

The Writer's House

It's Tense: Become a Time Lord



Bad writing costs. Good writing pays.



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It's Tense: Become a Time Lord

If you ask a linguist she will tell you that English is a language with only two tenses, the present and the past, because we use the present tense to talk about the future.

If you ask an English language learner she will probably tell you there are 12 tenses in English.

For those of us who write for work let's stick with what we were taught at school, that English has three main tense categories.

Keep your tense choice consistent

Readers will say your writing is **coherent** when you control your use of time - tense. Unnecessary shifts in tense will cause confusion and frustration.

The Present

1. Simple Present: *He sings*
2. Present Perfect: *He has sung*
3. Present Continuous: *He is singing*
4. Present Perfect Continuous: *He has been singing*

The Past

1. Simple Past: *He sang*
2. Past Perfect: *He had sung*
3. Past Continuous: *He was singing*
4. Past Perfect Continuous: *He had been singing*

The Future

1. Simple Future: *He will sing*
2. Future Continuous: *He will be singing*
3. Future Perfect: *He will have sung*
4. Future Perfect Continuous: *He will have been singing*

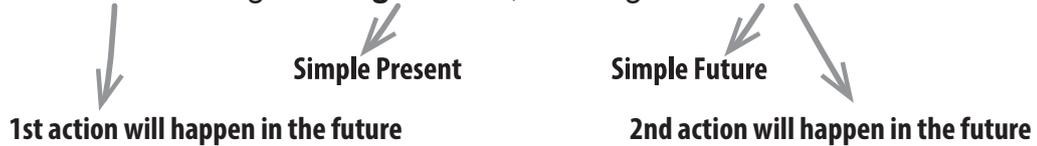




Change tense only when you must show a time change

1.

When the dog owner **gets** here, the neighbours **will shout** abuse.



- The first action will take place in the future; therefore, the second action needs to indicate the future tense.

2.

The board **reached** a decision *after* all of the members **had read** every report.



- The first action occurred in the past but after the second action. The second action requires the past perfect tense (had + verb).

3.

If drivers **can see** the new signage, they **will be encouraged** to visit.



- The first action in the above sentence happens in a conditional present. The second action is a future possibility dependent upon the first action taking place.

