

- Sentence 1 begins in the present tense with the verb *stroll* but then slips into the past tense with the verb *began*. The tenses are inconsistent since both actions (strolling and beginning) occur at the same time.
- Sentence 2 is consistent. Both verbs, *strolled* and *began*, are now in the past tense.
- Sentence 3 is also consistent, using the present tense forms of both verbs, *stroll* and *begin*. The present tense here gives a feeling of immediacy, as if the action is happening now.*

Of course, you should use different verb tenses in a sentence or paragraph if they convey the meaning that you wish to convey:

4. Last fall I *took* English 02; now I *am taking* English 13.

- The verbs in this sentence accurately show the time relationship between the two classroom experiences.†

PRACTICE 1

Read the following sentences carefully for meaning. Then correct any inconsistencies of tense by changing the verbs that do not accurately show the time of events.

EXAMPLE I took a deep breath and opened the door; there stands a well-dressed man with a large box.

Consistent: I took a deep breath and opened the door; there ^{stood} stands a well-dressed man with a large box.

or

Consistent: I ^{take} took a deep breath and ^{open} opened the door; there stands a well-dressed man with a large box.

1. Two seconds before the buzzer sounded, LeBron James sank a basket from midcourt, and the crowd goes wild.
2. Nestlé introduced instant coffee in 1938; it takes eight years to develop this product.
3. We expand our sales budget, doubled our research, and soon saw positive results.

* For more work on spotting verbs, see Chapter 26, "The Simple Sentence," Part C.

† For more work on particular verb tenses and forms, see Chapters 29, 30, and 31.

4. For 20 years, Dr. Dulfano observed animal behavior and seeks clues to explain the increasing violence among human beings.
5. I knew how the system works.
6. I was driving south on Interstate 90 when a truck approaches with its high beams on.
7. Two brown horses graze quietly in the field as the sun rose and the mist disappeared.
8. Lollie had a big grin on her face as she walks over and kicked the Coke machine.
9. Maynard stormed down the hallway, goes right into the boss's office, and shouts, "I want curtains in my office!"
10. The nurses quietly paced the halls, making sure their patients rest comfortably.

PRACTICE 2

Inconsistencies of tense are most likely to occur within paragraphs and longer pieces of writing. Therefore, it is important to revise your writing for tense consistency. Read this paragraph for meaning. Then revise, correcting inconsistencies of tense by changing incorrect verbs.

It was 1850. A poor German-born peddler named Levi Strauss came to San Francisco, trying to sell canvas cloth to tent makers. By chance he met a miner who complained that sturdy work pants are hard to find. Strauss had an idea, measures the man, and makes him a pair of canvas pants. The miner loved his new breeches, and Levi Strauss goes into business. Although he ordered more canvas, what he gets is a brown French cloth called *serge de Nîmes*, which Americans soon called "denim." Strauss liked the cloth but had the next batch dyed blue. He became successful selling work pants to such rugged men as cowboys and lumberjacks. In the 1870s, hearing about a tailor in Nevada adding copper rivets to a pair of the pants to make them stronger, Strauss patents the idea. When he died in 1902, Levi Strauss was famous in California, but the company keeps growing. In the 1930s, when Levi's jeans became popular in the East, both men and women wear them. By 2000, people all over the world had purchased 2.5 billion pairs of jeans.



U.S. soldiers trying to rest in "Ranger graves" like those the student describes in Practice 3

PRACTICE 3

The following paragraph is written in the past tense. Rewrite it in consistent present tense. Cross out each past tense verb and write the present tense form above it. Make sure all verbs agree with their subjects.*

The desert heat was vicious under the burlap that camouflaged me. I lay in my "Ranger grave," Army slang for the shallow holes soldiers dug into the sand, just big enough to conceal their bodies. A few thoughts worked their way through the haze of my brain, but mostly I dreamed about water—icy, sparkling water. I almost heard the clink of ice cubes in a Mason jar, dripping with condensation. I barely noticed the fine sand in my eyes. I didn't have enough fluid in my body to make tears. "Water truck!" The call floated down the nearly invisible line of graves that stretched across the sand. I peeked out as the water truck drove away through shimmering waves of heat. It left behind a water buffalo, a huge tank of water for the ground troops in our area. As the new guy in the squad, I had to fill our canteens. With my monkey suit for chemical attack, my machine gun, and extra ammo, I trudged out. The desert coated me with sand. My helmet felt huge on my head. Finally, I reached the tank and mentally pumped myself up. I was a paratrooper, a member of the 82nd Airborne, elite fighting force of the U.S. Army! My sense of duty and my mental ice pushed me onward. I sipped a little hot water, filled the canteens, and dragged them back to the men.

—Ray Christian, Student

* For more work on agreement, see Chapter 29, "Present Tense (Agreement)."

PRACTICE 4

The following paragraph is written in the present tense. Rewrite it in consistent past tense,* crossing out each present tense verb and writing the past tense form above it.

In the summer of 1816, four friends share a house in Switzerland. Days of rain force them to stay indoors. They begin telling ghost stories to ease the boredom. For awhile, they read aloud from *Tales of the Dead*, a collection of horror stories full of eerie graveyards, swirling fog, and restless spirits. Then one night, they decide to hold a contest to see who can write the most frightening ghost story. All four feel eager to compete. Two of the friends—Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron—are already famous poets. The other two—Dr. John Polidori and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, Shelley's wife-to-be—are also writers. Midnight passes, and they retire to their bedrooms. Mary closes her eyes, and imagination takes over. In her mind's eye, she sees a science student kneeling beside a creature he constructed. It is a hideous corpse of a man, but suddenly, it twitches with life. Horror-stricken, the young man runs away from his creation, hoping that the spark of life will sputter and die. Later, though, he wakes to find the monster standing over his bed. Following this nightmare, Mary writes her novel *Frankenstein* in a two-month rush. Published in 1818, *Frankenstein* becomes a classic, read by people around the world.

PRACTICE 5

Longer pieces of writing often use both the past tense and the present tense. However, switching correctly from one tense to the other requires care. Read the following essay carefully and note when a switch from one tense to another is logically necessary. Then revise verbs as needed.

A QUICK HISTORY OF CHOCOLATE

Most of us now take solid chocolate—especially candy bars—so much for granted that we find it hard to imagine a time when chocolate didn't exist. However, this delicious food becomes an eating favorite only about 150 years ago.

The ancient peoples of Central America began cultivating cacao beans almost 3,000 years ago. A cold drink made from the beans is served to Hernando Cortés, the Spanish conqueror, when he arrives at the Aztec court of Montezuma in 1519. The Spaniards took the beverage home to their king. He likes it so much that he kept the formula a secret. For the next 100 years, hot chocolate was the private drink of the Spanish nobility. Slowly,

* For more work on the past tense, see Chapter 30, "Past Tense."

it makes its way into the fashionable courts of France, England, and Austria. In 1657, a Frenchman living in London opened a shop where devices for making the beverage are sold at a high price. Soon chocolate houses appeared in cities throughout Europe. Wealthy clients met in them, sipped chocolate, conducted business, and gossip.

During the 1800s, chocolate became a chewable food. The breakthrough comes in 1828 when cocoa butter was extracted from the bean. Twenty years later, an English firm mixed the butter with chocolate liquor, which results in the first solid chocolate. Milton Hershey's first candy bar come on the scene in 1894, and Tootsie Rolls hit the market two years later. The popularity of chocolate bars soar during World War I when they are given to soldiers for fast energy. M&Ms gave the industry another boost during World War II; soldiers needed candy that wouldn't melt in their hands.

On the average, Americans today eat ten pounds of hard chocolate a year. Their number-one choice is Snickers, which sold more than a billion bars every year. However, Americans consume far less chocolate than many Western Europeans. The average Dutch person gobbled up more than 15 pounds a year while a Swiss packed away almost 20 pounds. Chocolate is obviously an international favorite.

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B. Consistent Number and Person

Just as important as verb tense consistency is consistency of **number** and **person**.

Consistency of Number

Consistency of number means avoiding confusing shifts from singular to plural or from plural to singular within a sentence or paragraph. Choose *either* singular or plural; then be *consistent*.

1. Inconsistent number: *The wise jogger chooses their running shoes with care.*
2. Consistent number: *The wise jogger chooses his or her running shoes with care.*
3. Consistent number: *Wise joggers choose their running shoes with care.*

PRACTICE 7

Correct the shifts in **person** in these sentences. If necessary, change the verbs to make them agree with any new subjects.

EXAMPLE One should eliminate saturated fats from ^{one's} your diet.

1. Sooner or later, most addicts realize that you can't just quit when you want to.
2. One problem facing students on this campus is that a person doesn't know when the library will be open and when it will be closed.
3. One should rely on reason, not emotion, when they are forming opinions about such charged issues as abortion.
4. I have reached a time in my life when what others expect is less important than what one really wants to do.
5. Members of the orchestra should meet after the concert and bring your instruments and music.
6. The wise mother knows that she is asking for trouble if you let a small child watch violent television shows.
7. The student who participates in this program will spend six weeks in Spain and Morocco. You will study the art and architecture firsthand, working closely with an instructor.
8. You shouldn't judge a person by the way they dress.
9. If you have been working that hard, one needs a vacation.
10. People who visit the Caribbean for the first time are struck by the lushness of the landscape. The sheer size of the flowers and fruit amazes you.

PRACTICE 8

The following paragraph consistently uses third person singular—*the job applicant, the job seeker, he or she*. For practice in revising for consistency, rewrite the paragraph in **consistent third person plural**. Begin by changing *the job applicant* to *job applicants*. Then change verbs, nouns, and pronouns as necessary.

In a job interview these days, the job applicant should stress his or her personal skills, rather than only technical skills. This strategy could increase his or her chances of getting hired. The job seeker should point out such skills as speaking and writing confidently, working well on a team, solving problems quickly, or managing people. These days, many

employers assume that if an applicant has excellent "soft skills" like these, he or she can be trained in the technical fine points of the job.

PRACTICE 9

Revise the following essay for inconsistencies of person and number. Correct any confusing shifts (changing words if necessary) to make the writing clear and *consistent* throughout.

IS OUR IDEA OF RACE CHANGING?

What is race, anyway? Is it skin color, country of origin, cultural traditions, biology? The students in Samuel Richards' sociology class at Pennsylvania State University are pondering these questions. Professor Richards encourages him or her to move beyond the black and white labels most people apply to themselves and others.

To make his point that race and ethnicity are complex aspects of identity, Richards began offering a DNA test to any student who wanted to learn more about their racial heritage. Most students, naturally curious about his or her ancestors, rushed to sign up. The DNA tests were performed through a simple mouth swab by a professor of genetics, Mark Shriver. He tested for four DNA groups: Western European, West African, East Asian, and Native American.

The results received national attention. Many students discovered that he or she was mixed race, including some who believed they were 100 percent Caucasian or Asian. One white student, for example, learned that 14 percent of his DNA was African and 6 percent East Asian. "I was like, oh my God, that's me," he recalls. A.J. Dobbins knew he was black and perhaps had a white ancestor, but he was amazed to learn that one's DNA is 28 percent Caucasian, 70 percent sub-Saharan African, and 2 percent Native American.

Many hope that this experiment will chip away at prejudice, shaking people out of his rigid thinking. Critics, however, say the genetic tests are incomplete. They call DNA

1. When he was 20, he worked seven days a week in a fruit store.

2. The child in me wants to run away from problems.

3. The home team charged enthusiastically onto the field.

4. "Work hard and keep your mouth shut" is my mother's formula for success.

5. The men thought the movie was amusing.

PRACTICE 12

The following paragraph contains both correct and faulty parallel structures. Revise the faulty parallelism.

During World War II, United States Marines who fought in the Pacific possessed a powerful weapon that was also unbeatable: Navajo Code Talkers. Creating a secret code, Code Talkers sent and were translating vital military information. Four hundred twenty Navajos memorized the code, and it was used by them. It consisted of both common Navajo words and there were also about 400 invented words. For example, Code Talkers used the Navajo words for *owl*, *chicken hawk*, and *swallow* to describe different kinds of aircraft. Because Navajo is a complex language that is also uncommon, the Japanese military could not break the code. Although Code Talkers helped the Allied Forces win the war, their efforts were not publicly recognized until the code was declassified in 1968. On August 14, 1982, the first Navajo Code Talkers Day honored these heroes, who not only had risked their lives but also been developing one of the few unbroken codes in history.

PRACTICE 13.

The following essay contains both correct and faulty parallel structures. Revise the faulty parallelism.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

Vincent Van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime, but his oil paintings later influenced modern art and establishing him as one of the greatest artists of all time. Born in Holland in 1853, Van Gogh struggled to find an inspiring career. After failing as a tutor and being a clergyman, he began to paint. Van Gogh's younger brother Theo supported him with money and also sending art supplies. Eventually, Van Gogh went to live with Theo in Paris, where the young artist was introduced to Impressionism, a style of painting that emphasizes light at different times of day. Using vivid colors and also with broad brush strokes, Van Gogh made powerful pictures full of feeling. His favorite subjects were landscapes, still lifes, sunflowers, and drawing everyday people. Perhaps his most famous picture, *Starry Night*, shows a wild night sky over a French village, with the moon and stars swirling in fiery circles.



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Starry Night, Vincent Van Gogh