Basic English Grammar Module

Unit 2B – The Verbal Group and Tenses

INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES
UNIT 2B: THE VERBAL GROUP AND TENSES

INTRODUCTION
In the previous unit we looked at the verbal group with respect to finite and non-finite verbs. In this unit we want to look at the verbal group again but from a different perspective, that of tense.

WHY YOU WERE RECOMMENDED TO THIS UNIT
You have been referred to this Unit because you may not be able to use tense accurately and appropriately for academic writing. You may be making errors in your sentences that look like the following:

Example 1: The practice of nursing may including informing the community of diseases in the community.

Example 2: This first element of Roy's Adaptation Model would be useful in caring for the aged in nursing homes. Nurses at the nursing home would use the nursing care plans and continuously evaluated the outcomes. For example, if an elderly patient has a small injury, the nurses will plan his/her care for a short term stay at the nursing home. After recovering, then the patient will return home. If the elderly patient has a tumour, the nursing care plan will be a plan for the patient to stay long term at the nursing home.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS UNIT
After you have completed this unit you should be able to:

* recognise where tense is indicated in the verbal group
* recognise the tenses which generally occur in written academic texts
* identify an incorrect tense in context
* correct a tense problem in context.
INTRODUCTION
If you are not using tense accurately and appropriately in your writing, there are three possible sources of your problem: one, the forms of the verbs; two, the structure of the verbal group and three, the context in which the verbal group occurs. In this unit we will look at each of these areas in turn.

THE FORMS OF VERBS
One of the problems you may be having is that you are not familiar enough with the forms of the verbs you are using. Verbs have several forms which can be used on their own or combined with other verb forms called auxiliaries. When you combine a verb with an auxiliary it is called a verbal group. These verbal groups can be finite or non-finite. If a verbal group is finite, it shows tense or judgement.

Regular/irregular verbs have the following forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Form</th>
<th>'s' Form</th>
<th>Present Participle</th>
<th>Past Form(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>state</td>
<td>states</td>
<td>stating</td>
<td>stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say</td>
<td>says</td>
<td>saying</td>
<td>said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>writes</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>wrote, written</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercise 1: Fill in the table with the correct forms of the verbs listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Form</th>
<th>'s' Form</th>
<th>Present Participle</th>
<th>Past Form(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>find</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>determine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>choose</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>say</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you had difficulty with the forms of these verbs then you need to do some revision. If, when you're writing, you use a verb but its forms are unfamiliar to you, you should check a dictionary.

You should also be aware of the uses of these different forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORM</th>
<th>USES</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>base form</td>
<td>present tense</td>
<td>There are a number of variables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>imperative</td>
<td>Outline the major issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the infinitive</td>
<td>The aim is to fund various projects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after modals</td>
<td>They ought to consider the outcomes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'s' form</td>
<td>3rd person singular of the present tense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The project needs a lot of funding. The result indicates need for more research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present participle</td>
<td>continuous tenses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The project manager is assessing it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'ing' adjectives</td>
<td>Diminishing resources may be a problem.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'ing' nouns</td>
<td>Costing of the project is a priority.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-finite clauses</td>
<td>After testing the samples, destroy them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past form</td>
<td>simple past tense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The agar flowed to the edge of the cover slip.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past participle of regular verbs</td>
<td>past participle of regular/irregular verbs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>perfect tenses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The report has been tabled.</td>
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<tr>
<td>'ed' adjectives</td>
<td>The warmed solution was then added.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some non-finite clauses</td>
<td>Influenced by public opinion, the council changed its policy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you are need further practice with the forms of regular and irregular verbs one of the following might be useful:


THE STRUCTURE OF THE VERBAL GROUP
A second problem you may be having with verbs is that you are not familiar enough with the elements that make up the structure of the verbal group. For example you may want to use a particular tense but you don't know which elements of the structure to use.
You will remember from Unit 2A that the verbal group has the following parts:

1. **main verb**
   - This contains the content information i.e. it tells us what type of activity is occurring.

2. **finite verb**
   - This gives us information about the verb with respect to time (tense) or judgement (modality).

3. **auxiliary verb(s)**
   - These give further information about tense.

When a verbal group is broken down into these parts it looks something like this:

```
 will  have  finish  ed
 finite  auxiliary  main verb  verb ending
```

You will also remember from Unit 2A that the finite part of the verb can be expressed in two ways - using time operators (e.g. **did**, **was**, **is** etc.) or modal operators (**may**, **should**, **might** etc.)

If we put these different parts together we get a finite verbal group structure that looks like the following:

```
(finite operator)  ^  (auxiliaries)  ^  (main verb)
time or modal  have/ be/be
```

You choose elements from the brackets according to factors relating to the message you are trying to give your reader:

- If you are concerned about time you choose a time operator to show past, present or future.
  - e.g. he **went**, he **is** going, he **didn't** go

- If you are concerned about indicating possibility or your attitude on what is being said you choose a modal operator.
  - e.g. he **might** go, he **should** go

- If you want to indicate secondary tense you choose an auxiliary
  - e.g. he might **have** gone, she is not **being** paid, it will **be being** determined

- If you want to concentrate on the thing affected by an action rather than the doer of the action you choose passive rather than active.
e.g. he completed the experiment; the experiment was completed

We have already discussed time operators, modal operators and auxiliaries but we haven't looked yet at the difference between active and passive.

**ACTIVE AND PASSIVE**

A statement of just one clause may have the following elements:

Subject ^ Verbal group ^ Object ^ Complement ^ Adjunct

We want to look at a statement with just four of these elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verbal Group (Active)</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Adjunct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>will have finished</td>
<td>the experiment</td>
<td>by tomorrow.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We say that this statement is active because the "doer" of the action, he, is in first position as subject and the "receiver" of the action, the experiment, is the object.

Sometimes, however, we want to focus on the person or thing affected by the action, not the person or thing that does it and so we could re-write the above sentence in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verbal group (Passive)</th>
<th>Adjunct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The experiment</td>
<td>will have been finished</td>
<td>by tomorrow.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We put the object in subject position and change the verbal group to a passive form. In this example we have left out the person who did the action but we could have left him in:

*The experiment will have been finished by him by tomorrow.*

The choice of a passive form of the verb is very common in academic writing and particularly in scientific writing.

Now let's go back to look at the structure of the verbal group in relation to tense. Here is our general model again.

(time or modal) ^ (auxiliaries) ^ (main verb)

When you are constructing your verbal groups you have to know the appropriate combinations within this structure for each tense. Tables 1A & B may help you with this. In these tables a number of different verbs have been used to exemplify the elements of the verbal group structure that would be used for each tense. If you know the tense you want to use but you are unsure what elements should be included, refer to the table. Please note that not every case can be shown. For example, there are other modal operators that we have not been able to include.
Exercise 2: In the following examples mark the ones with the correct form of the tense.

a) Simple present tense
   i) ecosystems are consist of two parts
   ii) ecosystems consist of two parts
   iii) ecosystems is consist of two parts
   iv) ecosystems are consisting of two parts

b) Simple past tense
   i) James Cook first arrived in Australia in 1770
   ii) James Cook was first arrived in Australia in 1770
   iii) James Cook was first arrive in Australia in 1770
   iv) James Cook first was arrive in Australia in 1770

c) Past passive
   i) the experiments were conduct in the laboratory
   ii) the experiments were conducted in the laboratory
   iii) the experiments were being conduct in the laboratory
   iv) the experiments was being conducted in the laboratory

d) Present perfect passive
   i) it suggested that lipids form in the arterial wall
   ii) it is suggested that lipids form in the arterial wall
   iii) it has suggested that lipids form in the arterial wall
   iv) it has been suggested that lipids form in the arterial wall

e) Present continuous
   i) they is determining the levels now
   ii) they determine the levels now
   iii) they are determining the levels now
   iv) they determine the levels now

f) Past perfect passive
   i) in the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate been contaminated
   ii) in the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate had been contaminated
   iii) in the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate has contaminated
   iv) in the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate had being contaminated

g) Past continuous
   i) they were doing this type of procedure in the 1890s
   ii) they are doing this type of procedure in the 1890s
iii) they were done this type of procedure in the 1890s
iv) they were doning this type of procedure in the 1890s

h) Present passive

i) the peroxide content correlates with the degree of atherosclerosis
ii) the peroxide content correlated with the degree of atherosclerosis
iii) the peroxide content is correlated with the degree of atherosclerosis
iv) the peroxide content was correlated with the degree of atherosclerosis

**TABLE 1A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Finite Operators</th>
<th>Auxiliaries</th>
<th>Main Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Modal</td>
<td>have</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIMPLE TENSES</td>
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<td>simple present</td>
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<tr>
<td>might</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 1B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TENSES</th>
<th>Finite Operators</th>
<th>Auxiliaries</th>
<th>Main Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Modal</td>
<td>have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERFECT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>present perfect</td>
<td>has</td>
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<td>past perfect</td>
<td>had</td>
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<tr>
<td>future perfect</td>
<td>will</td>
<td>have</td>
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<td>PASSIVE</td>
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<tr>
<td>present perfect</td>
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<td>future perfect</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ought to</td>
<td>have</td>
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<tr>
<td>PERFECT CONTINUOUS</td>
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<tr>
<td>present perfect continuous</td>
<td>has</td>
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<tr>
<td>past perfect continuous</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>future perfect continuous</td>
<td>will</td>
<td>have</td>
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<tr>
<td>PASSIVE</td>
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<tr>
<td>present perfect continuous</td>
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<tr>
<td>past perfect continuous</td>
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<tr>
<td>future perfect continuous</td>
<td>will</td>
<td>have</td>
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<td>may</td>
<td>have</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>may</td>
<td>have</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TENSE AND CONTEXT
The third problem you may be having with verbs is choosing the correct tense for the context. The English tense system, which gives you information about time, is complicated. It requires that in your writing that you are able to shift your perspective from whether things are happening now (present), to whether they have already happened (past), to whether they will happen in the future.

If you think of a verb as some kind of event, or something happening, and all the words that modify that verb as giving you additional information about that event, then tense is what gives you information about when it happened - whether it is finished or not, still happening or is going to happen. Tense locates events or happenings in time.

Let's look first at the verbal group to see where the information on tenses is located.
The following verbal group has been broken down into its elements:

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{will} & \text{have} & \text{happen} & (ed) \\
\text{finite} & \text{auxiliary} & \text{main verb} & \text{verb ending} \\
\text{future} & \text{present} & & \text{past} \\
\end{array}
\]

As you can see from this example, we get information about tense from three places:

1. the finite verb, if there is one, gives primary tense
2. the auxiliary verb shows secondary tense
3. the endings to the main verb can also show tense

A description of the tense in this example is "past in the present in the future" or future perfect. Notice that we work backwards through the verbal group, starting with the main verb and its secondary tense, followed by the other secondary tenses, to the finite verb, which carries the primary tense, coming last.

We can look at some more tenses using the same 'main verb' as the example above:

1. are happening

   \[
   \begin{array}{cccc}
   \text{finite} & \text{main verb} \\
   \text{present} & \text{present} \\
   \end{array}
   \]

   The tense is the "present in present" or present continuous.

2. have happened

   \[
   \begin{array}{cccc}
   \text{finite} & \text{main verb} \\
   \text{present} & \text{past} \\
   \end{array}
   \]

   The tense is "past in present" or present perfect.

3. will be happening

   \[
   \begin{array}{cccc}
   \text{finite} & \text{auxiliary} & \text{main verb} \\
   \text{future} & \text{present} \\
   \end{array}
   \]

   The tense is "present in future" or future continuous.

Fortunately in academic written English, the range of tenses commonly used is much narrower than in spoken English. Mostly we find either simple forms e.g. simple present,
simple past or forms with one secondary tense e.g. present perfect and past perfect.

The following two texts should illustrate this. One is an essay from the social sciences; the other is a research paper from the physical sciences.

Each finite verbal group in the main clauses of the texts have been highlighted and then the verbal group has been placed in a column which indicates whether it is past time, present time or future time. Please note that not all of the essay (Text 1) or the research paper (Text 2) has been reproduced.

Exercise 3: Read Text 1 and Text 2.

Text 1: The Essay

- In the past time column what are the two main tenses?
  ..........................................................................................

- In the present time column what is the main tense?
  ..........................................................................................

- In the future column what tense is used?
  ..........................................................................................

Text 2: The Research Paper

- In the past time column what are the two main tenses?
  ..........................................................................................

- In the present time column what are the two main tenses?
  ..........................................................................................

- In the future time column what tense is used?
  ..........................................................................................

Were the tenses used the ones that we said commonly occur in academic English? YES/NO

In the next section we will do two things. First we will look at the meanings of these tenses and then we will go on to look at when the writers of academic texts use these tenses.
Text 1 - Essay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraph 1 - Introduction</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As television has been labelled as an &quot;influential teacher&quot; by many professionals, the claim that &quot;modern children spend more hours in front of television than they spend at school&quot; is definitely worth further investigation. If it is found that the quality and content of the children's programmes promote the development of social and cognitive skills then these citations have in fact, no relevance. Unfortunately however, many studies show that children's television is lacking and is even, in some instances, harmful. The devastating effects of T.V. violence on the development of the children's aggressive nature is one of the main concerns when evaluating the effects of T.V. on children.</td>
<td>has been labelled</td>
<td>is</td>
<td>is found</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Paragraph 7 | | | |
| Typically, two films similar in length, use of colour, identity of the acts and the character of the situation are shown. One film also shows distinctive and novel aggressive behaviours while the other does not, and in the post-film sessions the different children who viewed the films are compared for their aggressive behaviours. Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961, 1963) showed that young children were intrigued by displays of violence, and that given the opportunity, they would readily mimic them. In a typical study, children were allowed to watch a live or filmed model or a cartoon in which the hero made aggressive verbal statements or played aggressively with a toy, for example, an inflatable rubber toy. Then the children were left alone in a room full of toys and their words and behaviour were observed and recorded. In all the studies, the children imitated the model's behaviour whether gentle or aggressive, with the imitation more pronounced if the model's actions brought a reward or if the model had been kind to the child (Gardner, p.321) | showed | were allowed | were left | were observed, recorded | imitated | brought | had been | comes | do not show |

| Paragraph 8 | | | |
| In these studies, no real harm comes to person or property and so they do not show whether imitation of an aggressor who does do damage or is reprimanded... | | | |

| Paragraph 16 - Conclusion | | | |
| Although many controls and regulations have been introduced to enhance the quality and content of children's programs in Australia, violence and crime still seem to filter through. The common finding across most age groups is that this television violence and crime instigates aggressive... | have been introduced | | seem | is |
Text 2: The Research Paper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It has been suggested (1) that lipid peroxides formed in the arterial wall are active in atherogenesis. The suggestion has been widely accepted as reasonable, since these compounds break down readily, initiating chain reactions as they do so and forming various products that are potentially toxic. For example, lipid peroxides denature serum -lipoproteins (2) and attack the SH group of proteins (3). When vitamin E-deficient rats are fed a diet rich in polyunsaturated fats, lipid peroxides appear in their adipose and muscular tissues (4); similarly, it is thought unsaturated lipids present in atherosclerotic arteries may autoxidise and then polymerise to form &quot;ceroid&quot; (5). Lufton and Sowerby (1) provided some evidence for the atherogenic role of lipid peroxides. They showed that the content of peroxides in lipids extracted from the human aortic wall increased with the degree of atherosclerosis. They extracted the lipid, however, by mixing the tissue exposed to the air, with anhydrous sodium sulfate and extracting the mixture with chloroform at room temperature. These treatments may have caused the artifactual formation, by oxidation, of peroxides from unsaturated lipids during the extraction. We have therefore reopened the question of whether lipid peroxides occur in aorta lipids...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials and Methods</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aortas were obtained at autopsy, within 6-12 hours of death, at the University Hospital, Barchester. Aortas were classified as being at stage 0, I, II or III of atherosclerosis according to the appearance of the intima (6), and the adventitia was rapidly removed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the peroxides measured in lipid extracts from the arterial wall are artifacts, how can we explain Lufton and Sowerby's findings (1) that the peroxide content is correlated with degree of atherosclerosis? It has recently been discovered (6) that arterial lipids become progressively more unsaturated with increasing degree of atherosclerosis. Among the lipid classes, cholesteryl esters show the most striking increase in unsaturation, and the proportion of cholesteryl esters show the most striking increase in unsaturation, and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MEANINGS OF THE TENSES

As a writer you take your position in present time. You then have to decide from your position in the present whether the things you are writing about are happening now (present), whether they have already happened (past) or whether they will happen in the future.

PRESENT TIME

If you decide to stay in present time you will probably have to make a choice between simple present and the present continuous.

The Simple Present

The simple present does not specifically locate an event in time. It is used for things that either happen habitually or are always true. It is a general tense which applies for all time. It may stretch indefinitely into the past and into the future. For this reason it is used to apply to things which are assumed to be always true, to things which are general principles or to describe the current state of affairs.

Example:  

I smoke.

This indicates that I smoke as a habit even though I might not be smoking now.

Example:  

A molecule of water has two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen.

This indicates something that is always or generally true.

The Present Continuous

This is like a "temporary present" and its meaning is that of limited duration. This tense applies to things which are currently happening at the time of speaking or writing.

Example:  

I am smoking.

This means if you look at me now you would see that I am smoking.

Example:  

World energy demand is increasing at a rate of 3% per year.

This indicates a change or trend or development that is currently happening.

Exercise 4:  

To give you practice with the present tenses fill each gap in the following paragraph with a verb that is either in the simple present tense or the present continuous tense.

Care of persons who.............(be) unable to manage for themselves, whether by reason of illness or social factors .................(be) one of the few areas of employment that not only................. (need) to grow but...............(grow). This has probably come about through the increasing numbers of conditions that can now be treated, the increasing
technology available to those disorders, and the population changes. In particular, the aged and handicapped sections of the population .................(grow), creating a greater demand for care.

PAST TIME
Writing from your position in present time you will also have to decide what took place before the time at which you are writing.

The Simple Past
The simple past tells us that the event we are talking about is over but it does not necessarily specify when it was.

Example: There was no obvious correlation between peroxide content and stage of atherosclerosis.

However, we can choose to indicate when it occurred with a time expression or additional information.

Example: Lufton and Sowerby (1970:23) provided some evidence for the atherogenic role of lipid peroxides.

In this example the year 1970 tells us when the evidence was provided.

The Past Continuous
This is like a "temporary past". If you want to talk about continued states or repeated actions or events which occurred in the past you use the past continuous.

Example: Work was progressing but not as quickly as he would have liked.

The Present Perfect
There is a special problem when talking about past time. The simple past tense is used when talking about a happening related to a definite time in the past as we have already discussed. However, a perfect tense is used for a past happening which is seen in relation to a later event or time. Thus the present perfect means 'past-time-related-to-present-time'. If you want to talk about an activity or situation that started at some time in the past and is still happening now or has an effect or result in the present you use the present perfect.

Example: It has been suggested (1) that lipid peroxides formed in the arterial wall are active in atherogenesis. The suggestion has been widely accepted as reasonable.

This indicates that the 'suggestion' and its 'acceptance' took place in the past but are still having an effect now at the time of writing.

The Past Perfect
If you want to talk about a past event or situation that occurred before a particular time in the past, you use the past perfect.

Example: In the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate had become contaminated by a mould.
This indicates the "noticing" took place in the past and the culture plate was contaminated before the "noticing" took place.

Exercise 5: The original tenses in the following passage have been replaced with the infinitive form of the verb. Write in the most appropriate tense in each space. (Assume this was written in 1994)

In 1981 there (be) ............ 41,097 people in Australia who (be/born) ............ in Vietnam. The male:female ratio (be) ............ 54:46. By the end of 1982, a total of 51,966 people from Vietnam (have/settle) ................... in Australia.

Most of these people (live) ................ in large cities, with Sydney and Melbourne, accounting for 67%. Most (be).................. between the ages of 20 and 55 years. In 1981 the majority (have/be) ................... in Australia for three years or less. 60% of people with more than three years' residence (have/become) ..................... Australian citizens. In the 5 to 14 age group, 84% (speak) ..................... a language other than English at home. 92% of those 15 and older (be) ................ also in this category.

Over 29% of Vietnamese in Australia (be) .............. Buddhist, 18% (be) .......... Christian and 52% (be/classify) ..................... as 'other' religions. The most common religion in this last group (be) .............. Taoism.

If the relationships between the different tenses are displayed in a diagram they might be easier to understand:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEN</th>
<th>NOW</th>
<th>THEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past time</td>
<td>Present Time</td>
<td>Future Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Simple Present**

Much of the literature reviewed so far is mainly concerned with verbal interaction.

---

**Present Continuous**

Many studies show that children's television is lacking...

---

**Simple Past**

As a patient Chilver (1978) found it difficult to explain...

---

**Present Perfect**

It has been suggested (1) that lipid peroxides formed in the arterial wall...

---

**Past Perfect**

But he did say that the nurse had developed a way of knowing...
Now let's compare the writers in both the Essay and the Research Paper to see when they used the tenses they did.

Present Tense Choices in the Essay & the Research Paper

The Essay: Most of the Introduction has been written in the simple present tense. In the Introduction the writer introduces us to the topic of the essay, states the purpose of the essay, his/her position on the topic and outlines the scope of the paper. With the exception of the opening sentence, all this is done in the present tense.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>TENSE</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>give general background to topic</td>
<td>present perfect/simple present</td>
<td>As television has been labelled as an &quot;influential teacher&quot; by many professionals, the claim that &quot;modern children spend more hours in front of television than they spend at school&quot; is definitely worth further investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>state purpose</td>
<td>simple present</td>
<td>If it is found that the quality and content of the children's programmes promote the development of social and cognitive skills then these citations have, in fact, no relevance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>state essay's thesis/position</td>
<td>simple present</td>
<td>Unfortunately, however, many studies show that children's television is lacking and is even, in some instances, harmful. The devastating effects of T.V. violence on the development of the children's aggressive nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>state scope</td>
<td></td>
<td>is one of the main concerns when evaluating the effects of T.V. on children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Body of the essay, the writer again uses the simple present tense to describe the way a particular piece of research is usually carried out (paragraph 7). This constitutes part of her evidence:

"Typically two films....are shown. One film also shows distinctive and novel aggressive behaviours while the other does not, and in the post-film sessions the different children who viewed the films are compared for their aggressive behaviours."

The writer uses the present tense again in paragraph 8 when he/she criticises the evidence:

"In these studies, no real harm comes to person or property and so they do not show whether imitation of an aggressor who does do damage or is reprimanded..."

In the Conclusion the simple present tense is used when the writer confirms and qualifies the
thesis:

"Therefore the claim that 'modern children spend more hours in front of television than they spend at school' is indeed cause for alarm. For the young pre-schooler, the child with a high base level of aggression and the unsupervised 'latch-key' child, the implications of television are quite serious."

The simple present tense will probably be your main tense choice when writing essays. There will, however, be variations on this depending on the field you are working in. For example, in the field of history where you have to refer to many events that have occurred in the past, you would expect that there would be more use of the simple past tense. You would be presenting your argument in the present but would constantly be referring to past time for evidence to support that argument.

The following paragraph from a history essay will illustrate this:

In 1899, G. Arnold returned to Sydney from England to employment in the History Department of the University of Sydney. While in England he had been carefully following the South African issues, involving the Uitlanders and the Boers, from British and South African capitalist controlled newspapers (17). However, war is a controversial issue and interpretation of events by an individual is questionable due to the lack of accessibility to confidential documents.

Notice the shift to simple present tense when the writer says "However, war is..." when he/she wants to make a generalisation concerning war that is part of the argument that is being presented.

Exercise 6: Read the short text below and then answer the questions.

TEXT 1
As discussed in the previous chapters, the boarding houses in Waverley Municipality have the important function of providing relatively low rent accommodation. The Council is attempting to retain B/LH's in the area. The Council offers some incentives to the proprietors of the boarding houses.

1. Why does the writer switch from simple present to present continuous in sentence 2.

TEXT 2
Generally, women are responsible for purchasing and preparing food for their family and their decisions largely influence the health and well-being of a broad section of the community. Therefore, women were considered the target group for this programme.

1. Why does the writer use the simple present tense in the first sentence?
Now let's look at the second text.

The Research Paper:  
A Research paper is a more highly structured piece of writing than an essay with each section in the paper having a clearly defined purpose. A general pattern of tense throughout an experimental report has been observed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>TENSE CHOICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>• introduce general topic to be discussed</td>
<td>simple present/present perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• discuss previous research</td>
<td>past/present perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• identify aims and objectives</td>
<td>simple present or future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• state hypothesis</td>
<td>simple present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials and Methods</td>
<td>• describe how experiment was carried out</td>
<td>simple past passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>• describe what was found</td>
<td>simple present and simple past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>• explain what is significant from the results</td>
<td>simple present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>simple past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>present perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>• make generalisations</td>
<td>simple present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Research paper we looked at the writer uses the present tense mainly in the Introduction and the Discussion.

In the Introduction the writer uses the present tense to state what is generally held to be true and then to exemplify it:

*The suggestion has been widely accepted as reasonable, since these compounds break down readily, initiating chain reactions as they do so and forming various products that are potentially toxic. For example, lipid peroxides denature serum - lipoproteins (2) and attack the SH group of proteins (3). When vitamin E-deficient rats are fed a diet rich in polyunsaturated fats, lipid peroxides appear in their adipose and muscular tissues (4); similarly, it is thought, unsaturated lipids present in atherosclerotic arteries may autoxidise and then polymerise to form "ceroid" (5).*

Notice the verb group that is in bold. The researcher is showing his/her judgement of a particular finding in the field by using the modal "may".
In the Discussion section the writer again uses the simple present to discuss experimental findings that are generally accepted within the scientific community:

*Among the lipid classes, cholesteryl esters show the most striking increase in unsaturation, and the proportion of cholesteryl esters shows the most striking increase in unsaturation, and the proportion of cholesteryl esters relative to the other lipids also rises* (9, 10).

**Exercise 7:**

**TEXT 1:**
There are two types of reproduction: asexual reproduction and sexual reproduction. In sexual reproduction organisms produce special sex cells called gametes. These are male and female and must combine in a process called fertilisation to produce new offspring. In asexual reproduction there are no gametes produced and no fertilisation.

1. **What is the only tense used in this text?**

...........................................................................................................................................................................................

2. **Why do you think the writer uses only this tense?**

...........................................................................................................................................................................................

**Past Tense Choices in the Essay & the Research Paper**

The Essay In the Essay there is very little shift to past time. When it does occur it is not simple past but the present perfect. Each of the instances indicates something that began in the past but is still having an effect in the present.

The writer opens the Introduction with:

"*As television has been labelled as an 'influential teacher' by many professionals, the claim that...*"

The use of the present perfect here indicates that although television has been described in the past as an "influential teacher" and continues to be described that way, it is still open to debate.

In the Conclusion the writer also says:

"*Although many controls and regulations have been introduced...*"

These "controls and regulations" were introduced in the past but are still in effect at the time of writing.

**Exercise 8:**
TEXT 1

European occupation of Australia had a catastrophic impact on Aboriginal health. This resulted in widespread population decline. The most significant cause of depopulation was smallpox. Epidemics occurred in 1789 and 1829-31. It was noted that about half of the Aborigines in the neighbourhood of the first European settlement at Port Jackson had died from smallpox by 1790. This is consistent with the mortality rates among previously unexposed people in the Americas.

1. Which tense is used most frequently in this text. Why?

........................................................................................................................................................................

2. Why does the writer use "had died" in the second to last sentence? What is this tense called?

........................................................................................................................................................................

The Research Paper

The Research Paper makes much more use of past time. In the second paragraph of the Introduction the writer is describing the experimental work of Lufton and Sowerby and what they found:

Lufton and Sowerby (1) provided some evidence for the atherogenic role of lipid peroxides. They showed that the content of peroxides in lipids extracted from the human aortic wall increased the degree of atherosclerosis. They extracted the lipid however, by mixing the tissue, exposed to the air, with anhydrous sodium sulfate and extracting the mixture with chloroform at room temperature. These treatments may have caused the artificial formation, by oxidation, of peroxides from unsaturated lipids during the extraction. We have therefore reopened the question of whether lipid peroxides occur in aorta lipids, using aerobic extraction at much lower temperatures in order to minimise oxidation.

In the first part of this paragraph the writer is discussing experimental research that was completed and the findings that have been accepted by the scientific community as facts. The simple past tense is used.

However, notice how the writer shifts to the present perfect tense (underlined) when he/she wants to challenge part of the findings that are of direct relevance to the research work that is currently being carried out. The researcher challenges the methodology by using the modal "may" and by the use of the present perfect tense indicates that although this took place in the past, it is still of relevance to the present research.

In the Materials and Methods section there is consistent use of the simple past passive as this is a description of procedures that were completed in the past.

"Aortas were obtained at autopsy, within 6-12 hours of death, at the University Hospital, Barchester."

The Discussion section also makes use of the present perfect when reference is made to
previous research that is related to the current research

"It has recently been discovered (6) that arterial lipids become progressively more unsaturated with increasing degree of atherosclerosis.

Exercise 9: The following is an Introduction from a research paper. The main verbs have been underlined.

Aquatic hyphomycetes in freshwater habitats can be distinguished into the Ingoldian and the aeroquatic groups (Webster & Descals, 1980). The Ingoldian hyphomycetes are known to grow profusely on well-decayed leaves and twigs in running streams and lakes. Their spores were first observed on stream surface scum by Ingold (1942). Since then, over 150 species have been described but mostly from temperate countries. Few such fungi have been reported from the tropics. This paper presents some observations made on a survey for Ingoldian hyphomycetes in the local freshwaters. (Tan and Lim, 1980:36)

1. What tense is used to introduce the general topic to be discussed?

2. What tense(s) are used to discuss the previous research?

3. What tense is used to identify the aim of the paper?

THE ACADEMIC CONTEXT
In order to use tense accurately and appropriately in your writing, you have to be aware of three things: one, the forms of the verbs; two, how the verbal group is structured for a particular tense; and three, what is the context in which you are using the verbal group.

When you are making your tense choices also be aware of the field you are writing in e.g. is it history, biology etc. and the form and purpose of the paper you are trying to write.

EDITING A TEXT
In this section we are going to focus on selecting the correct tense for the context as you have already had some practice with choosing the correct form and structure of the verbal group.

Editing Strategy

a. read the whole text

2B.21
b. underline the finite verbs

c. is the tense choice appropriate for the context?

TEXT 1
Introduction
Since the introduction of modern computers, an important part of each computer system has been their file system. The file system was responsible for managing permanent data on some stable storage system, like a disk. Besides the file system, there is the memory management process which is responsible for managing short-term data and coding in volatile memory. In spite of a large body of investigation which has been done to improve the efficiency of these two parts, an important question remains. Why were there two different mechanisms for managing data in computer systems?

TEXT 2
Other events during this period also led to nurses being able to prevent the spread of diseases to a greater extent. Although it was a slow process in some areas, medical people started to accept the antiseptic principles of Lister. By extending the use of carbolic acid to all fields of surgery, infection and disease decreases. Based on this principle instruments are boiled to reduce the risk. The use of rubber gloves is also being introduced in some areas to control disease (Bullough, 1969: 119).
Exercise 1:

find finds finding found
think thinks thinking thought
determine determines determining determined
choose chooses choosing chosen
say says saying said
mean means meaning meant

Exercise 2:

(a) (ii) ecosystems consist of two parts
(b) (i) James Cook first arrived in Australia in 1770
(c) (ii) the experiments were conducted in the laboratory
(d) (iv) it has been suggested that lipids form in the arterial wall
(e) (iii) they are determining the levels now
(f) (ii) in the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate had been contaminated
(g) (i) they were doing this type of procedure in the 1890s
(h) (iii) the peroxide content is correlated with the degree of atherosclerosis

Exercise 3:

TEXT 1: THE ESSAY
In the past time column what are the two main tenses? simple past, present perfect
In the present time column what is the main tense? simple present
In the future column what tense is used? present passive

TEXT 2: THE RESEARCH PAPER

In the past time column what are the two main tenses? simple past, present perfect

In the present time column what are the two main tenses? simple present

In the future time column what tense is used? simple future

Except for the future tense, they are the tenses we said would commonly occur in academic writing.

Exercise 4:

Care of persons who are unable to manage for themselves, whether by reason of illness or social factors is one of the few areas of employment that not only needs to grow but is growing. This has probably come about through the increasing numbers of conditions that can now be treated, the increasing technology available to those disorders, and the population changes. In particular, the aged and handicapped sections of the population are growing, creating a greater demand for care.

Exercise 5:

In 1981 there were 41,097 people in Australia who were born in Vietnam. The male:female ratio was 54:46. By the end of 1982, a total of 51,966 people from Vietnam had settled in Australia.

Most of these people lived in large cities, with Sydney and Melbourne accounting for 67%. Most were between the ages of 20 and 55 years. In 1981 the majority had been in Australia for three years or less. 60% of people with more than three years' residence had become Australian citizens. In the 5 to 14 age group, 84% spoke a language other than English at home. 92% of those 15 and older were also in this category.

Over 29% of Vietnamese in Australia were Buddhist, 18% were Christian and 52% were classified as 'other' religions. The most common religion in this last group was Taoism.

Exercise 6:

TEXT 1

As discussed in the previous chapters, the boarding houses in Waverley Municipality have the important function of providing relatively low rent accommodation. The Council is attempting to retain B/LH's in the area. The Council offers some incentives to the proprietors of the boarding houses.
The use of the simple present in the first sentence indicates that the statement is generally true. The writer changes to the present continuous in the second sentence to indicate that this is what is happening at the time of writing.
TEXT 2

Generally, women are responsible for purchasing and preparing food for their family and their decisions largely influence the health and well-being of a broad section of the community. Therefore, women were considered the target group for this programme.

The writer uses the simple present tense in the first sentence to indicate that this is a statement that is generally considered to be true.

Exercise 7:

There are two types of reproduction: asexual reproduction and sexual reproduction. In sexual reproduction organisms produce special sex cells called gametes. These are male and female and must combine in a process called fertilisation to produce new offspring. In asexual reproduction there are no gametes produced and no fertilisation.

1. The simple present tense is the only tense used in this text.
2. The writer is making statements that are accepted as scientific fact.

Exercise 8:

European occupation of Australia had a catastrophic impact on Aboriginal health. This resulted in widespread population decline. The most significant cause of depopulation was smallpox. Epidemics occurred in 1789 and 1829-31. It was noted that about half of the Aborigines in the neighbourhood of the first European settlement at Port Jackson had died from smallpox by 1790. This is consistent with the mortality rates among previously unexposed people in the Americas.

1. The simple past is the tense most frequently used in this text because the writer is describing events that occurred in the past and are completed.
2. The writer uses the past perfect tense to indicate that one happening or event in the past - the death of half the Aborigines - had taken place before another event or happening in the past.

Exercise 9:

Aquatic hyphomycetes in freshwater habitats can be distinguished into the Ingoldian and the aeroquatic groups (Webster & Descals, 1980). The Ingoldian hyphomycetes are known to grow profusely on well-decayed leaves and twigs in running streams and lakes. Their spores were first observed on stream surface scum by Ingold (1942). Since then, over 150 species have been described but mostly from temperate countries. Few such fungi have been reported from the tropics. This paper presents some observations made on a survey for Ingoldian hyphomycetes in the local freshwaters. (Tan and Lim, 1980:36)
The **present passive** is used to introduce the general topic to be discussed.

The **simple past** and the **present perfect** are used to discuss the previous research.

The **simple present** is used to identify the aim of the paper.

**Editing A Text**

**TEXT 1**

*Introduction*

Since the introduction of modern computers, an important part of each computer system has been their file system. The file system is responsible for managing permanent data on some stable storage system, like a disk. Besides the file system, there is the memory management process which is responsible for managing short-term data and coding in volatile memory. In spite of a large body of investigation which has been done to improve the efficiency of these two parts, an important question remains. Why **are** there two different mechanisms for managing data in computer systems?

**TEXT 2:**

*Other events during this period also led to nurses being able to prevent the spread of diseases to a greater extent. Although it was a slow process in some areas, medical people started to accept the antiseptic principles of Lister. By extending the use of carbolic acid to all fields of surgery, infection and disease were decreased. Based on this principle instruments were boiled to reduce the risk. The use of rubber gloves was also being introduced in some areas to control disease (Bullough, 1969: 119).*