Verb Tenses

In English, it is possible to express several different tenses through a combination of words as well as by changing the form of a verb. Understanding these tenses allows the writer to provide the reader with a clearer presentation of the sequence of events and/or passage of time described in a piece of writing. Here are examples of some of the tenses that are possible in English: simple, continuous, and perfect.

- **Simple Tense:** The simple tenses are used to describe a specific point in time. It could be in the past, present, or future.
  - Simple Past: subject + past simple
    - They studied before they went to sleep.
    - He studied before he went to sleep.
  - Simple Present: subject + verb (+s)
    - They study.
    - He studies.
  - Future: subject + will + verb
    - They will study.
    - He will study.

- **Progressive Tense:** Progressive tense is also known as “continuous.” The continuous tenses are used to describe the length of time of a specific event.
  - Past Continuous: subject + was/were + verb-ing
    - I was studying when I remembered I needed to walk my dog.
    - They were studying when the power went out.
  - Present Continuous: subject + am/is/are + verb-ing
    - Right now, I am studying.
    - They are studying right now.
  - Future Continuous: subject + will + verb-ing
    - I will be studying for three hours.
    - He will be studying from three o’clock until five o’clock.

- **Perfect Tense:** The perfect tenses are used to describe a specific point in time that took place before another specific point in time.
  - Past Perfect: subject + had + past participle
- They had studied before the day of the test arrived.
- He had studied before the day of the test arrived.

  - Present Perfect: subject + has/have + past participle
    - They have already studied.
    - He has studied.

  - Future Perfect: subject + will + have + past participle
    - They will have studied before the test.
    - He will have studied before the test.

When writing and trying to decide on the correct verb tense to use, consider when the event began and/or ended as well as how long it lasted. Knowing the timing/length of time of the event you are describing will help you decide what tense will be the most appropriate for your writing.

A final note on verb tenses: Try to remain consistent with the tense that you choose to use in your writing. Changing tenses too often can cause the reader to become confused. Staying consistent with the verb tense can help to create a sense of the passage of time as well as the order of events.