

Verb Tenses

RULE: All verbs in a sentence **MUST** be consistent with each other in tense. A tense is a verb form that shows the time of an action.

TENSES	WHEN TO USE	VERB FORM	EXAMPLE
Present	Action occurring now		I <i>rest</i> when I am tired.
Past	Action occurred in the past	Present tense verb + <i>d</i> or <i>ed</i>	I <i>rested</i> when I was tired.
Future	Action will occur in the future	<i>Will</i> or <i>shall</i> + present tense verb	I <i>will rest</i> tomorrow.
Present Perfect	Action was completed at one or more times in the past	<i>Has</i> or <i>have</i> + past tense verb	I <i>have rested</i> many times before.
Past Perfect*	A past action preceded another past action	<i>Had</i> + past verb tense	I <i>had rested</i> when you called.
Future Perfect*	An action in the future will precede another future action	<i>Will have</i> or <i>shall have</i> + past tense verb	I <i>will have rested</i> by the time you arrive.
Present Progressive	Action is in progress	<i>Am</i> + ing verb	I <i>am resting</i> now.
Past Progressive	Action was in progress	<i>Was</i> + ing verb	I <i>was resting</i> yesterday.
Future Progressive	Action will be in progress	<i>Will be</i> + ing verb	I <i>will be resting</i> tomorrow.
Present Perfect Progressive	Action began in the past and is continuing in the present	<i>Have been</i> + ing verb	I <i>have been resting</i> all day.
Past Perfect Progressive*	Action was ongoing when it was interrupted by another action	<i>Had been</i> + ing verb	I <i>had been resting</i> when you called.
Future Perfect Progressive	Action will have been ongoing by the time of another future action	<i>Will have been</i> + ing verb	By tomorrow, I <i>will have been resting</i> for two days.

*Because these three verb tenses indicate two different actions that happen at two different times, the verbs will not agree.

Example: Because he ran so fast, he wins the race. (incorrect)
Because he ran so fast, he won the race. OR Because he runs so fast, he wins the race. (correct)

Exercise: Change the verbs in each sentence to agree.

- The movie finally ended, but all the buses are full. _____
- The man tries to rescue the cat, but he was unsuccessful. _____

THREE EXCEPTIONS:

- Past perfect, future perfect and past perfect progressive (see chart above)**
- Historical present tense**
- When discussing literature**

1. **Past Perfect Verb Tenses**

Sentences that use these verb tenses have two separate actions that occur at two different times. Though three of the verb tenses (past perfect, future perfect and past perfect progressive) use two verbs in a single sentence that do not agree, the SAT makes past perfect tense mistakes more than the other two. For the past perfect tense, you must decide which action in the sentence occurs first. If the action HAPPENED first you add *HAD*. There are usually clue words in these types of sentences that indicate time. Some such words are: until, before, after, when, while . . .

Examples: I had seen the stop sign before I saw the policeman. (correct)
 Bobby told us the final score after we had heard it on the radio. (correct)

Exercises: Circle all verbs. Correct any verb tenses that need changing by writing correct verb on blank.

1. Until last Friday, we thought we lost the cat. _____
2. Before I went to bed, I finished the book. _____
3. After you arrived, he sang “Happy Birthday to You”. _____
4. I walked slowly until I saw the thunderstorm. _____
5. It rained before the game began. _____

II. **Historical present tense**

Present tense is used for facts that are always true regardless of the tense of the rest of the verbs in the sentence.

Example: I wrote about Copernicus’ discovery which stated that the earth revolved around the sun. (incorrect)
 I wrote about Copernicus’ discovery that *states* that the earth *revolves* around the sun.(correct)

III. **When Discussing Literature**

Present tense is used when discussing literature regardless of the tense of the rest of the verbs in the sentence.

Example: While with my friends, I discussed how Hamlet killed his uncle. (incorrect)
 While with my friends, I discussed how Hamlet *kills* his uncle. (correct)

Exercises: Circle all verbs. Correct any verb tenses that need changing by writing correct verb on blank.

1. I walked past the sign which read that Key West was the southernmost point of the United States. _____
2. Kafka’s hero in “The Metamorphosis” transformed into an enormous insect. _____
3. I wore sunscreen since the ultraviolet rays of the sun caused skin cancer. _____
4. I learned that summer began on June 21st. _____
5. My teacher told me that the English Channel separated England and France. _____

Cumulative Review Exercises: Correct all incorrect verb tenses.

1. When Karen sleeps, she has snored loudly. _____
2. In 1970, the grain production has been increasing but was wasted. _____
3. The price has been set and the car had been sold. _____
4. The historian argued that the world was round. _____
5. Pollution has been studied for years, but the damage was only now apparent. _____
6. Orwell’s novel, *1984*, explored the power and influence of Big Brother. _____
7. Before I went to the movies, I cleaned my room. _____
8. Last Saturday, we stop at the store and buy new shoes. _____