

Verb Tenses

When a verb (verb = an action word) is used in English, the way it is *conjugated* must show when the action occurs (or occurred, or will occur). That is, it must show *tense*. Verbs change their form according to the subject (e.g.: Jon, she, people) as well as the tense (e.g.: past, present, future).

Tense	Use	Conjugation with Examples	Sentence Level Examples
Simple Present	1) The action is happening right now. 2) The action happens regularly, all the time, or without stopping. 3) When discussing a literary text (<i>the literary present</i>).	Root form of verb: e.g.: <i>run</i> Plural subject: e.g.: <i>run</i> Singular subject: e.g.: <i>runs</i> (add 's')	1) Charles <u>runs</u> across the street. 2) Modernists <u>explore</u> absurdist themes. 3) Marlow <u>embodies</u> colonial hubris.
Present Perfect	1) The action occurred at an unknown time in the past. 2) The action began in the past and continues into the present. 3) When referring to authors in-text in APA style.	Singular subject: <i>has</i> + verb ('ed' form) (e.g.: <i>has lived</i>) Plural subject: <i>have</i> + verb ('ed' form) (e.g.: <i>have lived</i>)	1) Antonio <u>has read</u> <i>The Hobbit</i> . 2) David <u>has lived</u> in China for three years. 3) Brown and Smith (2016) <u>have researched</u> the emergence of neoliberalism.
Present Continuous	The action is happening now (and may continue). Note: A helping verb (<i>am, is, or are</i>) needs to be added to the root verb in 'ing' form. The verb form <i>am</i> is only used when the subject is 'I'.	Singular subject: <i>is</i> + verb ('ing' form) (e.g.: <i>is enjoying</i>) Plural subject: <i>are</i> + verb ('ing' form) (e.g.: <i>are enjoying</i>)	1) She <u>is enjoying</u> the movie so far. 2) They <u>are investigating</u> the link between diet and dementia. 3) I <u>am studying</u> the history of the Incas.
Simple Past	1) The action occurred in the past and is now complete. 2) When referring to authors in-text in APA style. Note: Most verbs take the 'ed' form, but irregular verbs like <i>go, take, or make</i> are treated differently.	Regular verbs: verb ('ed' form) (e.g.: <i>travelled</i>) Irregular Verbs: <i>went, took, made</i>	1) She <u>travelled</u> to India last year. 2) Bandura (1977) <u>posited</u> that social factors influence learning. 3) Lashawna <u>went</u> to King's last year.
Past Perfect	The action was completed before some point in the past. Note: Most verbs take the 'ed' form, but irregular verbs like <i>go, take, or make</i> are treated differently.	Regular verbs: <i>had</i> + verb ('ed' form) (e.g.: <i>had danced</i>) Irregular verbs: e.g.: <i>gone, taken, made</i>	1) Jayda Gadwa <u>had danced</u> at the pow wow the previous weekend. 2) They had <u>made</u> an agreement last year to meet again.
Past Continuous	The action was continuous and was happening at some point in the past.	Singular subject: <i>was</i> + verb ('ing' form) (e.g.: <i>was playing</i>) Plural subject: <i>were</i> + verb ('ing' form) (e.g.: <i>were playing</i>)	They <u>were playing</u> in the yard when their mother called them for dinner.
Simple Future	The action will begin and end in the future.	<i>will</i> + verb (root form)	Carter <u>will sing</u> in the play tomorrow.

In general, verb tenses must not be changed at random; they must only be changed if there is a strong logical reason to do so.

Here is an example of a sentence in which verb tenses change for no reason:

Sam *backed up* her car and *drives* to the grocery store.

In this sentence, the initial compound verb ("*backed up*") is in simple past tense, while the second verb ("*drives*") is in simple present tense.

Here is a revised version of the sentence in which the verb tenses are consistent:

Sam *backed up* her car and *drove* to the grocery store.

(By changing the verb '*drives*' to '*drove*', we have ensured that the sentence is consistently in simple past tense. It would also be fine to say: Sam *backs up* her car and *drives* to the grocery store.)

In some cases a change in verb tense may be needed because *the time frame has changed*:

Sam *backed up* her car at 9.15 A.M., and now she *is driving* to the grocery store.

In this version of the sentence, the initial compound verb ("*backed up*") is in simple past tense, while the second verb (*is driving*) is in present continuous tense. The sentence starts with a moment in the near past (when Sam backed up her car) to explain a present action (driving to the grocery store).

Finally, it is proper to conjugate verbs in the present tense when discussing characters, events, or ideas within a literary text. For example:

In Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Samad struggles to maintain his Muslim identity in a dominantly English context.

More on Verb Tenses:

The Little Seagull Handbook (3rd Edition), pp. 322-34

OWL Purdue: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/grammar/verb_tenses/index.html

A resource created by Tristin Barker for



<https://kings.uwo.ca/writeplace>