



Verb Tenses

The Four Forms of Every Main Verb are:

The following list shows the forms for the regular verb help and the irregular verbs write and tear.

General present tense	help, write, tear
Past tense	helped, wrote, tore
Past participle	helped, written, torn
Present participle	helping, writing, tearing

The Six Verb Tenses are:

Present, Present Perfect, Past, Past Perfect, Future, and Future Perfect

The purpose of different verb tenses is to indicate the time an action occurs.

With present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect, a helping verb is needed to show which tense will be used. The helping verb will go before the action verb. Here is the list of helping verbs:

have	has	had	do	does	did	can	shall
may	might	must	could	should	would	will	

Present – the action is happening now:

- The man **is helping**.
- I **am writing** a novel.
- They **tear** pages from books.

Present Perfect – the action was completed very recently:

- I **have helped** the first table.
- She **has written** several short stories.
- Ed **has torn** that ligament again.

Past – the action happened in the past:

- The medicine **helped** yesterday.
- We **wrote** the book reviews a month ago.
- The girl **tore** her sleeve.

Past Perfect – the action was completed awhile ago:

- I **have** already **helped** Angela revise chapter two.
- He **had written** only one essay when he enrolled.
- Jasmine said that she **had torn** the note up.

Future – the action will happen in the future:

I **will help** fix dinner in an hour.
Kyle **will write** the article tonight.
It **will tear** eventually.

Future Perfect – the action will be completed by a certain point in the future:

I **will already have helped** decorate the gym before 5:00.
He **won't have** his evaluation **written** by this afternoon.
By next month they **will have torn** this building down.

Consistency of Tense

You should choose a tense and stick with it. Do not shift tenses without a reason; it may cause the reader much confusion. If you are writing about events in the past, use the past tense consistently. You typically would use the present tense when you are writing about literature, whether you are discussing an author's viewpoint or describing events in a particular work. Present tense is also used when analyzing an assignment.

Missing Verbs

Make sure you do not leave out the verb by mistake. The verbs most commonly left out are the "state of being" verbs, which are:

am	is	are	was
were	be	being	been

Here are two examples:

Incorrect: Mary very talented.

Correct: Mary **is** very talented.

Incorrect: Streets in Huntsville crooked.

Correct: Streets in Huntsville **are** crooked.

For further information:

Azar, Betty Schramper. Understanding and Using English Grammar. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1989.

Raimes, Ann. Grammar Troublespots: A Guide for Student Writers. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.