

## You've got talent!

Scene 1. The student and Ms Parrot are seated at a table.

Student:

I'm writing an essay about talent shows, and I need some help with the tenses of the verbs.

Ms Parrot:

Of course. Have you ever been to a talent show?

Student:

Yes. I went to one last week.

Ms Parrot:

What a coincidence. So did I!

Scene 2. The talent contest. Oscar Cicada, Professor Grahamarian and Bobby Dylan are seated together as the judging panel.

Oscar Cicada:

Welcome to *You've Got Talent*, or as it's known in Spanish, *Tengo talento, pero no mucho talento*, and in Portuguese, *Austrália sem talento*.

Professor Grahamarian :

*Tem talento.*

Oscar Cicada:

Oh yes. *Austrália tem talento*. And on our judging panel we have myself, Oscar Cicada, Professor Grahamarian and singer Bobby Dylan.

Professor Grahamarian:

Good evening. I'm pleased to see you here. Talent shows allow people to demonstrate their creative abilities. That's why talent shows are important.

Bobby Dylan:

They are the best way for people to become famous. In the past, shows were simpler. People used to win smaller prizes. Recently, though, talent contests have become bigger and more glamorous.

Professor Grahamarian :

Research has shown that such talent contests can even be harmful for the competitors.

Bobby Dylan:

I agree. Talent shows are exciting, but people nearly always feel nervous before they perform on stage.

Oscar Cicada:

Tonight we have some wonderful, and some ambitious, contestants. The first group are Adelaide's own *Really Really Terrible Quartet*.

The *Really Really Terrible Quartet* enter.

Bobby Dylan:  
How long have you been playing together?

Ms Parrot:  
At the end of August, we will have been playing together for 3 years.

Professor Grahamarian:  
How often do you practise?

Ms Parrot:  
We usually practise once a week.

Professor Grahamarian:  
So at the end of August you will have had over 150 rehearsals. And have you ever won a competition?

Ms Parrot (evasively):  
Not exactly.

Professor Grahamarian:  
Did you win the last competition you entered?

Ms Parrot:  
No. By the time we finished playing, all the audience had left. But I'm sure we'll win one day!

Bobby Dylan:  
Do you think you're going to win today?

Ms Parrot:  
We'll see.

Bobby Dylan:  
What will you be playing?

Ms Parrot:  
We're going to play some music by Mozart.

The RRTQ play.

Bobby Dylan:  
My theory is that we shouldn't judge by appearances. You all look very professional, but you sounded terrible. In your opinion, do you think you have any musical talent?

Ms Parrot:  
Oh no. We are all 'musically disadvantaged', like the *Really Terrible Orchestra* in Scotland.

Professor Grahamarian:  
While you were playing, I noticed that you didn't play in time with each other. And you didn't play in tune.

Ms Parrot:  
Oh no. That would spoil the fun!

Exit RRTQ to very thin applause.

Oscar Cicada:  
Who's next?

Prince Wolfgang and the Medics enter.

Oscar Cicada:  
What's your name?

Prince Wolfgang :  
We're Prince Wolfgang and the Medics.

Oscar Cicada:  
Thank you. That was brilliant. I loved the instruments.

Bobby Dylan:  
That was wonderful! Great sense of rhythm.

Oscar Cicada:  
Ladies and gentlemen. There were two acts, but one clear winner. Prince Wolfgang and the Medics have won this round and will go through to the final competition. The results of the show indicate that people must have talent to win!

Scene 3. Back to Student and Ms Parrot discussing tenses

Student:  
Your group was 'interesting'. You said you had been practising for several years.

Ms Parrot:  
Yes. But we never improve. We don't try to be good! We just have fun. Now, what about your essay?

Student:  
Yes. I need help with the tenses. When do you use the present tense?

Ms Parrot:  
Let's see. We use the present simple for facts or strong predictions about the future: principles, opinions, results, actions, theories, claims and facts. Depending on the referencing style you're using, you can use the present simple even when someone said something in the past.

Student:  
Can you give me an example?

Ms Parrot:  
You can say "Shakespeare says" or "Confucius claims".

Student:  
That sounds strange to me.

Ms Parrot:  
Yes. But it's what we do. Let's look at some examples of tenses from the talent show.

Ms Parrot:  
A general principle

Professor Grahamarian:  
Talent shows entertain us! They allow people to demonstrate their creative abilities.

Ms Parrot:  
Someone's opinion

Bobby Dylan:  
In your opinion, do you think you have any musical talent?

Ms Parrot:  
Results

Oscar Cicada:  
The results of the show indicate that people must have talent to win!

Ms Parrot:  
A habitual action in the present

Bobby Dylan:  
. . . people nearly always feel nervous before they perform on stage.

Ms Parrot:  
A theory

Bobby Dylan:  
My theory is that we shouldn't just by appearances

Ms Parrot:  
A claim

Bobby Dylan:  
They are the best way for people to become famous.

Ms Parrot:  
A fact

Professor Grahamarian:  
. . . such talent shows can even be harmful for the contestants.

Ms Parrot:  
And past simple? Can you give me a fact in the past?

Student:  
There were two acts.

Ms Parrot:  
Good. And here is an example that shows what happened in the past but implies that something is different now.

Professor Grahamarian:  
In the past, shows were simpler.

Student:  
And there's an example with 'used to'.

Professor Grahamarian:  
People used to win smaller prizes.

Ms Parrot:  
Excellent. We use the present perfect to show that something started in the past and still has an effect now. Here's an example.

Bobby Dylan:  
Recently, though, talent contests have become bigger and more glamorous.

Ms Parrot:  
And we use progressive tenses for temporary or changing things. That means we don't use them so much in academic writing. We don't use the future much either, because academic writing usually talks about research or discusses ideas. You can find information about all the different tenses on the English for Uni website.

Student:  
Thanks Ms Parrot. Now I understand more about tenses I think I can write my essay.

Ms Parrot:  
You're welcome. Now, I'm just going to do a bit of violin practice. Would you like to stay and listen?

(She picks up her violin. The student exits hurriedly. Ms Parrot turns round.)  
Where did she go?!