

Grammar: Verb Tense Consistency

Check for verb tense consistency in the following sentences. **Change the second verb** in each sentence to **match the underlined verb**.

1. Mike had driven quickly, so we arrive on time.

2. I checked my answering machine, but I hear no messages.

3. Troy sharpens his pencils while I passed out the test.

4. When Brian woke up, he goes straight to the shower.

Some of the following sentences are correct, and some are not. For those that are incorrect, **change the first verb** in the sentence so that it will **correspond to the underlined verb**. If the sentence is correct as it is, **write "Correct" on the line**.

1. Just as Brandi spoke, the microphone turns on.

2. I prefer sugar-free gum, but my cousin liked rock candy.

3. I never studied in elementary school and have trouble passing tests.

4. Last night, I did not sleep well even though I went to bed early.

In the following passage from Alex Haley's *Roots*, some of the verbs have been deliberately omitted. **Supply the appropriate tense for each missing verb**.

In Banjul, the capital of Gambia, I met with a group of Gambians. They [tell]_____ me how for centuries the history of Africa has been preserved. In the older villages of the back country, there are old men called *griots*, who [be]_____ in effect living archives. Such men [memorize]_____ and, on special occasions, [recite]_____ the cumulative histories of clans or families or villages as those

histories [have]_____ long been told. Since my forefather [have]_____ said his name was Kin-tay (properly spelled Kinte), and since the Kinte clan [be]_____ known in Gambia, the group of Gambians would see what they could do to help me. I was back in New York when a registered letter [arrive]_____ from Gambia.

Although the main tense in the following paragraph is past, the writer **correctly** shifts to present tense twice. Find these two verbs in present tense and **circle them**. If you encounter difficulty, try reading the paragraph aloud.

The Iroquois Indians of the Northeast regularly burned land to increase open space for agriculture. In fact, the early settlers of Boston found so few trees that they had to row out to the islands in the harbor to obtain fuel. Just how far north this practice extended is uncertain, but the Saco River in southern Maine appears to have been the original northern boundary of the agricultural clearings. Then, pressured by European settlement, the Iroquois extended their systematic burning far northward, even into the Maritime Provinces of Canada. (abridged from Hay and Farb, *The Atlantic Shore*)

Read the following paragraph and determine the main tense. **Write it on the line given**. Then reread it and find the three verbs that shift **incorrectly** from the main tense. **Circle these verbs**.

For the past seven years, I have called myself a swimmer. Swimming, my one sport, provides a necessary outlet for my abundant energy. I have always drawn satisfaction from exertion, straining my muscles to their limits. I don't know why pushing forward in the water, as my muscles cried out in pain, sets off a booming cheer in my head. Many times when I rounded the turn for the last lap of a race, my complaining muscles want to downshift and idle to the finish. My mind, however, presses the pedal to the floor and yells, "FASTER!" The moment that I touched the wall my muscles relax; the pain subsides. I am pleased to have passed the point of conflict. (Adapted from Brendon MacLean, *"Harder!"*)

Main tense:_____

You will notice several shifts in tense in the following paragraph describing action in a fictional narrative. Remember that when writing about literature, you should use the present tense. Find the **six** faulty shifts in tense and **circle them**.

In "The Use of Force," William Carlos Williams describes a struggle involving a doctor, two parents, and their young daughter. The doctor must obtain a throat culture from the girl, who was suspected of having diphtheria. This ordinarily simple task is hindered by the frightened and uncooperative patient, Mathilda Olson. Adding to the doctor's difficulties were the parents, who had to struggle with their own conflicting emotions. They want their daughter helped, but they did not trust the doctor to do the right thing. Sensitive to the parents' uncertainty, the doctor became more and more frustrated by Mathilda's resistance. Williams gives considerable attention to how each of the Olsons react, but it is clear that his main interest was in the doctor and his responses.