

THE PRESENT TENSE (SADAŠNJE VREME) The Serbian present tense of **-em** Verbs

Here is the list of endings for the **-em** and **-jem** verb class

Table 1: The Present Tense Endings of **-em and **-jem** Verbs**

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
First person	-em/jem	-emo/jemo
Second person	-eš/ ješ	-ete/jete
Third person	-e/je	-u/ju

This is the most complex set of verbs in the sense that you cannot tell what the present tense stem is by just looking at the infinitive ending. Below I describe various groups of verbs that belong to this class and how you can recognize them.

1) The majority of verbs in this class have the infinitive stem in a consonant – **sti**:

Table 2. Examples **-em verbs derived from the infinitive in **-sti****

infinitive	tresti 'to shake'	spasti 'rescue',	gristi 'to bite'	plesti 'knit'
present stem	tres-	spas-	griz-	plet-

- The first two examples: **tresti** and **spasti** have the predictable present stem: **tres-** and **spas-**, respectively. Examples: Ja tresem: 'I shake', Spasem 'I rescue'
- However, the present tense stem for **gristi** is **griz**, not gris. Example: Ja grizem 'I bite'. Similar verbs like **gristi** are **vesti** 'crochet', with the present stem: **-vez**. Example: Ja vezem 'I crochet'
- Also, you may notice that the last example in Table 12 has the present stem **plet-** not ples-.
- Example: Ja pletem 'I knit'. Similar verbs like plesti are **grepsti** 'scratch', with the present stem: **greb**, not grep. Here, p became b. Example: Ja grebem 'I scratch'
- Some verbs in this class have infixes – inserted letters in the present tense stem. So you need to memorize such verbs. Here is a partial list.

Table 3. Examples of **-em verbs derived from the infinitive in **-sti** with the infixes **-d-** or **-dn-** in the present stem**

infinitive	present stem	Example: 3 rd pl.	Example: 1 st sg.	present stem infix
dovesti 'bring'	doved-	Oni dovedu. 'They bring'	Ja dovedem. 'I bring'	-d-
krasti 'steal'	krad-	Oni kradu. 'They steal'	Ja kradem. 'I steal'	-d-
jesti 'eat'	jed-	Oni jedu. 'They eat'	Ja jedem. 'I eat'.	-d-
pasti 'fall'	padn-	Oni padnu. 'They fall'	Ja padnem. 'I fall'	-dn-
sesti 'sit'	sedn-	Oni sednu. 'They sit'	Ja sednem. 'I sit'	-dn-
sresti 'meet'	sretn-	Oni sretnu. 'They meet'	Ja sretnem. 'I meet'	-tn-

2) The **-em** verbs can also be derived from infinitives in **-vati** (**ovati**, **-evati** and **-ivati**).

- These verbs are usually made of nouns, like 'put-ov-ati' 'travel', where **put** means **trip**. There are around 1,000 **-em** verbs derived from the infinitive in **-ovati**.
- There are only a dozen of **-em** verbs derived from infinitive verbs in **-evati**. All other infinitives in **-evati** belong to the **-am** class.
- There are around 2,000 **-em** verbs derived from infinitive verbs in **-ivati**.

Table 4. Examples of -jem verbs derived from the infinitive in -ovati, -evati and -ivati

infinitive	putovati 'to travel'	mačevati 'to fence'	pokazivati 'show'
present stem	putu-	maču-	pokazu-

Notes about the forms in Table 4:

- These are all [imperfective verbs](#), derived by infixing (or inserting) **-ov**, **-ev** and **-iv** to the infinitive stem.
- Note that all three present stem types have a vowel **u**, instead of the vowels of the infinitive: -o, -e or -i, respectively.
- These verbs are basically '**jem**' verbs, because '**j**' is inserted. So, you may call these verbs: -**ujem** verbs, because both **u** and **j** are inserted in the present stem.
- Examples: Ja put**ujem** 'I travel', Ja mač**ujem** 'I fence', Ja pokaz**ujem** 'I show'.
- In this group, we have also the infinitive **zvati** 'to call', which has the unusual present tense stem: **zov-**. Example: Ja ga z**ovem** 'I am calling him'.

2b) A subclass of -em verbs derived from the infinitive in -a-ti

Remember that the majority of verbs in **-ati** (over 5,000) belong to the **-am** class. However, there is a small number of verbs in **-ati**, that have the present tense of **-em** verbs. This subclass is the most complex one, because the present stem undergoes some sound changes.

Specifically, in this subclass, the (short) vowel **-a** in **-a-ti**, gets deleted in the present tense forms, and in addition, the final consonant of the infinitival root changes in the present tense forms, according to the following phonological rules:

p>plj, b>blj, m>mlj, v>j, t>ć, d>đ, s>š, z>ž, c>č, k>č, g>ž, h>š, sk>št

The examples are provided below.

Table 5. Examples of -em verbs derived from the infinitive in -a-ti undergoing sound changes in the present stem forms

sound change	infinitive	present stem	example
p>plj	kapati 'drip'	kaplj-	kapljem 'I drip'
b>blj	zobati* 'peck'	zoblj-	zobljem 'I peck'
m>mlj	hramati 'limp'	hramlj-	hramljem 'I limp'
va>j	davati	daj-	dajem 'I give'
ta>ć	umetati 'fit into'	umeć-	umećem 'I fit into'
da>đ	glodati 'nibble'	glod-	glodem 'I nibble'
sa>š	pisati 'write'	piš-	pišem 'I write'
ha>š	mahati 'wave, wag'	maš-	mašem 'I wave'
ska >š	iskati 'ask, demand'	išt-	ištem 'I demand'
z>ž	kazati 'say'	kaž-	kažem 'I say'
ca>č	isticati 'stand out'	istič-	ističem se 'I stand out'
ka>č	plakati 'cry, wail'	plač-	plačem 'I cry'
ga>ž	vagati 'weigh'	važ-	važem 'I weigh'
-n- infix	stati 'stop'	stan-	stanem 'I stop'
-n- infix	nestati 'disappear'	nestan-	nestanem 'I disappear'
	slati 'send'	šalj-	šaljem 'I send'

*Note that the verbs like **kolebati** 'falter' and **vežbati** 'exercise' change like the **-am** verbs, and not like the (j)em verbs. See the list of **-am** verbs.

And finally, the **-ati** infinitives that have a palatal consonant before **-ati**, such as **j, lj, nj, š** and also **r**, lose the vowel **-a** in the present tense. Here are some such verbs.

Table 6. Examples of -em verbs derived from the infinitive in: -j-ati, lj-ati, nj-ati, š-ati and r-ati

sound change	infinitive	present stem	example
ja > j	brijati 'shave'	brij-	Brijem se* 'I shave myself'
lja > lj	kašljati 'cough'	kašlj	Kašljem 'I cough'
nja > nj	počinjati 'begin'	počinj	Počinjem 'I begin'
ša > š	češati 'scratch'	češ	Češem se 'I scratch myself'
ra > r	orati 'plow'	or	Orem 'I plow'

*The reflexive pronoun **se** 'self' is used here.

3) The **-em** verbs can also be derived from some infinitives in **-iti, -eti, and -uti**.

The important thing to note here is that the infinitive root of these verbs ends in vowels **-i, -e,** or **-u**. So, please don't mix these verbs with the **-im** verb class, where the infinitive suffix is also **-iti,** or **-eti**. What distinguishes these verbs from the **-im** verbs is the verb root. The verb root in **-(j)em** class ends in **-i, -e,** or **-u,** whereas the verb root in the **-im** class ends in a consonant. Please refer to the section with **-im** verbs.

Table 7. Examples of -em verbs derived from the infinitive in -iti, -eti and -uti

infinitive	Šiti 'to sew'	umeti 'to know how'	čuti 'hear'
present stem	šij-	ume-	čuj-

- Note that the verbs in **-iti** and **-uti**, have the present stem **-jem**. Examples: Ja šijem 'I sew', Ja čujem 'I hear'. Compare with the **-eti** infinitive: Ja umem 'I know how'
- Some present stems, derived from the infinitives in **-eti**, have an infix, an inserted letter(s). So you need to memorize such verbs.

Table 8. Examples of -em verbs derived from the infinitive in -eti with the infixes s and m

infinitive	present stem	Example: 3 rd pl.	Example: 1 st sg.	present stem infix
doneti 'to bring'	dones-	Oni donesu 'They bring'	Ja donesem 'I bring'	-s-
podneti 'submit'	podnes	Oni podnesu. 'They submit'	Ja podnesem. 'I submit'	-s-
početi 'to start'	počn	Oni počnu 'They start'	Ja počnem 'I start'	-n-
oteti 'abduct, seize'	otm	Oni otmu. 'They seize'.	Ja otmem. 'I grind'.	-m-
uzeti 'take'	uzm	Oni uzmu. 'They take'	Ja uzmem. 'I take'	-m-

- Click here to see a more comprehensive list of **-em** verbs derived from the infinitive **-iti, -eti** and **-uti**.

4) The **-em** verbs can also be derived from infinitives in **-ći**.

In addition to **-ti**, infinitives can also end in **-ći**. The present stem of such verbs belongs to the **-em** class. All these verbs get an infix in the present stem. The infix is different for different verbs. Don't get overwhelmed. With practice, you'll learn them. Here is a partial list of such verbs.

Table 9. Examples of **-em verbs derived from the infinitive in **-ći**.
Note the unusual present stem, and then the sound changes of the present tense forms**

infinitive	present stem	Example: 3 rd pl.	Example: 1 st sg.	present tense stem infix/sound changes
ići 'go'	id-	idu 'they go'	idem 'I go'	-d-
doći 'come'	dođ	dođu 'they come'	dođem 'I come'	-đ-
proći 'pass through'	prođ	prođu 'they pass through'	prođem 'I pass through'	-đ-
naći 'find'	nađ	nađu 'they find'	nađem 'I find'	-đ-
dići 'lift'	dign	dignu 'they lift'	dignem 'I lift'	-gn-
leći 'lie down'	legn	legnu 'they lie down'	legnem 'I lie down'	-gn-
pomoći 'help'	pomogn	pomognu 'they help'	pomognem 'I help'	-gn-
reći 'say'	rekn	reknu 'they say'	reknem 'I say'	-kn-
maći 'move'	makn	maknu 'they move'	maknem 'I move'	-kn-
peći 'bake'	pek-	peku 'they bake'	pe č em 'I bake'	k>č (before -e)
seći 'cut'	sek-	seku 'they cut'	se č em 'I cut'	k>č (before -e)
vući 'pull'	vuk-	vuku 'they pull'	vu č em 'I pull'	k>č (before -e)

- Notice that for the last three verbs with the present stem in **k**, that sound undergoes the sound change, turning into **č** before the vowel **e**.

This completes the list of present tense verbs with 'fairly' regular present-tense conjugation. Overwhelmed? I am. But don't worry. You'll learn this by doing exercises in your lessons and also by conversing with the native Serbian speakers.

Here are the examples of some verbs in this class –fully conjugated for you.

Table 10: Present tense verb forms for -em verbs

English	Infinitive	Present – for all persons – singular first line, plural –second line	Verb class
get	dobiti	dobijem, dobiješ, dobije dobijemo, dobijete, dobiju	-em
give	davati (impf)	dajem, daješ, daje dajemo, dajete, daju	-em
go	ići	idem, ideš, ide idemo, idete, idu	-em
hear	čuti	čujem, čuješ, čuje čujemo, čujete, čuju	-em
eat	jesti	jedem, jedeš, jede jedemo, jedete, jedu	-em
believe	verovati	verujem, veruješ, veruje verujemo, verujete, veruju	-em
call	zvati	zovem, zoveš, zove zovemo, zovete, zovu	-em
sell	prodati	prodajem, prodaješ, prodaje prodajemo, prodajete, prodaju	-em
bring	dovesti (perfective)	dovedem, devedeš, devede dovedemo, dovedete, dovedu	-em