

## CONSISTENCY OF TENSE

### Verb tense

Verb tense indicates the time of action, indicating whether the action occurred in the past, whether it occurs in the present, or whether it will happen in the future.

### Consistency of tense

Consistency of tense means using the same tense throughout your paper, unless it is necessary to show an event that occurred at a different time.

- **Do not shift tenses unnecessarily.**
- **If you begin writing a paper in the present tense, don't shift suddenly to the past.**
- **If you begin in the past, don't shift without reason to the present.**

### Notice the inconsistent verb tenses in the following selection:

Smoke **spilled** from the front of the overheated car. The driver **opens** up the hood, then **jumped** back as steam billows out.

**The verbs must be consistently in the present tense:**

Smoke **spills** from the front of the overheated car. The driver **opens** up the hood, then **jumps** back as steam billows out.

**Or the verbs must be consistently in the past tense:**

Smoke spilled from the front of the overheated car. The driver opened up the hood, then jumped back as steam billowed out.

**Of course, you should use different verb tenses in a sentence or paragraph if they convey the meaning that you wish to convey:**

Last fall I **took** English 512; now I **am taking** English 513.  
(The verbs in this sentence accurately show the time relationship between the two classroom experiences.)

## EXERCISE

### Examples:

**Inconsistent:** I **took** a deep breath and **opened** the door; there **stands** a well-dressed man with a large box.

**Consistent:** I **took** a deep breath and **opened** the door; there **stood** a well-dressed man with a large box.

**Consistent:** I **take** a deep breath and **open** the door; there **stands** a well-dressed man with a large box.

**Instructions:** Read the following sentences carefully for meaning. Then correct any inconsistencies of tense by changing any verbs that do not show the accurate time of events.

1. Two seconds before the buzzer sounded, Larry Bird sank a basket from mid court, and the crowd goes wild.
2. Although Americans spend about \$20 billion a year on cancer treatments, the number of cancer deaths increased every year.
3. We traveled by train to Boise, Idaho, where my aunt has met us at the station and drove us around town.
4. For twenty years, until his death in 1983, Dr. Dulfano observed animal behavior and seeks clues to explain the increasing violence among human beings.
5. I told you this will happen.
6. The actors performed with such energy and joy that when the play ends, nobody wants to go home.
7. I was driving south on Interstate 90 when a truck approaches with its bright lights on.
8. Jim had a big grin on his face as he walks over and kicked the Coke machine.
9. Maynard stormed down the hallway, goes right into the boss' office and shouts, "I want curtains in my office!"
10. I gasped and then shrieks when I discovered a dead mouse in the toe of my shoe.
11. The old woman looked delicate, but she ran quickly toward the bus and jumps onto the step.
12. On vacation, I couldn't face another restaurant meal, so I purchase cheese and crackers and ate in my room.
13. Before the rain stopped, mud slid down the hill and crashes into the houses in the valley.
14. Leo stuffed the last piece of blueberry pie, swallows it all, and then flashed a grin for the photographer.
15. The outfielder tumbled, made a great catch, and lifts the ball for the umpire to witness.