

Verb Tenses Guide: When to Keep Them Consistent and When to Mix

Why Verb Tenses Matter

Verb tenses tell us when things happen. When we mix tenses without a good reason, our writing gets confusing. But sometimes, mixing tenses is needed to show when different actions happen.

Basic Tenses to Know

Past Tense

- **Past Simple:** I walked, I played, I saw
- **Past Continuous:** I was walking, I was playing
- **Past Perfect:** I had walked, I had seen

Present Tense

- **Present Simple:** I walk, I play, I see
- **Present Continuous:** I am walking, I am playing
- **Present Perfect:** I have walked, I have seen

Future Tense

- **Future Simple:** I will walk, I will play
- **Future Perfect:** I will have walked

When to Keep Tenses the Same

Keep your tenses the same when:

1. All actions happen at the same time

- **Good:** Yesterday, I **went** to the shop, **bought** some sweets, and **walked** home.
- **Bad:** Yesterday, I **went** to the shop, **buy** some sweets, and **was walking** home.

2. Writing about facts or regular habits

- **Good:** Water **boils** at 100°C. The Earth **orbits** the sun.
- **Bad:** Water **boils** at 100°C. The Earth **orbited** the sun.

3. Telling a story in one time period

- **Good:** The dog **barked**, **jumped** over the fence, and **ran** away.
- **Bad:** The dog **barked**, **jumps** over the fence, and **ran** away.

When It's OK to Mix Tenses

You can mix tenses when:

1. Some actions happened before others

- **Good:** By the time I **arrived**, they **had already eaten** dinner.
- (Past simple + past perfect)

2. Connecting past events to the present

- **Good:** I **have lived** here since I **was** five years old.
- (Present perfect + past simple)

3. Stating timeless facts within a past story

- **Good:** She **explained** that the Earth **orbits** the sun.
- (Past simple + present simple for the fact)

4. Showing a change over time

- **Good:** She **used to hate** vegetables, but now she **loves** them.
- (Past + present to show change)

5. Using time markers that require different tenses

- **Good:** Every day I **walk** to school, but **yesterday** I **took** the bus.
- (Present simple + past simple with clear time markers)

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. Random tense shifts

- **Wrong:** I **went** to the cinema and then I **am eating** popcorn.
- **Right:** I **went** to the cinema and then I **ate** popcorn.

2. Wrong forms of irregular verbs

- **Wrong:** I **have went** to that restaurant before.
- **Right:** I **have gone** to that restaurant before.

3. Mixing past and present in one time frame

- **Wrong:** When I **was** young, I **love** playing outside.
- **Right:** When I **was** young, I **loved** playing outside.

Practice Exercise

Fix these sentences:

1. Last week, I visit my gran and she gives me some biscuits.
2. I have saw that film three times already.
3. By next month, I will finished the project.
4. When I was a child, I am afraid of the dark.
5. She has lived in London since she moves there in 2020.

Remember!

It's not wrong to mix tenses if you have a good reason. What matters is that your writing is clear and the time of each action makes sense.

Practice Exercise Answers

1. Last week, I **visited** my gran and she **gave** me some biscuits. (Past simple tense needed for a completed action in the past)
2. I have **seen** that film three times already. (Correct past participle form needed for present perfect tense)
3. By next month, I will **have finished** the project. (Future perfect tense needed for an action that will be completed by a future time)
4. When I was a child, I **was** afraid of the dark. (Past tense needed to match the time frame "when I was a child")
5. She has lived in London since she **moved** there in 2020. (Past simple needed for the specific completed action in 2020)



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