



Verb Tenses

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June 2015

Verbs

Think of a sentence like a movie. The **subject** is the “star” of your sentence, the person or thing around which all action revolves.

A **verb**, on the other hand, is the actual action taking place.

Here’s an example: In the movie *Die Hard*, **actor Bruce Willis** **crawls** through a lot of ducts and air shafts.

Bruce Willis is the “star,” the one doing the action. That means he is the subject. “Crawls” is the action being performed – that means “crawls” is the verb.

Sometimes, a verb just describes a state of being or existence.

Roses are red; **violets are** blue.

The **pillow case** **had** Teenage Ninja Mutant Turtles on it.

My brother is the owner of a 100-acre farm called “Belly Acres.”



Verb Tense

Verb tense is determined by looking at two factors:

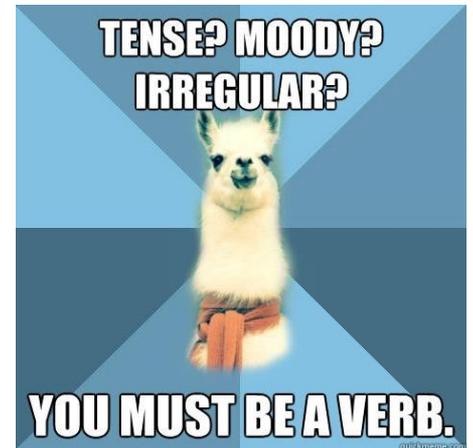
Factor One: When did the action take place?

Past Tense – these events have already taken place by the time the reader is reading the sentence.

Present Tense – these events are taking place at the same time the reader is reading the sentence.

Future Tense – these events will take place in the future, sometime after the reader has read the sentence.

Factor Two: Was/Is the action a continuous and on-going activity or a one-time situation?



Verb Tense

For the next several slides, you are going to see a LOT of verbs and tenses, and you may feel like your head will explode.

These slides are not meant to be memorized or worried about. Rather, the slides are meant to show you that when it comes to verbs, you have a lot of choices. But all choices depend on these three factors:

1. Is your subject plural (more than one) or singular (one)?
2. Did the action already take place, is the action currently taking place, or will the action take place in the future?
3. Is the action a one-time deal or does the action continue?



Verb Tense: Past



Simple Past

A simple past tense verb uses a verb with an **-ed** suffix.

Anna **jumped** on the bed and **giggled** like a three-year-old child.
The six crows **landed** on the bird feeder and **fought**.

Past Continuous

A past continuous verb uses was/were + a verb with an **-ing** suffix.

Anna **was jumping** on the bed and **was giggling** like a three-year-old child.
The six crows **were landing** on the bird feeder and **were fighting**.

Past Perfect

A past perfect verb uses had + a verb with an **-ed** suffix.

Anna **had jumped** on the bed and **had giggled** like a three-year-old child.
The six crows **had landed** on the bird feeder and **had fought**.

Past Perfect Continuous

A past perfect continuous verb uses had + been + a verb with an **-ing** suffix.

Anna **had been jumping** on the bed and **had been giggling** like a three-year-old child.
The six crows **had been landing** on the bird feeder and **had been fighting**.



Verb Tense: Present

Simple Present:

I **exercise** every day, and I **love** my Zumba class.

They **watch** *Mad Men* on Sundays but **stop** to watch Sunday Night Football.

Present Continuous

A present continuous verb uses am/are/is + a verb with an –ing suffix.

I **am exercising** every day, and I **am loving** my Zumba class.

They **are watching** *Mad Men* on Sundays but **are stopping** to watch Sunday Night Football.

Present Perfect

A present perfect verb uses have/has + a verb with an –ed suffix.

I **have exercised** every day, and I **have loved** my Zumba class.

They **have watched** *Mad Men* on Sundays but **have stopped** for Sunday Night Football.

Present Perfect Continuous

A present perfect continuous verb uses have/has + been + a verb with an –ing suffix.

I **have been exercising** every day, and I **have been loving** my Zumba class.

They **have been watching** *Mad Men* on Sundays but **have been stopping** for Sunday Night Football.



Something tells me this isn't what they meant

Verb Tense: Future

Simple Future (will, may, might):

A simple future verb uses a word like will/may/might + verb.

Katie **will dress** her puppy up in outfits that Katie **will make** herself.
My little puppies **might try** to hide between the furniture because they **might get** scared.

Future Continuous

A future continuous verb uses will/may/might + be + a verb with an –ing suffix.

Katie **will be dressing** her puppy up in outfits that Katie **will be making** herself.
My little puppies **might be trying** to hide because they **might be getting** scared.

Future Perfect

A future perfect verb uses will/may/might + have/has + a verb with an –ed suffix.

Katie **will have dressed** her puppy up in outfits that Katie **will have made** herself.
My little puppies **might have tried** to hide because they **might have gotten** scared.

Future Perfect Continuous

A future perfect continuous verb uses will/may/might + have/has + been +
A verb with an –ing suffix.

Katie **will have been dressing** her puppy up in outfits that Katie **will have been making** herself.

My little puppies **might have been trying** to hide because they **might have been getting** scared.

Verb Tense Agreement Errors

A verb tense agreement error occurs when you blend past, present, and future forms of verbs together. Here is an example:

Last Saturday, I called **ed** up my cousin Keith and **compliment** him on his band's new CD.

>>>The words "Last Saturday" make it pretty clear the event discussed happened in the past. The verb "called" also makes the past tense clear because of the **-ed** ending. However, the verb "**compliment**" is present tense.

To make the sentence consistent, it needs to be all in past OR present tense. Sometimes, you have a choice which tense you want. However, in this example, the sentence needs to be written in past tense to make sense:

Last Saturday, I called **ed** up my cousin Keith and complimented **ed** him on his band's new CD.

Verb Tense Agreement Errors

Here is another example:

I **was suppose** to **pick** up my friend Jon at the airport, but if I **forgot**, he **gets** mad.

>>>This sentence has a mixture of **past** and **present tense** verbs which is quite confusing. The sentence needs to be rewritten either in all present tense or all past tense.

Present tense version:

I **am supposed** to **pick** up my friend Jon at the airport, but if I **forget**, he **gets** mad.

Past tense version:

I **was supposed** to **pick** up my friend Jon at the airport, but I **forgot** and he **got** mad.

>>>Note: Any verb that follows the word “to” is present tense: to pick, to run, to cook

I **use** to work at the grocery store, but I **resigned** three weeks ago.

>>>This sentence is clearly referring to a past-tense situation (**resigned, three weeks ago**). However, the sentence contains a present-tense verb (**use**). This sentence has to be written in past tense to make sense:

I **used** to work at the grocery store, but I **resigned** three weeks ago.

Verb Tense Agreement Errors

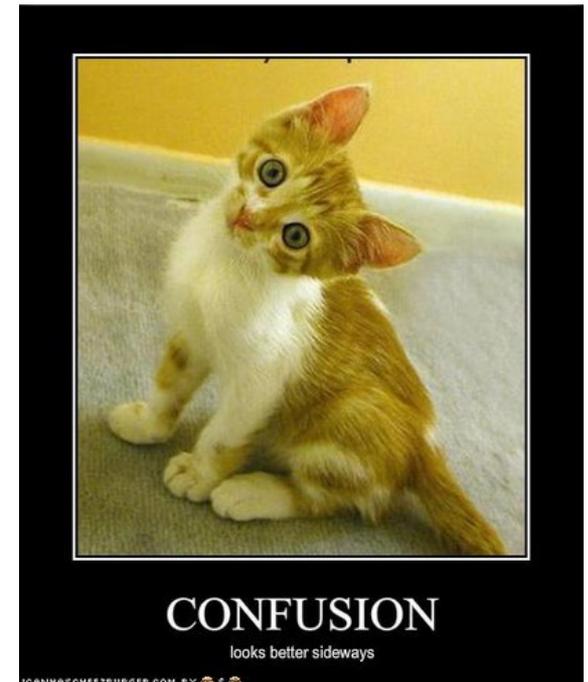
And finally, in honor of my father Tom Gulick, here is something he once uttered that confused us all. We were driving down the street, and Dad noticed one of his friends sitting in a parked car. Dad said the following:

“Norm’s front tire looks pretty low, and I’m gonna tell him that as I drove by.”

“I’m going” = I am going = future

“as I drove by” = past tense = ???

We still don’t know what he was talking about 😊





A Word about Irregular Verbs

And my word is...sighhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

If only all verbs behaved the way we just saw – just add an –ed to the end of a verb to indicate past tense. Let's look at some verbs associated with gardening:

I plant > I plant**ed**, I water > I water**ed**, I weed > I weeded, I hoe > I ho**ed**, I dig > I dig**ged**.
digged???

Digged isn't a verb; dug is the past tense form of dig. In reality, English is filled with what are called irregular verbs, verbs that **do not** show past tense by adding an –ed suffix.

Rather, irregular verbs present different versions of the verb. Truthfully, irregular verbs aren't always easy to figure out, and they don't always make a whole lot of sense.

This is an example of a regular verb; this makes sense:

I shoveled too much snow yesterday. >> past tense verb
indicated by the –ed suffix.

I shovel snow for the cardio benefits. >> present tense

I will shovel the snow tomorrow after work. >> future tense



A Word about Irregular Verbs

This makes no sense:

I **was** the best at coloring in my kindergarten class. >> past tense

I **am** the best at coloring in my kindergarten class. >> present tense

I **will be** the best at coloring in my kindergarten class. >> future tense

Was? Am? Will be?

Other than just memorizing irregular verbs or looking them up in a dictionary, there is no simple way to learn them. Further, there are hundreds of irregular verbs.

For a good discussion of some of the more commonly mistaken irregular verbs, consult [this link](#).

For a very thorough list of irregular verbs, consult [this link](#).



Do You Still Have Questions?

If you still have questions, please stop by the Writing Lab (DI20).

