THE PRINCIPLE
Verb tenses tell us when the action in a sentence has occurred, will occur, or is occurring. There are 3 simple verb tenses and 9 progressive verb tenses.

Simple:

Present:
She runs.
They leap.
He shuffles.

Past:
She ran.
They leapt.
He shuffled.

Future:
She will run.
They will leap.
He will shuffle.

Progressive tenses: Deal with actions or conditions that are completed or ongoing.

Present perfect: An action that began in the past but is being completed in the present:
She has biked to school all semester.

Present progressive: Current, ongoing actions.
He is eating his lunch.

Present perfect progressive: Current action that spans past and present.
She has been reading that book all day.

Past perfect: An action that occurred in the past and was finished before another action occurred that also happened in the past:
He had asked for permission to miss class already.

Past progressive: Action that occurred in the past and was ongoing.
She was watching that movie last night.

Past perfect progressive: Past actions that were ongoing, now completed.
He had been reading that series all last year.
**Future perfect:** An action that will be completed before another action occurs that will also be completed in the future:
They will have eaten lunch before class starts.

**Future progressive:** Refers to a future action that will be ongoing.
She will be working on that project all next semester.

**Future perfect progressive:** Refers to action that will be ongoing in the future; refers more specifically to time passing in the future:
He will have been finished with his dinner by 8 p.m.

**A FEW PROBLEMS (AND THEIR SOLUTIONS)**
Here are examples of sentences that do not use the correct verb tense:
She walks to the store yesterday.
They will ran tomorrow.

Corrected:
She walked to the store yesterday.
They will run tomorrow.

It is important to maintain consistency with verb tenses; otherwise the sequence of events becomes confusing:
Ex:
She went fishing with her father when they drove up to the mountains. They catch lots of fish and cook them for dinner.

Corrected:
She went fishing with her father when they drove up to the mountain. They caught lots of fish and cooked them for dinner.

**NOW SOME FINE PRINT**
Sequence is important in maintaining the correct understanding of time sequence within a sentence.
For instance, if the verb in the main clause is past or past perfect tense, the verb in the subordinate clause must also be in past or past perfect form.

Ex:
She found her book and then ran to class.
He stepped over a puddle because it had rained earlier.
They had been through the material, but they still struggled on the test.

**Conditional:** dealing with cause and effect:
These sentences cover speculation and prediction usually reflected in the subordinate clause, followed by outcome in the main clause:

If the team plays well, they will win.
When he bakes cookies, everyone eats them.
Unless it rains, we will have a picnic.