smart Fingers technique, more and more tenses problems are going to be solved well.

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