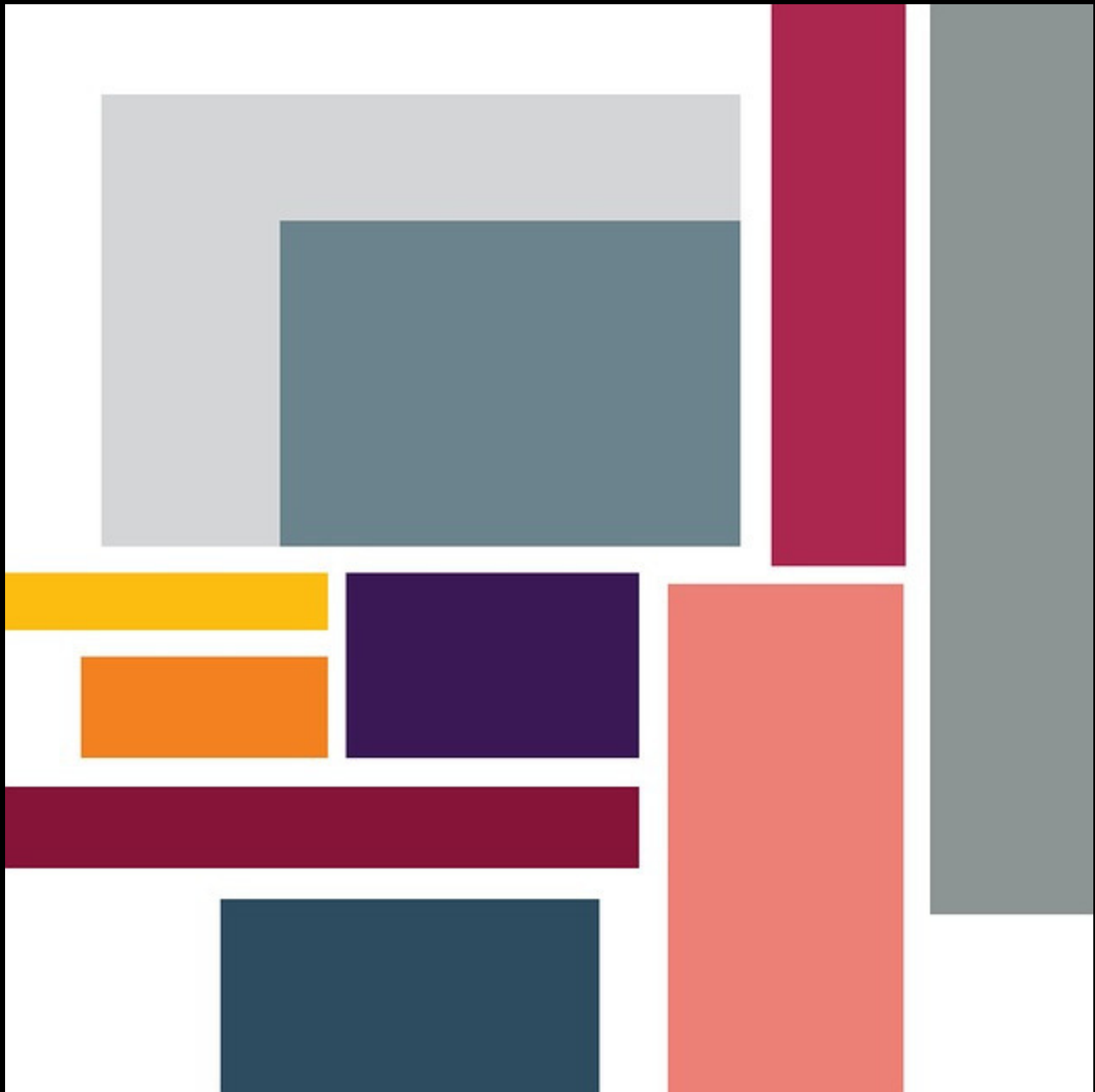


Verb Tense



Verb Tense

Lesson & Exercises

As a general rule, verbs should remain consistent (or **parallel**) in tense or form throughout a sentence. Unless there is information to indicate that a change in tense is necessary, a sentence that begins in the past should stay in the past, and a sentence that begins in the present should stay in the present.

Incorrect: Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* **charts** the emotional development of the protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, who **learns** the error of making hasty judgments and **came** to appreciate the difference between the superficial and the essential.

Correct: Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* **charts** the emotional development of the protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, who **learns** the error of making hasty judgments and **comes** to appreciate the difference between the superficial and the essential.

The sentence begins in the present tense, as indicated by the verbs *charts* and *learns*, and must continue in the present tense since there is nothing to indicate otherwise.

Although much of the writing you do will require you to apply this basic principle – in a history paper, for example, most of the verbs will obviously need to be in the past tense – English does contain a variety of tenses, and to maximize the clarity and effectiveness of your writing, you should have an understanding of the ways in which they are constructed and used.

Principle Parts

Every verb has four principle parts:

- 1) **Infinitive** or *to* form.
- 2) **Present participle**, or *-ing* form.
- 3) **Past participle**. Regular verbs end in *-ed*. Irregular verbs commonly end in *-ung*, *-unk*, *-en*, *-awn*, or *-own*, e.g., *sung*, *sunk*, *broken*, *grown*. This form is used after any form of *to be* or *to have*.
- 4) **Simple past**, also known as the **preterit**. The simple past of regular verbs ends in *-ed* and is identical to the past participle. Irregular verbs commonly end in *-ang*, *-ank*, *-oke*, or *-ew*, e.g., *sang*, *sank*, *broke*, *grew*.

Note that some irregular verbs also have unpredictable simple past forms, which may not resemble the past participle at all (e.g., the simple past form of *to go* is *went*, whereas as the past participle is *gone*).

	Infinitive	Present Participle	Past Participle	Simple Past
Regular	to walk	walking	walked	walked
Irregular (-eak)	to speak	speaking	spoken	spoke
Irregular (-ow)	to grow	growing	grown	grew
Irregular (-ing)	to ring	ringing	rung	rang
Irregular (-ink)	to sink	sinking	sunk(en)	sank

For a complete list of irregular verbs, see the chart on the following page.

Simple vs. Compound Tenses

There are two main types of tenses: simple and compound.

Simple tenses are called “simple” because they consist of a single verb, either present or past.

Examples: *she goes, they work, it begins, we thought*

Compound tenses involve two verbs:

- 1) A main verb
- 2) A “helping” verb, or auxiliary (ox-ill-uh-ree) verb, which is always a form of *be*, *have*, *will*, or *would*.

Examples: *she will go, they would work, it has begun, we had thought*

Note that when *be* or *have* is used as the helping verb, the past participle rather than the simple past must be used.

Incorrect	Correct
He has sang	He has sung
They have grew	They have grown
She had rose	She had risen
It was spoke	It was spoken
Having flew	Having flown

Likewise, the past participle should not be used immediately after a noun, when no helping verb is present.

Incorrect	Correct
He sung	He sang
They grown	They grew
She risen	She rose