

Conquer Verb-Tense Consistency

A verb's *tense* indicates when the action that it describes takes place—in the past (I ran), in the present (I run), or in the future (I will run).

The verb tense you use should remain *consistent*, or the same, unless you have a good reason to change it. The verb tense should remain consistent throughout sentences, throughout paragraphs, and throughout the entire body of whatever you are writing—again, unless you have a good reason to change it. For example:

Incorrect: When my mom **goes** to the store, she **bought** a treat for everyone.
(*Goes* is in the present tense, and *bought* is in the past tense—and you don't have a good reason to change the tense you are using.)

Correct Option 1: When my mom **goes** to the store, she **buys** a treat for everyone.
(Both verbs are in the present tense.)

Correct Option 2: When my mom **went** to the store, she **bought** a treat for everyone.
(Both verbs are in the past tense.)

So what IS a good reason to change the verb tense you are using? When you are describing events that happen at different times. For example:

Correct: Lindsey **plays** field hockey now, but last year she **was** on the soccer team.
(You are describing something that is happening now, and you are also describing something that happened in the past.)

Correct: We **took** first place in the state competition; next week we **will compete** in the national competition. (You are describing something that happened in the past, and you are also describing something that will happen in the future.)

Directions: In each group of sentences or paragraphs below, place a ✓ in front of the sentence or paragraph that correctly uses verb tenses.

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1. **a** _____ I picked up the cell phone quickly and dial the number.
b _____ I pick up the cell phone quickly and dialed the number.
c _____ I picked up the cell phone quickly and dialed the number.
2. **a** _____ Suddenly, the lights flickered and an uninvited guest enters the room.
b _____ Suddenly, the lights flicker and an uninvited guest enters the room.
c _____ Suddenly, the lights flicker and an uninvited guest entered the room.
3. **a** _____ When I was comfortable, I began my homework.
b _____ When I was comfortable, I begin my homework.
c _____ When I am comfortable, I began my homework.
4. **a** _____ Stephen is going to save his money so that he will be able to buy a drum set.
b _____ Stephen is going to save his money so that he was able to buy a drum set.
c _____ Stephen saves his money so that he was able to buy a drum set.

