

What are Verb Tenses?

Verb tenses give a sense of timing to the action.

	Simple	Continuous	Perfect	Perfect Continuous
Past	<p>--Events that start and finish in the past <i>I <u>worked</u> there last summer</i></p>	<p>--For events that were in progress in the past (often when another one-time event happened) <i>He <u>was sleeping</u> when I got home.</i> <i>Sorry I didn't answer the phone</i> <i>- I <u>was taking</u> a shower</i></p>	<p>--For past events that happened BEFORE other past events <i>When I woke up, I saw that my cat <u>had eaten</u> a mouse</i></p>	<p>--For past actions that continued up to another point in the past <i>Before I lost my job, I <u>had been working</u> on some projects</i></p>
Present	<p>--General Facts <i>The shirt <u>costs</u> ten dollars</i> --Actions that happen regularly <i>I <u>eat</u> lunch at 12:00</i></p>	<p>--For continuous action in progress at the moment <i>I'm <u>working</u> on my PhD</i> --For future plans/arrangements <i>I'm <u>having</u> lunch with my sister tomorrow</i></p>	<p>--Actions that happen in the past at an unspecified time <i>I've <u>been</u> to China</i> --Actions that began in the past and continue to the present <i>I've <u>worked</u> here 12 years</i> --Actions that have never happened <i>She's <u>never eaten</u> sushi.</i></p>	<p>--Actions that began in the past and continue to the present <i>I've <u>been thinking</u> about that since yesterday</i></p>
Future	<p>--For plans, arrangements, and predictions <i>We're <u>going to move</u> next year</i> -- For promises, predictions, and decisions made in the moment of speaking <i>I'll <u>call</u> you later</i> <i>He <u>will be late</u></i></p>	<p>--For actions that will be in progress at a time in the future <i>Don't call me I'll <u>be driving</u> home.</i> <i>He'll <u>be coming</u> home late.</i></p>	<p>--For actions that will be completed before a future time <i>I <u>will have written</u> a paper before December</i></p>	<p>--For actions that will continue in the future <i>By the time she graduates she <u>will have been studying</u> for 7 years.</i></p>

<p>General Rules at the Sentence Level: Keep tenses consistent within sentences. Do not change tenses when there is no time change for the action.</p>
<p>General Rules at the Paragraph Level: Generally, establish a primary tense and keep tenses consistent from sentence to sentence. Do not shift tenses between sentences unless there is a time change that must be shown.</p>

<p>General Rules at the Paper Level:</p> <p>Use present tense: --your own ideas --factual topics --the action in a specific movie, play, or book</p> <p>Use future tense: an event that will occur in the future.</p> <p>Remember: ONLY change tense when something in the content of your essay demands that you do so for clarity.</p>	<p>Use past tense: --past events --completed studies or findings --arguments presented in scientific literature</p>
--	---

Tense Agreement Worksheet

Check the following sentences for confusing shifts in tense. If the tense of each underlined verb expresses the time relationship accurately, write S (satisfactory). If a shift in tense is not appropriate, write U (unsatisfactory) and make necessary changes. In most cases with an inappropriate shift, there is more than one way to correct the inconsistency. Reading the sentences aloud will help you recognize differences in time.

- ___ 1. If the club limited its membership, it will have to raise its dues.
- ___ 2. As Barbara puts in her contact lenses, the telephone rang.
- ___ 3. Thousands of people will see the art exhibit by the time it closes.
- ___ 4. By the time negotiations began, many pessimists have expressed doubt about them.
- ___ 5. After Capt. James Cook visited Alaska on his third voyage, he is killed by Hawaiian islanders in 1779.
- ___ 6. I was terribly disappointed with my grade because I studied very hard.
- ___ 7. The moderator asks for questions as soon as the speaker has finished.
- ___ 8. Everyone hopes the plan would work.
- ___ 9. Harry wants to show his friends the photos he took last summer.
- ___ 10. Scientists predict that the sun will die in the distant future.
- ___ 11. The boy insisted that he has paid for the candy bars.
- ___ 12. The doctor suggested bed rest for the patient, who suffers from a bad cold.

In the following passage from Alex Haley's *Roots*, some of the verbs have been deliberately omitted. Supply the appropriate tense for each missing verb, the plain form of which is given in brackets.

In Banjul, the capital of Gambia, I met with a group of Gambians. They [tell] me how for centuries the history of Africa has been preserved. In the older villages of the back country, there are old men called griots, who [be] in effect living archives. Such men [memorize] and, on special occasions, [recite] the cumulative histories of clans or families or villages as those histories [have] long been told. Since my forefather [have] said his name was Kin-tay (properly spelled Kinte), and since the Kinte clan [be] known in Gambia, the group of Gambians would see what they could do to help me. I was back in New York when a registered letter [arrive] from Gambia.

Words [have] been passed in the back country, and a griot of the Kinte clan [have], indeed, been found. His name, the letter said, [be] Kebba Kanga Fofana. I [return] to Gambia and [organize] a safari to locate him.

Tense Agreement Worksheet Answer Key

- U 1. If the club **limited** its membership, it *will* have to raise its dues. (**change will to would**)
- U 2. As Barbara *puts* in her contact lenses, the telephone **rang**. (**change puts to put**) OR As Barbara *puts* in her contact lenses, the telephone **rings**. (**change rang to rings to illustrate ongoing action**)
- S 3. Thousands of people **will see** the art exhibit by the time it **closes**.
- U 4. By the time negotiations **began**, many pessimists *have* expressed doubt about them. (**change have to had**)
- U 5. After Capt. James Cook **visited** Alaska on his third voyage, he *is* killed by Hawaiian islanders in 1779. (**change is to was**)
- U 6. I **was** terribly disappointed with my grade because I *studied* very hard. (**change studied to had studied**)
- S 7. The moderator *asks* for questions as soon as the speaker **has finished**. (**asks as habitual action; will ask is also possible**)
- U 8. Everyone *hopes* the plan **would work**. (**change hopes to hoped**)
- S 9. Harry **wants** to show his friends the photos he **took** last summer.
- S 10. Scientists **predict** that the sun **will die** in the distant future.
- U 11. The boy **insisted** that he *has* paid for the candy bars. (**change has to had**)
- U 12. The doctor **suggested** bed rest for the patient, who *suffers* from a bad cold. (**change suffers to was suffering**)

In Banjul, the capital of Gambia, I met with a group of Gambians. They **told** me how for centuries the history of Africa has been preserved. In the older villages of the back country, there are old men called griots, who **are** in effect living archives. Such men **memorize** and, on special occasions, **recite** the cumulative histories of clans or families or villages as those histories **have** long been told. Since my forefather **had** said his name was Kin-tay (properly spelled Kinte), and since the Kinte clan **was** known in Gambia, the group of Gambians would see what they could do to help me. I was back in New York when a registered letter **arrived** from Gambia.

Word **had** been passed in the back country, and a griot of the Kinte clan **had**, indeed, been found. His name, the letter said, **was** Kebba Kanga Fofana. I **returned** to Gambia and **organized** a safari to locate him.