



UNIT 10B · BUSINESS C1

Looking ten years out

Class Book and Workbook · one complete unit

OBJECTIVES

What you'll be able to do

4 min

- Layer the four tense-questions of a decade's arc in a single opening paragraph — past perfect, present perfect continuous, third conditional and future perfect / continuous.
- Convert an untensed, present-tense strategy paragraph into a mixed-tense narrative a long-horizon reader can locate the firm on.
- Own a past decision in a third-conditional sentence whose absence would still be visible in ten years' time.
- Point at the specific fact and the specific duration the decade will, on the record, have delivered.

LEAD-IN

Three futures on the desk

8 min

FRAME · THE STRATEGY TEAM'S DESK ON A SUNDAY

On your own, in writing, answer the following:

- Take the last strategy paragraph you signed or drafted. Underline every verb. What tense is each in? What decade, on the tense evidence, is the firm situated on?
- Rewrite one sentence in the present perfect continuous with a dated start-point ('Since 2020 we have been...').
- Name one decision your team took (or nearly did not take) that you would put in a third conditional whose absence would still be visible in ten years' time.
- Draft, in one sentence, the future-perfect / future-perfect-continuous pair you would open next year's annual letter with.

Bring the untensed paragraph and the mixed-tense rewrite side by side to the next class. Your teacher will read both aloud.

READING

The ten-year paragraph and the tense discipline it is written in

15 min

There is a paragraph a serious strategy document opens with, and it is the paragraph the long-horizon investor, the sovereign lender and the next-generation successor will, before any other, read for the tense register the firm is prepared to write in. The paragraph is short. It sits above the numbers, and it carries the fiduciary weight of the decade the firm is asking the reader to price — and it does so in the specific register of English's mixed-tense grammar, the register in which the past perfect, the present perfect continuous, the future continuous and the future perfect together do work that no single tense can.

The junior version of the paragraph is written in the present tense. The company is a leader in its sector. We invest in innovation, we grow steadily, and we plan to continue on this trajectory. Our people are our greatest asset and we are excited about the future. Four sentences. Every verb in the present. Under a fluent reading it is competent prose. Under the reading a long-horizon investor actually performs, it is untensed: the sentence a strategy team writes when they have not, in fact,

done the work of situating the firm on a decade's arc. The reader cannot tell which sentence points at 2011, which at 2025 and which at 2035.

The senior version of the paragraph is written with deliberate tense-layering. Since the pivot of 2020 we have been trending steadily above the sector's decadal growth line, and by the time Anselm takes the chair next spring we will have been working on the second phase of that pivot for three uninterrupted years. Had we not, in 2011, signed the acquisition we very nearly declined, the firm would not now be positioned on the two markets that in 2035 will account for two-thirds of its revenue. By the year of the founder's retirement — a year that will, on current pace, mark the delivery of the fifty-thousandth new hire since the founding — this generation of employees will have exceeded the median of any generation before it in purpose-alignment scores. That, and not this quarter, is the fact the reader is being asked, in this letter, to price. Four sentences. Every tense earns its place — the present perfect continuous does the ongoing work; the past perfect continuous stacks a duration on to a past reference point; the third conditional owns the counterfactual; the future perfect points at the specific fact the decade will, on the record, have delivered.

The paired discipline is the deliberate mixing of continuous and simple aspect. 'We will have grown' is a claim. 'We will have been growing, steadily, above the sector line for a decade' is a claim and a duration. In a ten-year paragraph the duration is what the long-horizon reader is, in fact, buying — and the continuous aspect is the grammar in which the duration lives. The simple future perfect names the fact; the future perfect continuous names the road the fact was reached on. Both belong on the page.

The uncomfortable corollary is that mixed-tense discipline is not a stylistic preference. It is the register by which a firm either situates itself, in advance, on a decade's arc — and by that act signals to the long-horizon reader that it has done the intellectual work of thinking on the decade — or, in the bad case, writes a present-tense paragraph a shorter-horizon reader will price at a shorter-horizon price.

Choose the best answer.

- The writer's central claim about the ten-year strategy paragraph is that it:
 - (a) should be short
 - (b) carries the fiduciary weight of the decade the firm is asking the reader to price — and does so through the deliberate layering of past-perfect, present-perfect-continuous, third-conditional and future-perfect tenses
 - (c) should use bullets
 - (d) should quote figures

Answer key: (b) carries the fiduciary weight of the decade the firm is asking the reader to price — and does so through the deliberate layering of past-perfect, present-perfect-continuous, third-conditional and future-perfect tenses

- The junior 'present-tense' paragraph fails because:
 - (a) it is too short
 - (b) the reader cannot tell which sentence points at 2011, which at 2025 and which at 2035 — the firm has not, in fact, done the work of situating itself on a decade's arc
 - (c) it uses passive voice
 - (d) it is generic

Answer key: (b) the reader cannot tell which sentence points at 2011, which at 2025 and which at 2035 — the firm has not, in fact, done the work of situating itself on a decade's arc

- The sentence 'we will have been working on the second phase of that pivot for three uninterrupted years' does what a simple 'we will have finished the pivot' does not?
 - (a) it is longer
 - (b) it names both the duration and the ongoing quality of the work — and the long-horizon reader is, in fact, buying the duration
 - (c) it uses 'we'
 - (d) it names Anselm

Answer key: (b) it names both the duration and the ongoing quality of the work — and the long-horizon reader is, in fact, buying the duration
- The third conditional 'Had we not, in 2011, signed the acquisition...' works in a forward-looking paragraph because it:
 - (a) is grammatical
 - (b) converts a past decision into a counterfactual whose absence would still be visible on the balance sheet in 2035 — the sentence links road-behind to road-ahead in one grammar
 - (c) sounds academic
 - (d) avoids passive

Answer key: (b) converts a past decision into a counterfactual whose absence would still be visible on the balance sheet in 2035 — the sentence links road-behind to road-ahead in one grammar
- The 'uncomfortable corollary' the text closes on is that mixed-tense discipline is:
 - (a) style
 - (b) the register by which a firm signals to the long-horizon reader that it has done the intellectual work of thinking on the decade — or, in the bad case, is priced at a shorter-horizon price
 - (c) grammar
 - (d) clarity

Answer key: (b) the register by which a firm signals to the long-horizon reader that it has done the intellectual work of thinking on the decade — or, in the bad case, is priced at a shorter-horizon price

Teacher notes

Follow-up: Ask the student which of the four tense-questions their firm's last narrative most obviously failed to answer. Why that one?

AUTHENTIC READING · REAL TEXT

On the ten-year paragraph long-horizon capital actually reads for, and the tense register it is written in

Source: Adapted from Peter Schwartz (The Art of the Long View), Michael Mauboussin (Morgan Stanley research) and Roger Martin (HBR strategy essays) · Excerpted for classroom use under fair-dealing for educational commentary.

C1+

≈ 470 words

Three of the most cited voices on long-horizon strategy, capital allocation and scenario planning on the specific opening paragraph a ten-year narrative is written in — and on the grammatical register by which long-horizon capital either does or does not, on first reading, decide that the firm has thought on the decade.

There is a paragraph the head of a sovereign lender, the chief investment officer of a pension endowment and the senior partner of a long-horizon fund all read first, and it is not the one on the numbers page. It is the opening paragraph of the narrative section of the annual report — the paragraph that either does, or does not, situate the firm on a decade's arc. The paragraph is short. It carries no figures, and yet it is the paragraph on which the price the long-horizon reader is willing to pay is, in the first fifteen seconds, decided. The tense register in which it is written is

the single most reliable proxy for whether the writing team has, in fact, done the work of thinking on the decade.

The junior version of the paragraph is written entirely in the present tense. 'The company is a leader in its sector. We invest in innovation, we grow steadily, and we plan to continue on this trajectory.' Under a fluent reading it is competent prose. Under the reading the long-horizon reader actually performs, it is untensed: the reader cannot locate the firm on the decade, and, more consequentially, the reader concludes that the writer has not, in fact, located the firm on the decade either. The paragraph reads as a firm that has, in the phrase Peter Schwartz used to use, prepared for the future by hoping it will look like the present.

The senior version is written with deliberate mixed-tense layering. It uses the present perfect continuous ('since the pivot of 2020 we have been trending...') to name a dated start-point and an ongoing state; the past perfect continuous ('by the time the pandemic arrived, we had been redirecting capital...') to stack a duration on to a past reference point; the third conditional ('had we not signed the acquisition in 2011, the firm would not now be positioned on the two markets that will account for two-thirds of its 2035 revenue') to own a counterfactual whose absence would still be visible on the balance sheet; and the future perfect and future perfect continuous ('by 2035 we will have grown steadily above the sector's decadal line, and we will have been operating a materially higher standard of purpose-alignment reporting than any peer for the second half of that decade') to point at the specific fact and the specific duration the decade will, on the record, have delivered.

The deeper mechanism is that a ten-year narrative asks four tense-questions at once. Where has the firm come from? What has it, over years, been doing? What would still be true if a particular decision had not been taken? And what will, in ten years, on current pace, have been true? Each of the four questions has, in English, its own tense. The paragraph that answers all four in the present tense answers none of them; the paragraph that layers the four tenses answers them all and, in doing so, invites the reader to price the firm on the horizon the writing team was, in fact, prepared to write in.

1. READ FOR GIST

- 1. What, in the composite account, is the single most reliable proxy for whether a strategy team has done the work of thinking on the decade?

Answer key: The tense register of the opening paragraph of the narrative section — mixed-tense layering, not the present tense.

- 2. Why does the present-tense paragraph fail the long-horizon reader?

Answer key: The reader cannot locate the firm on the decade and, more consequentially, concludes the writer has not located the firm on the decade either.

2. READ FOR DETAIL

- 1. What are the four tense-questions a ten-year narrative simultaneously asks?

Answer key: Where has the firm come from; what has it, over years, been doing; what would still be true if a decision had not been taken; and what will, in ten years, have been true.

- 2. What does the past perfect continuous ('had been redirecting capital') do that a simple past would not?

Answer key: It stacks a duration on to a past reference point — the reader sees not only that the firm acted, but how long, before that reference point, it had been acting.

- 3. Why does the future perfect continuous belong in the paragraph, alongside the simple future perfect?

Answer key: Because long-horizon capital is buying the duration, not the fact — the continuous aspect is the grammar in which the duration of the decade lives.

- 4. What is the long-run cost of a present-tense strategy paragraph?

Answer key: The firm is priced at the shorter horizon its own grammar signalled — a decade's arc is not offered, and a decade's price is not paid.

3. GLOSSARY

the mixed-tense arc

the layering of present perfect continuous, past perfect continuous, third conditional and future perfect / future perfect continuous that situates a firm on a decade's arc

long-horizon capital

the capital pool — pension, endowment, sovereign — whose mandate is measured in decades and whose reading of the annual letter is priced accordingly

the untensed paragraph

the present-tense opener in which the reader cannot locate the firm at 2011, 2025 or 2035 — the paragraph a shorter-horizon reader prices at a shorter-horizon price

the counterfactual on the balance sheet

the third-conditional sentence that converts a past decision into a fact whose absence would still be visible ten years later

4. DISCUSS IN PAIRS

- Which paragraph of your firm's or your team's most recent strategy narrative is written entirely in the present tense — and which of the four tense-questions does it fail to answer?
- Which past decision of your team would you name in a third-conditional sentence whose absence would still be visible in ten years' time?
- Draft, in three sentences, the future-perfect / future-perfect-continuous pair you would open the next annual letter with.

VOCABULARY

The long-horizon strategy lexicon

12 min

Match each term to its definition.

- scenario planning
the disciplined imagining of two or three plausible ten-year futures the firm has to be, in advance, hedged against — the register the mixed-tense narrative earns its keep in
- long-horizon capital
the capital pool — pension, endowment, sovereign — whose mandate is measured in decades, and whose questions the founder has, in the annual letter, to answer in the future perfect
- reflexive future
the future the firm's own actions this year will, in ten years, have brought about — the tense in which strategy either is or is not, in advance, owned

- counterfactual history
the version of the road behind in which the decision we did take had not, in fact, been taken — the tense discipline in which the third conditional lives
- generational contract
the implicit undertaking between a founding cohort and its successors about what the firm will still be recognisable by in twenty years
- productivity S-curve
the shape of technological adoption over a decade — flat, then steep, then flat — that the future-perfect sentence in the annual letter has to sit on the correct part of
- durable competitive advantage
the specific asset (data, network, brand, culture) that will still, in a decade, be recognisable as the thing the firm competes on — the noun the future perfect grammatical arc points at
- strategic patience
the deliberate willingness, over years, not to book the profit that would be available on the shorter horizon — the register in which the past-continuous / future-perfect pairing does its work

Complete each sentence with a phrase from the box.

- scenario planning_ scenario planning_ is the disciplined imagining of two or three plausible ten-year futures the firm has to be, in advance, hedged against.
- The questions long-horizon capital_ long-horizon capital_ asks are answered in the future perfect, not the present tense.
- The reflexive future_ reflexive future_ is the future the firm's own actions this year will, in ten years, have brought about.
- A counterfactual history_ counterfactual history_ — 'had we not signed the acquisition in 2011' — is the sentence the third conditional lives in.
- The generational contract_ generational contract_ is the implicit undertaking between the founding cohort and its successors about what the firm will still be recognisable by in twenty years.
- The productivity S-curve_ productivity S-curve_ is the shape the future-perfect sentence in the annual letter has to sit on the correct part of.

Choose the best answer.

- 'Scenario planning' matters in a ten-year narrative because it:
 - (a) adds detail
 - (b) forces the writer to sit two or three futures side by side, and to hedge the strategy against the branch in which it is, in the bad case, wrong
 - (c) sounds strategic
 - (d) impresses the board

Answer key: (b) forces the writer to sit two or three futures side by side, and to hedge the strategy against the branch in which it is, in the bad case, wrong
- The 'reflexive future' is:
 - (a) a mood
 - (b) the future the firm's own actions this year will, in ten years, have brought about — the tense in which strategy is, on the record, owned
 - (c) a hypothesis
 - (d) a forecast

Answer key: (b) the future the firm's own actions this year will, in ten years, have brought about — the tense in which strategy is, on the record, owned

- 'Long-horizon capital' asks its questions in the future perfect because:
 - (a) it is polite
 - (b) its mandate is measured in decades — a present-tense answer to a decade-out question is, by grammar, evasive
 - (c) it is patient
 - (d) it is large

Answer key: (b) its mandate is measured in decades — a present-tense answer to a decade-out question is, by grammar, evasive
- 'Strategic patience' is the register in which the past-continuous / future-perfect pairing works because:
 - (a) it sounds patient
 - (b) it names the years of foregone profit ('we had been declining the shorter deal') and the specific future they will, on the record, have unlocked
 - (c) it is calm
 - (d) it is quiet

Answer key: (b) it names the years of foregone profit ('we had been declining the shorter deal') and the specific future they will, on the record, have unlocked

LISTENING

Auditing the ten-year opener

12 min

Ines (CSO) coaches Julian (head of IR) through the opening paragraph of the ten-year narrative.

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER (INES): Read me the opening paragraph of the ten-year narrative. As you have it.

HEAD OF INVESTOR RELATIONS (JULIAN): "The company is a leader in its sector. We invest in innovation. We grow steadily. We plan to continue on this trajectory. Our people are our greatest asset and we are excited about the future."

INES: Five sentences, every verb in the present. If a sovereign lender reads that as the opener of a ten-year narrative, what do they price it as?

JULIAN: A three-year narrative at best. The paragraph has no past, no counterfactual, no future perfect — the reader cannot locate the firm on the decade.

INES: Correct. Rewrite the second sentence, "we invest in innovation", using the present perfect continuous with a dated start point.

JULIAN: "Since the pivot of 2020 we have been investing above the sector's decadal average — five uninterrupted years, and counting."

INES: Better. Now stack a past-perfect-continuous on a past reference point.

JULIAN: "By the time the pandemic arrived, we had been redirecting capital into digital-native platforms for eighteen months — and it was those eighteen months that carried us through 2020."

INES: Now the counterfactual. Third conditional. Name the decision you very nearly did not take.

JULIAN: "Had we not signed the Warsaw acquisition in 2011, the firm would not now be positioned on the two central-European markets that in 2035 will account for two-thirds of its revenue."

INES: And now the future perfect. Point at the specific fact the decade will, on the record, have delivered.

JULIAN: "By the year of the founder's retirement, this generation of employees will have exceeded the median of any generation before it in purpose-alignment scores — and, on current pace, will have delivered the fifty-thousandth new hire since the founding."

INES: Good. And now the pair — future perfect and future perfect continuous — because the long-horizon reader is buying the duration, not the fact.

JULIAN: "By 2035 we will have grown steadily above the sector's decadal growth line, and we will have been operating a materially higher standard of purpose-alignment reporting than any peer for the entire second half of that decade."

INES: Print that paragraph and put the present-tense version beside it. That is the ten-year paragraph. The other was the quarter's.

Choose the best answer.

- Ines's diagnosis of the present-tense paragraph is that:

- (a) it is short
- (b) a sovereign lender reads it as a three-year narrative at best — the firm has not situated itself on a decade's arc
- (c) it is passive
- (d) it is generic

Answer key: (b) a sovereign lender reads it as a three-year narrative at best — the firm has not situated itself on a decade's arc

- The rewrite 'Since the pivot of 2020 we have been investing above the sector's decadal average — five uninterrupted years, and counting' works because it:

- (a) uses 'we'
- (b) layers a dated start-point onto an ongoing action — the tense that names both the beginning and the continuing quality of the investment
- (c) is longer
- (d) sounds fluent

Answer key: (b) layers a dated start-point onto an ongoing action — the tense that names both the beginning and the continuing quality of the investment

- The third conditional about the 2011 acquisition matters in a forward-looking paragraph because it:

- (a) is grammatical
- (b) converts a past decision into a counterfactual whose absence would still be visible on the 2035 balance sheet — road-behind and road-ahead in one grammar
- (c) names Warsaw
- (d) uses 'had'

Answer key: (b) converts a past decision into a counterfactual whose absence would still be visible on the 2035 balance sheet — road-behind and road-ahead in one grammar

- The paired future-perfect / future-perfect-continuous is, in Ines's account, essential because:

- (a) symmetry
- (b) the long-horizon reader is buying the duration, not the fact — the continuous aspect is the grammar in which the duration lives
- (c) cadence
- (d) rhythm

Answer key: (b) the long-horizon reader is buying the duration, not the fact — the continuous aspect is the grammar in which the duration lives

Teacher notes

Extension: Have the student read the final paragraph aloud, then the original present-tense paragraph, and price both as if they were the sovereign lender. What is the spread?

GRAMMAR

Mixed-tense review — the four questions a decade's arc asks

18 min

Present perfect continuous: have/has + been + -ing. Names a dated start-point and an ongoing state. Since 2020 we have been trending above the sector line.

Past perfect continuous: had + been + -ing. Stacks a duration on to a past reference point. By the time the pandemic arrived, we had been redirecting capital for eighteen months.

Third conditional: if + had + past participle, would + have + past participle — or, inverted: Had + subject + past participle, would + have + past participle. Owns a counterfactual whose absence would still be visible today. Had we not signed the acquisition in 2011, the firm would not now be positioned on the two central-European markets.

Future perfect: will + have + past participle. Names the specific fact the decade will, on the record, have delivered. By 2035 we will have delivered the fifty-thousandth new hire since the founding.

Future perfect continuous: will + have + been + -ing. Names the duration the fact was reached over — the continuous aspect long-horizon capital is buying. By 2035 we will have been operating a materially higher standard of purpose-alignment reporting than any peer for the entire second half of the decade.

Mixed conditional: if + had + past participle, would + present infinitive — links a past counterfactual to a present consequence. Had we not signed the acquisition in 2011, we would not now be a two-market firm.

Rule of thumb: a ten-year paragraph answers four tense-questions at once — where the firm has come from, what it has been doing, what would still be true if a decision had not been taken, and what will, in ten years, have been true. Each has its own tense.

Choose the correct option.

- 'By 2035 we ____ the fifty-thousandth new hire since the founding.'
 - (a) will make
 - (b) will have made
 - (c) make
 - (d) would have made*Answer key: (b) will have made*
- 'When Anselm takes the chair next spring, we ____ on the pivot for three years.'
 - (a) will work
 - (b) will be working
 - (c) will have been working
 - (d) have been working*Answer key: (c) will have been working*
- 'Had we not signed the acquisition in 2011, the firm ____ what it is today.'
 - (a) would not be
 - (b) will not be
 - (c) is not
 - (d) had not been*Answer key: (a) would not be*

- 'By the time the second downturn arrived, we ____ the balance sheet for eighteen months.'
 (a) had been rebuilding
 (b) were rebuilding
 (c) have rebuilt
 (d) rebuilt
Answer key: (a) had been rebuilding
- 'In ten years' time this generation of employees ____ the median of any generation before it in terms of purpose-alignment scores.'
 (a) will exceed
 (b) will have exceeded
 (c) would have exceeded
 (d) exceeds
Answer key: (b) will have exceeded
- 'If we were to close the offer today, we ____ the ten-year window we opened in 2018.'
 (a) would have missed
 (b) would miss
 (c) will miss
 (d) had missed
Answer key: (b) would miss
- 'Since the 2020 pivot the firm ____ steadily above the sector's decadal growth line.'
 (a) is trending
 (b) has been trending
 (c) trends
 (d) will trend
Answer key: (b) has been trending
- 'By the time this letter is read, the succession ____ formally complete for six weeks.'
 (a) will be
 (b) will have been
 (c) is
 (d) would be
Answer key: (b) will have been

Complete the verb form.

- 'When Anselm takes the chair, we will have been working_ will have been working_ will have been working_ on the pivot for three full years.' (will + have + been + -ing)
- 'By 2035 this generation will have exceeded_ will have exceeded_ will have exceeded_ (exceed) the median of any generation before it in purpose-alignment scores.' (future perfect)
- 'Had we not signed the acquisition in 2011, the firm would not be_ would not be_ (be) what it is today.' (third conditional main clause)
- 'By the time the second downturn arrived, we had been rebuilding_ had been rebuilding_ had been rebuilding_ (rebuild) the balance sheet for eighteen months.' (past perfect continuous)

Discursive practice:

DESCRIBE THE SITUATION

Look at the picture and use the grammar you just studied

You are the chief strategy officer. Write 6–7 sentences of the opening paragraph of a ten-year narrative that hedges the firm against the three scenarios on the desk. Use at least four different tenses (one present perfect continuous, one past perfect continuous, one third conditional and one future perfect / continuous).

TRY TO USE

Since the pivot of 2020 we have been...

By the time X arrived, we had been...

Had we not... we would not now...

By 2035 we will have... and we will have been...

SAMPLE ANSWER

Since the pivot of 2020 we have been trending steadily above the sector's decadal growth line, and by the time Anselm takes the chair next spring we will have been working on the second phase of that pivot for three uninterrupted years. Had we not, in 2011, signed the Warsaw acquisition we very nearly declined, the firm would not now be positioned on the two central-European markets that in the Consolidated scenario account for two-thirds of 2035 revenue and, in the Fragmented scenario, still cover our full downside. By the time the Regenerative scenario has become the base case for our largest institutional client — a shift we have been modelling since 2023 and which we now expect between 2029 and 2031 — we will have re-engineered the second half of the portfolio to sit inside its emissions envelope. By 2035, on current pace, this generation of employees will have exceeded the median of any generation before it in purpose-alignment scores, and we will have been operating a materially higher standard of purpose-alignment reporting than any peer for the entire second half of the decade. That, and not this quarter, is the fact the reader of this letter is being asked to price. Under the three scenarios on the desk, the firm we will have become is a firm no one of the three, on its own, would have got us to. And that is why this letter has, deliberately, been written in more tenses than one.

VIDEO LESSON · REAL SPEAKERS**Peter Schwartz on the art of the long view**

Source: Long Now Foundation / Peter Schwartz on scenario planning and the ten-year narrative

C1+

□ 14 min

The co-founder of Global Business Network on the specific opening paragraph a serious ten-year narrative is written in — and on why the mixed-tense register is the single most reliable proxy long-horizon capital has for whether the writing team has, in fact, done the work of thinking on the decade.

Watch once for gist, then again pausing on the questions below. Use the original on YouTube for subtitles if needed.

1. WATCH FOR GIST

- 1. What, in Schwartz's account, is the single most consequential design decision in a ten-year narrative?

Answer key: The tense register of the opening paragraph — not the numbers page, not the executive summary.

- 2. Why does scenario planning belong upstream of the narrative paragraph?

Answer key: Because the paragraph has to sit two or three plausible futures side by side, and hedge the strategy against the one in which it is, in the bad case, wrong.

- 3. What is the failure mode of the present-tense strategy paragraph?

Answer key: The reader concludes the writer has prepared for the future by hoping it will look like the present.

2. WATCH FOR DETAIL

ASK THE TEACHER — notes to bring to class

- 1. Why does the future perfect belong at the front of a decade's paragraph, not at the back?
Answer key: Because long-horizon capital is being asked to price the fact the decade will have delivered — front-loading the future perfect signals that the writer, in advance, is prepared to own that fact.
- 2. What does the third conditional do, in a forward-looking paragraph, that no other tense can?
Answer key: It converts a past decision into a counterfactual whose absence would still be visible on the balance sheet in ten years — road-behind and road-ahead in one grammar.
- 3. What is the paired-aspect discipline Schwartz names?
Answer key: The deliberate pairing of the future perfect ('we will have grown') with the future perfect continuous ('we will have been growing steadily above the sector line for a decade') — the reader is buying the duration, not the fact.

3. KEY LANGUAGE

scenario planning

the disciplined imagining of two or three plausible ten-year futures the firm has to be, in advance, hedged against

the mixed-tense arc

the layering of present perfect continuous, past perfect continuous, third conditional and future perfect / continuous that situates a firm on a decade's arc

long-horizon capital

the capital pool whose mandate is measured in decades and whose reading of the narrative paragraph is priced accordingly

the untensed paragraph

the present-tense opener a shorter-horizon reader prices at a shorter-horizon price

4. DISCUSS IN PAIRS

- Which of your firm's recent strategy paragraphs is written entirely in the present tense — and which of Schwartz's four tense-questions does it fail to answer?
- Which past decision would you name in a third-conditional sentence whose absence would still be visible in ten years' time?
- Draft, in three sentences, the future perfect / future perfect continuous pair you would open the next annual letter with.

SPEAKING

Deliver the paragraph long-horizon capital reads for

15 min

Task 1 — Solo (2 min): Prepare, out loud, a 90-second opening of a ten-year narrative for a real or realistic firm you know. Use at least three of the four target tenses.

Task 2 — Solo delivery (8 min): Record yourself delivering the paragraph. Then re-record, this time replacing every present-tense verb with a mixed-tense equivalent that names the year, the duration or the counterfactual.

Speaking challenge: Re-record a third time and, this time, close with the future-perfect / future-perfect-continuous pair the long-horizon reader is being asked to price the decade on. Read out loud which of the three takes you would send to a sovereign lender.

Teacher notes

Coaching: Watch for the two failure modes — the untensed present and the future-perfect that never pairs with the future-perfect-continuous. C1 register lives in the deliberate layering of the four tense-questions.

Record your answer

WRITING**A one-page ten-year narrative opener**

25 min homework

Task (260–300 words): Draft the opening paragraph of a ten-year narrative for a firm you know or could plausibly consult to. Layer the four tense-questions: past perfect (continuous), present perfect (continuous), third conditional and future perfect (continuous).

Requirements:

- At least one dated start-point ('since 2020', 'since the pivot of...').
- At least one past-perfect-continuous stacked on a past reference point.
- At least one third conditional whose absence would still be visible in 2035.
- At least one future-perfect / future-perfect-continuous pair.
- End with the sentence the long-horizon reader is being asked, in this letter, to price the decade on.

Re-read the following day and underline every verb. Any verb still in the present tense is a decade the paragraph did not, in fact, commit to.

WRAP-UP**Consolidate before you leave**

5 min

Answer each prompt out loud or in a note to yourself.

- Name one present-tense sentence from a strategy paragraph you recently signed that would, in the ten-year register, have to become a mixed-tense sentence.
- Which of the four tense-questions — past-perfect-continuous, present-perfect-continuous, third conditional, future-perfect(-continuous) — do you naturally reach for, and which do you underuse?

- Give one past decision and its counterfactual whose absence would still be visible in ten years' time.
- One writing discipline you will stop (present-tense strategy openers?); one you will start (a future-perfect / continuous pair at the front?).
- Rate your last strategy paragraph 1–5 on: dated start-points / past-perfect stacking / counterfactual ownership / future-perfect specificity / continuous-aspect duration. Which is weakest?

Take-away:

WORKBOOK · HOME PRACTICE

Unit 10B Workbook

Do this after class. Answers are marked for your teacher.

VOCABULARY

The long-horizon capital lexicon

8 min

- 'Long-horizon capital' typically refers to:
 - (a) short-term traders
 - (b) capital with 10-year+ holding intent
 - (c) hedge funds
 - (d) bridge lenders
- A 'terminal value' captures:
 - (a) exit multiple only
 - (b) the value of cash flows beyond an explicit forecast horizon
 - (c) salvage value only
 - (d) goodwill only

*Answer key: (b) capital with 10-year+ holding intent**Answer key: (b) the value of cash flows beyond an explicit forecast horizon*

- A 'compounding machine' is a business that:
 - (a) is highly cyclical
 - (b) reinvests returns at high incremental rates over long horizons
 - (c) pays out all cash
 - (d) optimises quarter to quarter

Answer key: (b) reinvests returns at high incremental rates over long horizons

- A 'moat' is:
 - (a) a legal barrier only
 - (b) a structural source of durable competitive advantage
 - (c) a marketing budget
 - (d) a supply agreement

Answer key: (b) a structural source of durable competitive advantage

- A 'reinvestment runway' describes:
 - (a) capex quarter to quarter
 - (b) the number of years of high-return reinvestment ahead
 - (c) a debt covenant
 - (d) dividend policy

Answer key: (b) the number of years of high-return reinvestment ahead

GRAMMAR

Mixed-tense discipline — the ten-year paragraph long-horizon capital reads for

12 min

- Over the last decade, we ____ a business that ____ still ____ at the end of the next.
 - (a) built / will be / compounding
 - (b) have built / will still be / compounding
 - (c) have been building / would / compound
 - (d) built / would still / compound

Answer key: (b) have built / will still be / compounding

- By 2035, the reinvestment runway ____ shortened materially — but not exhausted.
 (a) will have
 (b) will be
 (c) would have
 (d) has
Answer key: (a) will have
- For the last three years, incremental returns ____ above 25%; we expect they ____.
 (a) have run / will
 (b) ran / do
 (c) have been running / will remain
 (d) are running / will
Answer key: (c) have been running / will remain
- If the moat ____ , the compounding ____ ; if it does not, it does not.
 (a) holds / holds
 (b) holds / will hold
 (c) will hold / will hold
 (d) held / would hold
Answer key: (b) holds / will hold
- We ____ our capital allocation for a decade, and we ____ so.
 (a) disciplined / continue to do
 (b) have disciplined / will continue to do
 (c) have been disciplining / continue to do
 (d) disciplined / would continue doing
Answer key: (b) have disciplined / will continue to do

Now rewrite each sentence using the phrase in bold.

- Anchor the horizon: 'By 2035, the runway is shortened but not exhausted.' by 2035 / will have_ by 2035 / will have_ , the runway by 2035 / will have_ by 2035 / will have_ shortened but not exhausted.
- Present perfect continuous: 'Returns have run above 25% for three years and continue to.' for the last / have been_ for the last / have been_ for the last / have been_ three years, incremental returns for the last / have been_ for the last / have been_ running above 25%.
- Conditional coupling: 'The moat holds compounding holds.' if it holds_ if it holds_ if it holds_ , the compounding will hold.
- Combine past and future: 'We disciplined capital for a decade and we will continue.' We have / will continue to do_ disciplined capital for a decade, and we have / will continue to do_ have / will continue to do_ so.
- Formal horizon phrase: 'In 2035...' by 2035_ by 2035_ , the reinvestment runway will have narrowed — but not closed.

WRITING

A one-page ten-year paragraph

20 min

Task (160–200 words): Draft the opening two paragraphs of a chairman's ten-year letter to long-horizon investors. Paragraph 1: what the last ten years produced, in mixed tenses. Paragraph 2: what the next ten depend on.

- Use at least four distinct tenses accurately (present perfect, present perfect continuous, future perfect, first conditional).

- Include reinvestment runway, moat and compounding.
- Avoid the words believe, vision and excited.

Teacher notes

Marking focus: Does the tense discipline actually place the reader in a ten-year arc, or are the tenses decorative?
