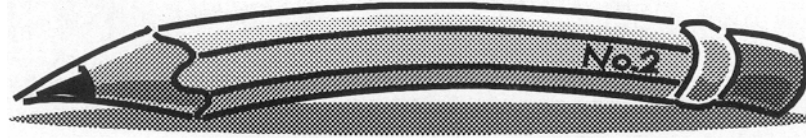


Your Name: _____



GRAMMAR PRACTICE

Consistency of Tense

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Good writing is consistent. It is important that each sentence or paragraph stay consistent. The most common mistake is switching verb tense. Verb tense indicates the time of the verb: past, present, or future. Unnecessary shifts in tense can cause confusion for the reader.

Inconsistent: He points the gun and heard another shot.

The verb “points” indicated the action is taking place in the present, yet the verb “heard” indicated past tense.

Consistent: He pointed the gun and heard another shot.

Inconsistency is easy to catch in simple sentences, but as you write more complex sentences or paragraphs, thorough editing is required.

Read the following paragraph, which contains several inconsistent sentences. Pay special attention to the **boldfaced** verbs:

I **used** to think I **want** to own a pig. After **visiting** a farm last summer, I **realize** that pigs were not for me. I decided to look at other options for pets. I **visited** a stable and I **love** it. I **have decided** a horse is the perfect pet and **felt** confident this is the right decision.

Compare the paragraph above to the corrected version below:

I used to think I **wanted** to own a pig. After visiting a farm last summer, I **realized** that pigs were not for me. I decided to look at other options for pets. I visited a stable and I **loved** it. I have decided a horse is the perfect pet and **feel** confident this is the right decision.

As with all rules, there are exceptions. Sometimes it is appropriate to switch tenses, but there should be a word or phrase to explain the switch as in this sentence where the reader can understand that the first part of the sentence is about something in the past—it happened yesterday, but the second part of the sentence is about the present—what is going on right now.:

Yesterday I left my jacket in my locker; now I am freezing on my way to school.

PRACTICE EXERCISE

Check for consistency in the following sentences. In the first four sentences, change the second verb in each sentence to match the earlier verb that is underlined.

1. Mike had driven quickly, so we arrive on time.
-

2. I checked my answering machine, but I hear no messages.
-

3. Troy sharpens his pencils while I passed out the test.
-

4. When Brian woke up, he goes straight to the shower.
-

Now in these next four sentences, some of them are correct and some are not. For those that are unacceptable, change the first verb in the sentence so that it will be the same tense as is the second verb, which is underlined. If the sentence is acceptable as it is, write “Correct” on the line.

1. Just as Brandi spoke, the microphone turns on.
-

2. I prefer sugar-free gum, but my cousin liked rock candy.
-

3. I never studied in elementary school, but I study hard now.
-

4. Last night, I did not sleep well and now I am suffering the consequences.
-

Answers: 1. *arrived*, 2. *heard*, 3. *pass*, 4. *went*.

1. *speaks* or *begins speaking*, 2. *preferred*, 3. *CORRECT*, 4. *CORRECT*. In both sentences 3 and 4, the word *now* serves as a clue to show readers that the timing is different.

Lesson created by Cherilyn Guy