

Conquer Verb-Tense Consistency

A verb's *tense* indicates when the action that it describes takes place—in the past (I ran), in the present (I run), or in the future (I will run).

The verb tense you use should remain *consistent*, or the same, unless you have a good reason to change it. The verb tense should remain consistent throughout sentences, throughout paragraphs, and throughout the entire body of whatever you are writing—again, unless you have a good reason to change it. For example:

Incorrect: When my mom **goes** to the store, she **bought** a treat for everyone.
(*Goes* is in the present tense, and *bought* is in the past tense—and you don't have a good reason to change the tense you are using.)

Correct Option 1: When my mom **goes** to the store, she **buys** a treat for everyone.
(Both verbs are in the present tense.)

Correct Option 2: When my mom **went** to the store, she **bought** a treat for everyone.
(Both verbs are in the past tense.)

So what IS a good reason to change the verb tense you are using? When you are describing events that happen at different times. For example:

Correct: Lindsey **plays** field hockey now, but last year she **was** on the soccer team.
(You are describing something that is happening now, and you are also describing something that happened in the past.)

Correct: We **took** first place in the state competition; next week we **will compete** in the national competition. (You are describing something that happened in the past, and you are also describing something that will happen in the future.)

Directions: In each group of sentences or paragraphs below, place a ✓ in front of the sentence or paragraph that correctly uses verb tenses.

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1. **a** _____ I picked up the cell phone quickly and dial the number.
b _____ I pick up the cell phone quickly and dialed the number.
c _____ I picked up the cell phone quickly and dialed the number.
2. **a** _____ Suddenly, the lights flickered and an uninvited guest enters the room.
b _____ Suddenly, the lights flicker and an uninvited guest enters the room.
c _____ Suddenly, the lights flicker and an uninvited guest entered the room.
3. **a** _____ When I was comfortable, I began my homework.
b _____ When I was comfortable, I begin my homework.
c _____ When I am comfortable, I began my homework.
4. **a** _____ Stephen is going to save his money so that he will be able to buy a drum set.
b _____ Stephen is going to save his money so that he was able to buy a drum set.
c _____ Stephen saves his money so that he was able to buy a drum set.

Ramblers and Run-ons

A run-on sentence combines two or more independent clauses incorrectly. (An independent clause is a group of words that contains a subject and verb, and expresses a complete thought—in other words, a sentence.) Consider the following run-on sentence:

The new *Hunger Games* movie is coming out soon, I want to see it.

"The new *Hunger Games* movie is coming out soon" and "I want to see it" are both independent clauses—each could stand on its own as a sentence. A comma is not enough to join two independent clauses together. Here are three ways to correct a run-on sentence:

1. Divide it into separate sentences.

Example: The new *Hunger Games* movie is coming out soon. I want to see it.

2. Use a comma and a conjunction such as **for**, **and**, **nor**, **but**, **or**, **yet**, or **so**.

Example: The new *Hunger Games* movie is coming out soon, and I want to see it.

3. Use a semicolon and a transitional word or phrase such as **however**, **what's more**, **furthermore**, **as a result**, **consequently**, **meanwhile**, **first**, **next**, **finally**, or **in addition**.

Example: The new *Hunger Games* movie is coming out soon; what's more, I want to see it.

Directions: Rewrite the following run-on sentences, using one of the solutions above.

1. I know fruit is healthy, there aren't many kinds of fruit that I like.

Correct: _____

2. This weekend is supposed to be warm and sunny, it will be perfect for our canoe trip.

Correct: _____

3. There is an adorable black-and-white puppy on the animal shelter's website, I can't stop looking at him.

Correct: _____

4. Leslie and Kari watched a scary movie, both of them had nightmares for a week.

Correct: _____

5. Four species of monkeys are native to Costa Rica, we saw all four on our trip there last spring.

Correct: _____

6. Liz invited me to go to a movie on Friday, I can't go because my brother's recital is that evening.

Correct: _____

7. I talked to Gavin, and he was excited about the plan, I haven't talked to Sophia yet.

Correct: _____

8. Every Tuesday and Thursday, Hannah goes to rehearsal, she has a performance coming up in June.

Correct: _____

Related to run-on sentences are rambling sentences. Rambling sentences may technically follow the rules of grammar, but they are still a problem because they ramble—that is, they go on and on in an aimless way. Rambling sentences contain TOO MANY independent clauses joined by conjunctions such as **for, and, nor, but, or, yet,** or **so**. For example:

My dad and I went hiking on Saturday, and when we started, the sun was shining and it was a beautiful day, but around 12:30 some dark clouds started to appear, and pretty soon it started to rain, so my dad, who is always prepared for anything, quickly put on his rain gear, but I had not packed mine, so I got really wet, but at least it wasn't too cold outside.

Oof! That's an awful lot to pack into one sentence! It would be much easier to read if you turned it into a few shorter sentences. Here's one way to do it:

My dad and I went hiking on Saturday. When we started, the sun was shining and it was a beautiful day. Around 12:30, however, some dark clouds started to appear, and pretty soon it started to rain. My dad, who is always prepared for anything, quickly put on his rain gear. I had not packed mine, though, so I got really wet. At least it wasn't too cold outside.

Directions: Rewrite the rambler below. Break it into several shorter sentences.

Last week was my mom's birthday, and the whole family came over to celebrate, so my sister Leah made a chocolate-chip cheesecake, which is my mom's favorite dessert, and it looked absolutely wonderful, yet as soon as we tasted it, it was clear that something had gone wrong, because it tasted awful, and Leah realized that she had forgotten to add the sugar!

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THE LAZY EDITOR: "The Curse of the Hope Diamond" • SKILL: Apostrophes

Perfect Apostrophes

Here are some rules to remember when you use apostrophes to create **contractions** and **possessives**:

1. To form a **contraction**, use an apostrophe to replace the letters you remove. For example, you form *don't* by combining *do* and *not*, and replacing the *o* in *not* with an apostrophe.
2. **Possessives** show ownership. To make a **singular noun** (like *artist*) possessive, add 's to the end of the noun. For example: *the artist's painting*. Here, the possessive shows that the painting belongs to one artist. Add the 's even if the noun ends with *s*: *Chris's trophy*.
3. To make a **plural noun** (like *animals*) possessive, add an apostrophe after the *s* that is already at the end of the noun. For example: *the animals' toy*. Here, the possessive shows that the toy belongs to more than one animal. If the plural noun doesn't end in *s*, add an apostrophe and an *s*. For example: *the children's markers*.
4. Don't add apostrophes to **possessive pronouns**. For example: *the bike is hers; its tires were flat; that is ours*.
5. To make a **compound noun** possessive, add 's to the end of the last word. For example: *my sister-in-law's apartment*. If **two or more people or things** possess the same item, add 's to the last person or thing only. For example: *Jason and Emily's vacation*.

Directions: For each sentence below, circle the word that needs an apostrophe. Then write the word, with the apostrophe added, on the line. If no apostrophe is needed, write NA for "no apostrophe" on the line.

- _____ 1. Would you please gather up the babys toys?
- _____ 2. The childrens parents will be arriving soon.
- _____ 3. The hurricane damaged many families homes.
- _____ 4. The airport security officers need to check everyones passport.
- _____ 5. That is my grandparents dog, so you should ask them if it is OK to give her treats.
- _____ 6. Its too bad Shondra and James could not come to the movies with us.
- _____ 7. Have you seen the pictures from Emily and Jasons trip?
- _____ 8. The yellow shovel is ours, but the green one is yours.

Directions: The following letter contains nine apostrophe errors. Circle them. Then rewrite the letter, correctly, on a separate piece of paper.

Dear Mom and Dad,

Im having a great time with Aunt Kim and Uncle Dave. It's so beautiful here! I spend all of my day's outside canoeing and hiking. On Sunday, we went whitewater rafting at Mendenhall Glacier. I learned that one half of the worlds glaciers' are in Alaska. Before I get home, I will have cruised through Alaskas Inside Passage. Youll love the picture's Im sending you, which we took with Aunt Kim's and Uncle Dave's fancy new camera. See you soon!

Love, Sofia

THE LAZY EDITOR: "The Curse of the Hope Diamond" • SKILL: Avoiding Sentence Fragments

Fragment Fix

A sentence fragment is a group of words that does not contain both a subject and a verb, or does not express a complete thought. A sentence fragment does not make sense on its own. Some examples of fragments are below, along with possible ways to fix them. (The fragments appear in bold.)

Incorrect: Eva wants to come with us to the mall. **After she finishes her chores.**

Correct: Eva wants to come with us to the mall after she finishes her chores.

Incorrect: The movie theater is on Vista Avenue. **Which is just past Downing Street.**

Correct: The movie theater is on Vista Avenue, which is just past Downing Street.

Incorrect: **Unless Taylor cleans his room.**

Correct: Unless Taylor cleans his room, he won't be able to come play basketball tonight.

Correct: Taylor has to stay home tonight, unless he cleans his room.

Directions: Write **F** for fragment or **S** for sentence on each line below.

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- ____ 1. Don't judge a book by its cover.
 - ____ 2. After completing her homework, Sofia sat down to watch her favorite show, *The Voice*.
 - ____ 3. While Michelle, who had been voted this year's Homecoming Queen, was in gym class.
 - ____ 4. Please stop shouting.
 - ____ 5. Even though Ryan's family had adopted the most adorable puppy I'd seen in my entire life.
 - ____ 6. Mark Twain, who wrote *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.
 - ____ 7. Josefina, who excels in math, aced last week's algebra test.
 - ____ 8. Unless Allyson decides to come camping with us over the weekend.

Directions: Rewrite the paragraph below, turning all the fragments into complete sentences.

Among the most well-known and fascinating kinds of sharks are the hammerheads. Which includes nine separate species. While most hammerheads, because of their small size, are considered harmless to humans. Some can be extremely dangerous. For example, the great hammerhead. Able to grow to more than 20 feet long and weigh up to 1,000 pounds. Beware!
