

Shifts in Verb Tense

Shifts in verb tense means changing from one tense to another (within the sentence). These changes help readers understand the temporal relationships among various narrated events. BUT unnecessary or inconsistent shifts in tense can cause **CONFUSION**. Generally, writers maintain **ONE** tense for the main discourse and indicate changes in time frame by changing tense relative to that primary tense. English has three time frames: past, present, and future. Each of these is divided into simple, progressive, perfect, and perfect progressive. The regular verb **TO MAKE** is shown below:

	Past	Present	Future
Simple	made	make/makes	will make
Progressive	was/were making	am/is/are making	will be making
Perfect	had made	has/have made	will have made
Perfect Progressive	had been making	has/have been making	will have been making

Each of these aspects is controlled, or affected, by **time markers** (also called **time expressions** or **signal words**). There are some examples of some commonly used time markers:

	Past	Present	Future
Simple	yesterday, the day before yesterday, last week/month/year, a few minutes/two hours/live years ago	rarely, sometimes, regularly, always, every week/day/time/year, usually	tonight, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, later, next week/month/year, in 2005, for the next 2 years/days/months
Progressive	while, when, as, at that time/moment	now, right now, at present, today, these days, nowadays, currently, presently	in 2005, for the next 2 years/days/months
Perfect / Perfect Progressive	before, after, by the time, already	since, for, already, yet, just, so far, until now, several/four/many times	by (a future point in time), by this time next year

Guidelines

- Don't shift from one tense to another if the time frame for each action/ state is the same.

Example

The ocean contains rich minerals that washed down from rivers and streams.

- Contains is present tense, referring to a current state; *washed down* is past, but should be present (*wash down*) because the minerals are currently continuing to wash down.

Correction

The ocean contains rich minerals that wash down from rivers and streams.

- Do shift tense to indicate a change in time frame from one action or state to another.

Example

The children love their new tree house, which they built themselves.

- Love is present tense, referring to a current state (they still love it now) *built* is past, referring to an action completed before the current time frame (they are not still building it.)

Incorrect	Correct
We are living there last year. She raised her hand and gives the wrong answer.	We were living there last year. She raised her hand and gave the wrong answer.