

CONSISTENCY IN VERB USAGE

Verbs need to be used in a consistent manner in both writing and speech. When verbs shift in tense, mood or voice without warning or reason, readers or listeners will become confused.

Consistency in Verb Tense

Start by determining the main verb tense for your text. Be clear on the purposes and conventions of each verb tense when deciding what your main tense will be.

TENSE	USAGE	EXAMPLE
Simple Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Habitual actions▪ Actions occurring at the time of writing/speaking▪ Facts or general truths▪ Fictional events in a literary text▪ Future actions that will occur at a specified time▪ Quoting and paraphrasing	I write.
Simple Past	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Actions that were completed in the past	I wrote.
Simple Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Actions that will happen in the future	I will write.
Present Perfect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Actions that begin in the past and continue into the present▪ Continual or habitual actions▪ Events which happened at an unspecified time in the past	I have written essays for many years.
Past Perfect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Actions completed before another action in the past▪ Quoting	He said that I wrote the essay before I had done enough research.
Future Perfect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Actions that will be completed before or by a specific time in the future	By next year, I will have written ten essays.
Present Progressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Actions in progress	I am writing an essay.
Past Progressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Actions that occurred over a specific period of time in the past▪ Actions in the past that were interrupted by other actions	I was writing my essay for two weeks. I was writing an essay when he called.
Future Progressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Actions which will occur in the future at a specified time▪ Actions which will occur in the future in relation to other actions	I will be writing my essay when he calls.

NOTE ON QUOTING, PARAPHRASING AND SUMMARIZING:

For MLA style: Use verbs in the present tense, such as: *she states, he asserts, he says.*
For APA style: Use verbs in the past tense, such as: *she reported, he demonstrated.*

Once you have determined your main tense, only use shifts to other tenses when you need to indicate changes in time frame, such as when an action happened before the time frame of your main verb tense. If the time frame for both actions is the same, do not shift to another tense.

For their group's report, she wrote the introduction while he wrote the conclusion. The others had already written the body.

Consistency in Mood

There are three moods of English verbs:

1. **Indicative:** for facts, questions and opinions
2. **Subjunctive:** for wishes or suppositions
3. **Imperative:** for advice or commands

Avoid switching from one to the other without preparing the reader for a shift.

Incorrect:

The tutor gave me advice about verb tenses. Be consistent!

Correct:

The tutor gave me advice about verb tenses, "Be consistent!"

Here is some advice about verb tenses: be consistent!

In the first corrected sentence, quotation marks separate the stated advice from the writer's introduction of the quotation, thereby preparing readers for a possible shift in mood. In the second corrected example, a colon prepares the reader for a shift in mood.

Consistency in Voice

If you are writing a scientific report in passive voice, don't switch to active voice. If you are writing an analytical essay in active voice, don't suddenly switch to passive voice.

Incorrect:

The professor informed me that the article was written by her.

Correct:

The professor informed me that she had written the article.

In the incorrect example, the voice switches from active to passive. In the corrected version, the voice is consistently active.