



Verb Tenses

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.