

Chapter 7

Verbs



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MICROTHEME

Writing Activity in Miniature

EXERCISE A

Before you work on this chapter, write a Microtheme on the following topic. Write small enough to leave room for marking later. **After** you have studied this chapter, return to your Microtheme and complete Exercise B to practice what you have learned.

Suggested Microtheme Topic: Write a Microtheme of 80 to 100 words about people’s driving habits that bother you. Give at least one real-life example.

EXERCISE B

Connecting Your Learning Objectives with Your Microtheme

Complete this exercise after you have studied this chapter.

1. Check to make sure your verbs are correct in form and consistent in tense.
2. Check to make sure your subjects and verbs agree.
3. Check to make sure you have used strong verbs in the appropriate voice and mood.



This chapter covers the use of standard verbs. To some, the word *standard* implies “correct.” A more precise meaning is “that which is conventional among educated people.” Therefore, a standard verb is the right choice in most school assignments, most published writing, and most important public-speaking situations. We all change our language when we move from these formal occasions to informal ones: We don’t talk to our families in the same way we would speak at a large gathering in public; we don’t write letters to friends the same way we write a history report. Even with informal language, we would seldom change from standard to nonstandard usage.

Regular and Irregular Verbs

Verbs can be divided into two categories, called *regular* and *irregular*. Regular verbs are predictable, but irregular verbs—as the term suggests—follow no definite pattern.

The forms for both regular and irregular verbs vary to show time.

- **Present-tense verbs** show an action or a state of being that is occurring at the present time: I *like* your hat. He *is* at a hockey game right now. Present-tense verbs can also imply a continuation from the past into the future: She *drives* to work every day.
- **Past-tense verbs** show an action or a state of being that occurred in the past: We *walked* to town yesterday. Tim *was* president of the club last year.
- **Past-participle verbs** are used with helping verbs such as *has*, *have*, and *had*: Georgina *had studied* hard before she took the test.

REGULAR VERBS

Present Tense

For *he*, *she*, and *it*, regular verbs in the present tense add an *-s* or an *-es* to the base word. The following chart shows the present tense of the base word *ask*, which is a regular verb.

	Singular	Plural
First Person:	I ask	we ask
Second Person:	you ask	you ask
Third Person:	he, she, it asks	they ask

If the verb ends in *-y*, you might have to drop the *-y* and add *-ies* for *he*, *she*, and *it*.

	Singular	Plural
First Person:	I try	we try
Second Person:	you try	you try
Third Person:	he, she, it tries	they try

Past Tense

For regular verbs in the past tense, add *-ed* to the base form.

Base Form (Present)	Past
walk	walked
answer	answered

If the base form already ends in *-e*, add just *-d*.

Base Form (Present)	Past
smile	smiled
decide	decided

If the base form ends in a consonant followed by *-y*, drop the *-y* and add *-ied*.

Base Form (Present)	Past
fry	fried
amplify	amplified

Regardless of how you form the past tense, regular verbs in the past tense do not change forms. The following chart shows the past tense of the base word *like*, which is a regular verb.

	Singular	Plural
First Person:	I liked	we liked
Second Person:	you liked	you liked
Third Person:	he, she, it liked	they liked

Past Participles

The past participle uses the helping verbs *has*, *have*, or *had* along with the past tense of the verb. For regular verbs, the past-participle form of the verb is the same as the past tense.

Base Form	Past	Past Participle
happen	happened	happened
hope	hoped	hoped
cry	cried	cried

Here is a list of some common regular verbs, showing the base form, the past tense, and the past participle. The base form can also be used with such helping verbs as *can*, *could*, *do*, *does*, *did*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, and *would*.

Base Form (Present)	Past	Past Participle
answer	answered	answered
ask	asked	asked
cry	cried	cried
decide	decided	decided
dive	dived (dove)	dived
finish	finished	finished
happen	happened	happened
learn	learned	learned
like	liked	liked
love	loved	loved
need	needed	needed
open	opened	opened
start	started	started
suppose	supposed	supposed
walk	walked	walked
want	wanted	wanted

IRREGULAR VERBS

Irregular verbs do not follow any definite pattern.

Base Form (Present)	Past	Past Participle
shake	shook	shaken
make	made	made
begin	began	begun

Some irregular verbs that sound similar in the present tense don't follow the same pattern.

Base Form (Present)	Past	Past Participle
ring	rang	rung
swing	swung	swung
bring	brought	brought

Present Tense

For *he*, *she*, and *it*, irregular verbs in the present tense add an *-s* or an *-es* to the base word. The following chart shows the present tense of the base word *break*, which is an irregular verb.

	Singular	Plural
First Person:	I break	we break
Second Person:	you break	you break
Third Person:	he, she, it breaks	they break

If the irregular verb ends in *-y*, you might have to drop the *-y* and add *-ies* for *he*, *she*, and *it*.

	Singular	Plural
First Person:	I fly	we fly
Second Person:	you fly	you fly
Third Person:	he, she, it flies	they fly

Past Tense

Like past-tense regular verbs, past-tense irregular verbs do not change their forms. The following chart shows the past tense of the irregular verb *do*.

	Singular	Plural
First Person:	I did	we did
Second Person:	you did	you did
Third Person:	he, she, it did	they did

For irregular verbs in the past tense, use the following list of irregular verbs.

Past Participles

Use the past-tense form with the helping verbs *has*, *have*, and *had*.

Here is a list of some common irregular verbs, showing the base form (present), the past tense, and the past participle. Like regular verbs, the base forms can be used with such helping verbs as *can*, *could*, *do*, *does*, *did*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, and *would*.

Irregular Verbs

Base Form (Present)	Past	Past Participle
arise	arose	arisen
awake	awoke (awaked)	awoken (awaked)
be (is)	was, were	been
become	became	become
begin	began	begun
bend	bent	bent
blow	blew	blown
burst	burst	burst
buy	bought	bought
catch	caught	caught
choose	chose	chosen
cling	clung	clung
come	came	come
cost	cost	cost
creep	crept	crept
deal	dealt	dealt
do	did	done
drink	drank	drunk
drive	drove	driven
eat	ate	eaten
feel	felt	felt
fight	fought	fought
fling	flung	flung
fly	flew	flown
forget	forgot	forgotten
freeze	froze	frozen
get	got	got (gotten)
go	went	gone
grow	grew	grown
hang	hung	hung
have	had	had
hit	hit	hit
know	knew	known
lead	led	led
leave	left	left
lose	lost	lost
make	made	made
mean	meant	meant
put	put	put
read	read	read
ride	rode	ridden
ring	rang	rung
see	saw	seen
sew	sewed	sewn (sewed)
shine	shone	shone
shoot	shot	shot

Base Form (Present)	Past	Past Participle
sing	sang	sung
sink	sank	sunk
sleep	slept	slept
slink	slunk	slunk
speak	spoke	spoken
spend	spent	spent
spread	spread	spread
steal	stole	stolen
stink	stank (stunk)	stunk
sweep	swept	swept
swim	swam	swum
swing	swung	swung
take	took	taken
teach	taught	taught
tear	tore	torn
think	thought	thought
throw	threw	thrown
thrust	thrust	thrust
wake	woke (waked)	woken (waked)
weep	wept	wept
write	wrote	written

EXERCISE 1 Selecting Verbs

Underline the correct verb form.

- In the twentieth century, two jilted men on opposite sides of the country (create, created) amazing structures to soothe their broken hearts.
- In 1908, Baldasare Forestiere (built, builded) a four-room underground apartment in Fresno, California.
- Then, he (goes, went) to his native Italy and (ask, asked) his childhood sweetheart to join him in America.
- When she refused, a sorrowful Baldasare (returns, returned) to the United States and (threw, throwed) himself into his digging.
- By the time Baldasare died in 1946, he had (digged, dug) for thirty-eight years and had (construct, constructed) ninety underground rooms over ten acres.
- Just after World War II, Edward Leedskalnin (began, begins) building a castle from enormous coral rocks in Florida City, Florida.
- He had been (jilted, jilted) in 1920 by his 16-year-old fiancée, Agnes.

8. Edward (hopes, hoped) that Agnes would come back to him when he (became, become) famous for his project, which he moved to Homestead, Florida.
 9. Edward (works, worked) on his castle for sixteen years in the dark of night, and no one (knows, knowed) how the five-foot-tall man moved twenty-five-ton blocks.
 10. Unfortunately, Agnes never (seen, saw) Coral Castle, and she did not (change, changed) her mind about marrying Edward.
-

EXERCISE 2 Selecting Verbs

Underline the correct verb form.

1. If you want to save money, professional tightwads urge you to reconsider the things you've always (threwed, thrown) away.
 2. For instance, ties that are worn out can (become, became) tails for kites or leashes for dogs.
 3. You may not have (realize, realized) that you can (use, used) toothbrushes to clean shoes.
 4. Your golfing pals will wonder why they've never (thoughted, thought) of using their own old socks as golf club covers.
 5. A clear, plastic yogurt lid can (become, became) a frame for a school photo if you add a magnet.
 6. Bridesmaid dresses can be cut up and (sew, sewn) together to create decorative throw pillows that would dazzle Martha Stewart.
 7. Two old license plates can be (reborn, reborned) as a roof for a birdhouse.
 8. And don't you dare toss this textbook; it can be (used, use) to wrap fish.
 9. Strapped to the chest, it can (stop, stopped) small-caliber bullets.
 10. When (dropped, dropt) from sufficient height, a single copy has been (known, knowed) to kill small rodents.
-

“Problem” Verbs

The following pairs of verbs are especially troublesome and confusing: *lie* and *lay*, *sit* and *set*, *rise* and *raise*. One way to tell them apart is to remember which word in each pair takes a direct object. A direct object answers the question *whom* or *what* in connection with a verb. The words *lay*, *raise*, and *set* take a direct object.

He *raised* the window. [He *raised* what?]

Lie, *rise*, and *sit*, however, cannot take a direct object. We cannot say, for example, “He rose the window.” In the following examples, the italicized words are objects.

Present Tense	Meaning	Past Tense	Past Participle	Example
lie	to rest	lay	lain	I lay down to rest.
lay	to place something	laid	laid	We laid the <i>books</i> on the table.
rise	to go up	rose	risen	The smoke rose quickly.
raise	to lift, to bring forth	raised	raised	She raised the <i>question</i> .
sit	to rest	sat	sat	He sat in the chair.
set	to place something	set	set	They set the <i>basket</i> on the floor.

EXERCISE 3 Selecting Verbs

Underline the correct verb form.

1. This story is about Bill “Chick” Walker, who (lossed, lost) all he owned at the Wagon Wheel Saloon in Las Vegas.
2. Chick had (laid, layed) one thousand dollars on the red 21 at the roulette table.
3. For that spin, he (done, did) an amazing thing—he (won, wins).
4. But after a while, Chick (became, become) stupid, and his luck (ran, run) out.
5. Before he had (ate, eaten) breakfast, he accepted free drinks from the charming Trixie, who (served, serve) cocktails.
6. His judgment was soon (ruined, ruint) by the drinks, and he (put, putted) all his money on one spin.

7. That wager (cost, costed) Chick everything, and he couldn't (raise, rise) any more money.
 8. Moreover, Trixie would not (sit, set) with him because she (like, liked) only winners.
 9. Chick drained his glass, (rose, raised) from his red-tufted vinyl barstool, and (head, headed) for the parking lot.
 10. There he (known, knew) Bonnie Lou would be waiting for him because she (lust, lusted) for losers.
-

EXERCISE 4 Selecting Verbs

Underline the correct verb form.

1. According to legend, a vampire (lays, lies) in his coffin during the daylight hours.
 2. Like a teenager, he (sets, sits) his own schedule: He sleeps all day and stays out all night.
 3. He cannot (rise, raise) until after the sun sets.
 4. Then the bloodsucker can (rise, raise) the coffin's lid and (set, sit) up.
 5. He (rises, raises) from his bed hungry.
 6. But don't bother (setting, sitting) a place for him at the dinner table.
 7. He goes out hunting for victims who have unwisely (lain, laid) down their crucifixes, wooden stakes, and garlic necklaces.
 8. He pounces quickly so that the victim has no time to (rise, raise) an alarm.
 9. If he (lies, lays) his hands upon you, you're a goner.
 10. But when the sun begins to (rise, raise) in the sky, this monster must hurry back to bed to (lie, lay) his head down.
-

EXERCISE 5 Using Verbs in Sentences

Use each of these words in a sentence of ten words or more.

1. *lie, lay (rest), lain, laid* _____

2. *sit, sat, set* _____

3. *is, was, were* _____

4. *do, does (or don't, doesn't)* _____

The Twelve Verb Tenses

Some languages, such as Chinese and Navajo, have no verb tenses to indicate time. English has a fairly complicated system of tenses, but most verbs pattern in what are known as the simple tenses: past, present, and future. Altogether there are twelve tenses in English. The four sections that follow illustrate those tenses in sentences. The charts place each verb on a timeline. The charts also explain what the different tenses mean and how to form them.

SIMPLE TENSES

Present: I, we, you, they *drive*.
He, she, it *drives*.

Past: I, we, you, he, she, it, they *drove*.

Future: I, we, you, he, she, it, they *will drive*.

PERFECT TENSES

Present Perfect: I, we, you, they *have driven*.
He, she, it *has driven*.

Past Perfect: I, we, you, he, she, it, they *had driven*.

Future Perfect: I, we, you, he, she, it, they *will have driven*.

PROGRESSIVE TENSES

Present Progressive: I *am driving*.
He, she, it *is driving*.
We, you, they *are driving*.

Past Progressive: I, he, she, it *was driving*.
We, you, they *were driving*.

Future Progressive: I, we, you, he, she, it, they *will be driving*.

PERFECT PROGRESSIVE TENSES

Present Perfect Progressive: I, we, you, they *have been driving*.
He, she, it *has been driving*.

Past Perfect Progressive: I, we, you, he, she, it, they *had been driving*.

Future Perfect Progressive: I, we, you, he, she, it, they *will have been driving*.

Simple Tenses

Tense	Time Line	Time	Verb Form
Present I <i>drive</i> to work. She <i>drives</i> to work.		Present, may imply a continuation from past to future	Present: <i>drive</i> <i>drives</i>
Past I <i>drove</i> to work.		Past	Past: <i>drove</i>
Future I <i>will drive</i> to work.		Future	Present preceded by <i>will</i> : <i>will drive</i>

Perfect Tenses

Tense	Time Line	Time	Verb Form
Present Perfect I <i>have driven</i> to work.		Completed recently in the past, may continue to the present	Past participle preceded by <i>have</i> or <i>has</i> : <i>have driven</i>
Past Perfect I <i>had driven</i> to work before I moved to the city. [event]		Prior to a specific time in the past	Past participle preceded by <i>had</i> : <i>had driven</i>
Future Perfect I <i>will have driven</i> to work thousands of times by December 31. [event]		At a time prior to a specific time in the future	Past participle preceded by <i>will have</i> : <i>will have driven</i>

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Progressive Tenses

Tense	Time Line	Time	Verb Form
Present Progressive I <i>am driving</i> to work.		In progress now	Progressive (-ing ending) preceded by <i>is, am, or are</i> : <i>am driving</i>
Past Progressive I <i>was driving</i> to work.		In progress in the past	Progressive (-ing ending) preceded by <i>was or were</i> : <i>was driving</i>
Future Progressive I <i>will be driving</i> to work.		In progress in the future	Progressive (-ing ending) preceded by <i>will be</i> : <i>will be driving</i>

Perfect Progressive Tenses

Tense	Time Line	Time	Verb Form
Present Perfect Progressive I <i>have been driving</i> to work.		In progress up to now	Progressive (-ing ending) preceded by <i>have been or has been</i> : <i>have been driving</i>
Past Perfect Progressive I <i>had been driving</i> when I began ride-sharing. [event]		In progress before another event in the past	Progressive (-ing ending) preceded by <i>had been</i> : <i>had been driving</i>
Future Perfect Progressive By May 1 [event], I <i>will have been driving</i> to work for six years.		In progress before another event in the future	Progressive (-ing ending) preceded by <i>will have been</i> : <i>will have been driving</i>

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EXERCISE 6 Choosing Verb Tense

Underline the correct verb form.

1. In the eighteenth century, Benjamin Franklin (is saying, said) that compound interest was the “eighth wonder of the world.”
2. Today, taking advantage of compound interest (is, was) still one way to grow a fortune.
3. I wish I (had, had been) started investing years ago.
4. If I (will have, could have) saved \$2,000 per year from age 21 on, I (would have, would have had) over a million dollars now.
5. I (have, had) never realized this until I did the math.
6. So I (have decided, could have been deciding) to begin investing money every month from now on.
7. Yesterday, I (determined, have determined) an amount I should save each week.
8. I hope that you (will have considered, are considering) doing the same thing.
9. By the time we’re ready to retire, we (were, may be) millionaires.
10. Someday we (will worry, worried) about how to pay the bills.

EXERCISE 7 Choosing Verb Tense

Underline the correct verb form.

1. We (study, are studying) William Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*.
2. The teenagers Romeo and Juliet (met, had met) at a party.
3. By the time the party was over, they (fell, had fallen) in love.
4. Unfortunately, though, their families (feud, were feuding), so Romeo and Juliet (hid, had hidden) their affection for one another.
5. They secretly (married, had married) and (planned, had planned) to run away together.
6. But long before Juliet met Romeo, Juliet’s father (decided, had decided) that she would marry a man named Paris.
7. The night before her wedding, Juliet (took, had taken) a potion that made her appear dead.
8. This tale (has, has had) a tragic ending because before Romeo found Juliet in her tomb, he (was not informed, had not been informed) that she wasn’t really dead.
9. So he (committed, had committed) suicide, and Juliet (stabbed, had stabbed) herself when she awoke to find his body.
10. If I review this exercise, I (have, will have) a hanky ready to dry my tears.

Subject-Verb Agreement

This section is concerned with number agreement between subjects and verbs. The basic principle of **subject-verb agreement** is that if the subject is singular, the verb should be singular, and if the subject is plural, the verb should be plural. In the examples under the following ten major guidelines, the simple subjects and verbs are italicized.

1. Do not let words that come between the subject and verb affect agreement.
 - Modifying phrases and clauses frequently come between the subject and verb:

The various *types* of drama *were* not *discussed*.

Angela, who is hitting third, *is* the best player.

The *price* of those shoes *is* too high.
 - Certain prepositions can cause trouble. The following words are prepositions, not conjunctions: *along with*, *as well as*, *besides*, *in addition to*, *including*, *together with*. The words that function as objects of prepositions cannot also be subjects of the sentence.

The *coach*, along with the players, *protests* the decision.
 - When a negative phrase follows a positive subject, the verb agrees with the positive subject.

Phillip, not the other boys, *was* the culprit.
2. Do not let inversions (verb before subject, not the normal order) affect the agreement of subject and verb.
 - Verbs and other words may come before the subject. Do not let them affect the agreement. To understand subject-verb relationships, recast the sentence in normal word order.

Are Jabir and his *sister* at home? [question form]

Jabir and his *sister are* at home. [normal order]
 - A sentence filler is a word that is grammatically independent of other words in the sentence. The most common fillers are *there* and *here*. Even though a sentence filler precedes the verb, it should not be treated as the subject.

There *are* many *reasons* for his poor work. [The verb *are* agrees with the subject *reasons*.]
3. A singular verb agrees with a singular indefinite pronoun. (See page 163.)
 - Most indefinite pronouns are singular.

Each of the women *is* ready at this time.

Neither of the women *is* ready at this time.

One of the children *is* not paying attention.

- Certain indefinite pronouns do not clearly express either a singular or plural number. Agreement, therefore, depends on the meaning of the sentence. These pronouns are *all*, *any*, *none*, and *some*.

All of the melon was good.

All of the melons were good.

None of the pie is acceptable.

None of the pies are acceptable.

4. Two or more subjects joined by *and* usually take a plural verb.

The *captain* and the *sailors* were happy to be ashore.

The *trees* and *shrubs* need more care.

- If the parts of a compound subject mean one and the same person or thing, the verb is singular; if the parts mean more than one, the verb is plural.

The *secretary* and *treasurer* is not present. [one]

The *secretary* and the *treasurer* are not present. [more than one]

- When *each* or *every* modifies singular subjects joined by *and*, the verb is singular.

Each *boy* and each *girl* brings a donation.

Each *woman* and *man* has asked the same questions.

5. Alternative subjects—that is, subjects joined by *or*, *nor*, *either/or*, *neither/nor*, *not only/but also*—should be handled in the following manner:

- If the subjects are both singular, the verb is singular.

Rosa or *Alicia* is responsible.

- If the subjects are plural, the verb is plural.

Neither the *students* nor the *teachers* were impressed by his comments.

- If one of the subjects is singular and the other subject is plural, the verb agrees with the nearer subject.

Either the Garcia *boys* or their *father* goes to the hospital each day.

Either their *father* or the Garcia *boys* go to the hospital each day.

6. Collective nouns—*team*, *family*, *group*, *crew*, *gang*, *class*, *faculty*, and the like—take a singular verb if the noun is considered a unit, but they take a plural verb if the group is considered as a number of individuals.

The *team* is playing well tonight.

The *team* are getting dressed. [In this sentence, the individuals are acting not as a unit but separately. If you don't like the way the sentence sounds, substitute "The members of the team are getting dressed."]

7. Titles of books, essays, short stories, and plays; a word spoken of as a word; and the names of businesses take a singular verb.

The Canterbury Tales was written by Geoffrey Chaucer.

Ives is my favorite name for a pet.

Markle Brothers has a sale this week.

8. Sums of money, distances, and measurements are followed by a singular verb when a unit is meant. They are followed by a plural verb when the individual elements are considered separately.

Three dollars was the price. [unit]

Three dollars were lying there. [individual]

Five years is a long time. [unit]

The *first five years* were difficult ones. [individual]

9. Be careful of agreement with nouns ending in -s. Several nouns ending in -s take a singular verb—for example, *aeronautics*, *civics*, *economics*, *ethics*, *measles*, *mumps*.

Mumps is an unpleasant disease.

Economics is my major field of study.

10. Some nouns have only a plural form and so take only a plural verb—for example, *clothes*, *fireworks*, *scissors*, *trousers*.

His *trousers* are badly wrinkled.

Marv's *clothes* were stylish and expensive.

EXERCISE 8 Making Subjects and Verbs Agree

Underline the verb that agrees in number with the subject.

1. "Two Kinds" (is, are) a short story by Amy Tan.
2. My trousers (is, are) wrinkled.
3. Twenty pounds (is, are) a lot to lose in one month.
4. Physics (is, are) a difficult subject to master.
5. *60 Minutes* (is, are) a respected television program.
6. Sears (is, are) having a giant sale.
7. The scissors (is, are) very sharp.
8. Five miles (is, are) too far to walk.
9. The class (is, are) stretching their muscles.
10. My dog and my cat (is, are) sleeping on the couch.

EXERCISE 9 Making Subjects and Verbs Agree

Underline the verb that agrees in number with the subject.

1. Even after the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans (is, are) the site of one of the most celebrated parties in the United States.
2. Though the event was temporarily scaled back, Mardi Gras (is, are) an event that refuses to die.
3. Mardi Gras, which means “Fat Tuesday,” (is, are) always forty-six days before Easter.
4. But twelve days before that, the crowd (begins, begin) to grow.
5. All of the bands in the state of Louisiana (converges, converge) on New Orleans.
6. A visitor, along with just about all of the city’s residents, (enjoys, enjoy) nonstop jazz and blues music.
7. Cajun and Creole food (satisfies, satisfy) the revelers’ hungry appetites.
8. There (is, are) numerous parades, but the best ones (occurs, occur) during the last five days of the celebration.
9. Each of the spectacular parade floats (is, are) decorated and (carries, carry) riders wearing costumes.
10. Four miles (is, are) the length of a typical parade route.
11. Beads, coins, cups, and an occasional medallion (is, are) tossed from the floats into the crowd.
12. People who line the parade route (tries, try) to catch as many trinkets as they can.
13. One float, the best of all of that parade’s floats, (wins, win) an award.
14. Some of the most popular festivities, besides a good parade, (is, are) the masked balls.
15. Every one of the costumes (is, are) outrageous and unique.
16. *Cajun Mardi Gras Masks* (is, are) a book that will give you some ideas.
17. The celebration (is, are) a happening of fun and frenzy.
18. After dark, there (is, are) fireworks in the night sky.
19. Neither the participants nor the curious onlooker (wants, want) the party to end.
20. (Is, Are) these days of merrymaking something you’d enjoy?

Consistency in Tense

Consider this paragraph:

We (1) went downtown, and then we (2) watch a movie. Later we (3) met some friends from school, and we all (4) go to the mall. For most of the evening, we (5) play video games in arcades. It (6) was a typical but rather uneventful summer day.

Does the shifting verb tense bother you (to say nothing about the lack of development of ideas)? It should! The writer makes several unnecessary changes. Verbs 1, 3, and 6 are in the past tense, and verbs 2, 4, and 5 are in the present tense. Changing all verbs to past tense makes the paragraph much smoother.

We went downtown, and then we watched a movie. Later we met some friends from school, and we all went to the mall. For most of the evening, we played video games in arcades. It was a typical but rather uneventful summer day.

In other instances you might want to maintain a consistent present tense. There are no inflexible rules about selecting a tense for certain kinds of writing, but you should be consistent, changing tense only for a good reason.

The present tense is most often used in writing about literature, even if the literature was written long in the past:

Moby Dick is a novel about Captain Ahab's obsession with a great white whale. Ahab sets sail with a full crew of sailors who think they are going on merely another whaling voyage. Most of the crew are experienced seamen.

The past tense is likely to serve you best in writing about your personal experiences and about historical events (although the present tense can often be used effectively to establish the feeling of intimacy and immediacy):

In the summer of 1991, Hurricane Bob hit the Atlantic coast region. It came ashore near Cape Hatteras and moved north. The winds reached a speed of more than ninety miles per hour on Cape Cod but then slackened by the time Bob reached Maine.

EXERCISE 10 Making Verbs Consistent in Tense

Correct verbs as needed in the following paragraph to achieve consistency in tense. Most verbs will be past tense.

Lizzie Borden was famous for being arrested and tried for the gruesome ax murder of her father and stepmother. On August 4, 1892, when Andrew Borden was taking a nap in his home, someone hits him in the head eleven times with a hatchet. His wife, Abby Borden, had already been killed in an upstairs bedroom with the same weapon. The police investigate and conclude that Andrew's

thirty-two-year-old daughter Lizzie is the murderess. Lizzie is arrested but pleaded not guilty to the crimes. Her sensational trial was followed by people all over the country. The prosecution presents an overwhelming amount of circumstantial evidence. Many people thought that she is guilty. Nonetheless, Lizzie's jury acquitted her. The case remains unsolved to this day.

EXERCISE 11 Making Verbs Consistent in Tense

Correct verbs as needed in the following paragraph to achieve consistency in tense. Most verbs will be past tense.

Guam is located in the Mariana chain of islands. It is first inhabited by the Chamorro people approximately 4,000 years ago. This island is an American territory since 1898, when the Spanish give up control after losing the Spanish American War. The Japanese occupy the island during World War II until it is recaptured by the United States in July 1944. Today the island was a popular tourist spot for Asians as well as being a site for several U.S. military bases. A beautiful tropical island, Guam looked much like the Hawaiian Islands. The original inhabitants come from Indonesia around 4,000 years ago. From those times came the belief in Taotao Mona, spirits of the ancient Chamorros; today most residents of Guam were Christian. People born in Guam are American citizens. In fact, the motto of Guam was "Where America's Day Begins."

Active and Passive Voice

Which of these sentences sounds better to you?

Ken Griffey Jr. slammed a home run.

A home run was slammed by Ken Griffey Jr.

Both sentences carry the same message, but the first expresses it more effectively. The subject (*Ken Griffey Jr.*) is the actor. The verb (*slammed*) is the action. The direct object (*home run*) is the receiver of the action. The second sentence lacks the vitality of the first because the receiver of the action is the subject; the one who performs the action is embedded in the prepositional phrase at the end of the sentence.

The first sentence demonstrates the active voice. It has an active verb (one that leads to the direct object), and the action moves from the beginning to the

end of the sentence. The second sentence exhibits the passive voice (with the action reflecting back on the subject). When given a choice, you should usually select the active voice. It promotes energy and directness.

The passive voice, although not usually the preferred form, does have its uses.

- When the doer of the action is unknown or unimportant:

My car was stolen. [The doer, a thief, is unknown.]

- When the receiver of the action is more important than the doer:

My neighbor was permanently disabled by an irresponsible drunk driver.
[The neighbor's suffering, not the drunk driver, is the focus.]

As you can see, the passive construction places the doer at the end of a prepositional phrase (as in the second example) or does not include the doer in the statement at all (as in the first example). In the first example, the receiver of the action (the car) is in the subject position. The verb is preceded by *was*, a *to be* helper. Here is another example:

The book was read by her. [passive]

She read the book. [active]

Weak sentences often involve the unnecessary and ineffective use of the passive form; Exercises 12 and 13 give you practice in identifying the passive voice and changing it to active.

EXERCISE 12 Using Active and Passive Voice

Identify each sentence as either active voice (A) or passive voice (P). If a sentence with the passive form would be more effective in the active voice, rewrite it.

- _____ 1. For centuries, pirates have harassed ships on all of the world's oceans.
- _____ 2. Piracy has been defined as armed robbery on the high seas.
- _____ 3. Cargo was seized and coastal towns were plundered by pirates.
- _____ 4. Also, people were kidnapped and held for ransom by pirates.
- _____ 5. Captains of pirate ships often flew a flag with a white skull and crossbones on a black background.
- _____ 6. The swashbuckling pirate of our imagination was created by writers such as Rafael Sabatini and Lord Byron.

- _____ 7. The romantic portrait of a sword-wielding, treasure-hunting ruffian in gold earrings was given to readers by books like *Captain Blood* and poems like “The Corsair.”
- _____ 8. As a result, pirates have often been perceived by people as ruthless but adventurous heroes.
- _____ 9. Actually, though, a drunken, violent, and short life was lived by these desperate criminals.
- _____ 10. The decline of piracy was caused by the development of national navies in the nineteenth century.

EXERCISE 13 Using Active and Passive Voice

Identify each sentence as either active voice (A) or passive voice (P). If a sentence with the passive form would be more effective in the active voice, rewrite it.

- _____ 1. A story was reported by the *Las Vegas SUN* newspaper.
- _____ 2. An accident was experienced by the Flying Elvises during a skydive in Boston.
- _____ 3. Elvis Presley, King of Rock 'n' Roll, was impersonated by these high-flying stuntmen.
- _____ 4. Fringed white jumpsuits, slicked-back hair, and sunglasses were worn by the four-member skydiving team.
- _____ 5. The toughest part of the act involved keeping their hair in place as they fell.
- _____ 6. But this time, the four Elvi were blown off course.
- _____ 7. A miscalculation was made by the jumpers on that windy day.

- _____ 8. Two of the Elvi hit the water in Boston Harbor.
- _____ 9. A street and a yacht club were struck by the two other Elvi.
- _____ 10. The accident was observed by about 1,600 confused but amused people.

Strong Verbs

Because the verb is an extremely important part of any sentence, it should be chosen with care. Some of the most widely used verbs are the *being* verbs: *is*, *was*, *were*, *are*, *am*. We couldn't get along in English without them, but writers often use them when more forceful and effective verbs are available.

Consider these examples:

Weak Verb: He *is* the leader of the people.

Strong Verb: He *leads* the people.

Weak Verb: She *was* the first to finish.

Strong Verb: She *finished* first.

EXERCISE 14 Using Strong Verbs

Replace the weak verbs with stronger ones in the following sentences. Delete unnecessary words to make each sentence even more concise if you can.

1. Like most people, Bob is afraid of public speaking.
2. Public speaking is the one thing most people fear more than death!
3. Bob is full of worry about looking foolish.
4. Bob is in need of more learning about public speaking.
5. So Bob is now in attendance at Santa Ana College.
6. He is a student who has enrolled in a speech class.
7. Preparation of a speech is something that Bob learns how to do.
8. Bob is now a person who can control his anxiety.
9. To relax, Bob is taking deep breaths.
10. Bob is a confident giver of speeches.

EXERCISE 15 Using Strong Verbs

Replace the weak verbs with stronger ones in the following sentences. Delete unnecessary words to make each sentence even more concise if you can.

1. Mickey Mantle was the hitter of many home runs.
2. The chef was a man with a fondness for food.
3. To graduate in two years is my plan.
4. John Hancock was the first signer of the Declaration of Independence.
5. Juanita is the organizer of the event.
6. Cooking is something she likes to do.
7. Carl was the owner of the restaurant.
8. Tiger Woods will be the winner of the tournament.
9. They were in love with each other.
10. His passion for her was in a state of demise.

Subjunctive Mood

Mood refers to the intention of the verb. Three moods are relevant to our study: indicative, imperative, and subjunctive.

The **indicative mood** expresses a statement of fact.

I considered the issue.

I was tired.

The **imperative mood** expresses a command (and has a *you* understood subject).

Go to the store.

The **subjunctive mood** expresses a statement as contrary to fact, conditional, desirable, possible, necessary, or doubtful. In current English the subjunctive form is distinguishable only in two forms: The verb *to be* uses *be* throughout the present tense and *were* throughout the past tense.

He requires that we *be* [instead of *are*] on time.

If she *were* [instead of *was*] the candidate, she would win.

In other verbs, the final *s* is dropped in the third-person singular (*he, she, it*) of the present tense to make all forms the same in any one tense.

I request that he *report* [instead of *reports*] today.

Here are examples of the common forms:

If I *were* [instead of *was*] you, I wouldn't do that. [contrary to fact]

She behaves as if she *were* [instead of *was*] not certain. [doubt]

I wish I *were* [instead of *was*] in Texas. [wish]

EXERCISE 16 Selecting Subjunctive Verbs

Underline the subjunctive verbs.

1. If she (was, were) a few years older, he would ask her out.
2. I wish I (was, were) a wealthy woman.
3. If I (was, were) rich, I'd buy you a pony.
4. They act as if they (are, were) immortal.
5. She requested that her check (is, be) mailed to her.
6. If you wish you (are, were) thinner, try this new diet.
7. You talk as if you (are, were) not coming back.
8. My attorney requested that I (am, be) released on bail.
9. Let's pretend that your theory (was, were) true.
10. If I (was, were) younger, I'd wear bikinis.

CHAPTER REVIEW Verbs

1. **Standard usage** is appropriate for the kind of writing and speaking you are likely to do in your college work and future career.
2. Whereas **regular verbs** are predictable—having an *-ed* ending for past and past-participle forms—**irregular verbs**, as the term suggests, follow no definite pattern.
raise, raised, raised [regular]; *see, saw, seen* [irregular]
3. Certain verbs (present-tense here) can be troublesome and should be studied with care (page 128).
lie, lay sit, set rise, raise
4. If the subject of a sentence is singular, the verb should be singular; if the subject is plural, the verb should be plural.
The *price* of the shoes *is* high.
The *advantages* of that shoe *are* obvious.
5. There are no inflexible rules about selecting a tense for certain kinds of writing, but you should be consistent, changing tense only for a good reason.

6. Usually you should select the present tense to write about literature.

Herman Melville's character Bartleby the Scrivener *fails* to communicate.

Select the past tense to write about yourself or something historical.

I *was* eighteen when I *decided* I *was* ready for independence.

7. English has twelve verb tenses. (See pages 131–133 for names, examples, functions, and forms.)
8. The **active-voice** expression (subject, active verb, and sometimes object) is usually preferred over the **passive-voice** expression (subject as the receiver of action, with doer unstated or at the end of a prepositional phrase).

She *read* the book. [active]

The book *was read* by her. [passive]

9. In your revision, replace weak verbs with strong ones.

He *was* the first to leave. [weak verb]

He *left* first. [strong verb]

10. The **subjunctive mood** expresses a statement that is contrary to fact, conditional, desirable, possible, necessary, or doubtful. *Be* is used throughout the present tense and *were* throughout the past.

He requires that we *be* [not *are*] on time.

I wish I *were* [not *was*] home.

In other verbs, the final *s* is dropped in the third-person singular (*he*, *she*, *it*) of the present tense.

I request that he *report* [instead of *reports*] today.

CHAPTER REVIEW Exercises

REVIEW 1

Changing Verb Tense

Change the verbs from present to past tense.

1. Frederick Douglass is the leading spokesman of African-Americans in the 1800s.
2. Born a slave, he is befriended by his master's wife and begins to educate himself.
3. As a young man, he runs away to New Bedford, Massachusetts.
4. He works as a common laborer for some time.

5. At the Massachusetts Antislavery Society in 1841, he gives a speech on the importance of freedom.
 6. His speech is so well received that he was hired to lecture on his experience as a slave.
 7. While traveling on the lecture circuit, he often protests various forms of segregation.
 8. He insists on sitting in “Whites Only” areas on the railroad.
 9. He successfully protests against segregated schools in Rochester, New York.
 10. In 1845 he publishes *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, his autobiography.
-

REVIEW 2

Making Subjects and Verbs Agree

Underline the verb that agrees in number with the subject.

1. The result of the defendant’s corrupt business dealings (was, were) soon felt.
 2. The mayor and most citizens (was, were) deeply affected.
 3. There (was, were) no justification for the defendant’s behavior.
 4. Neither of the defendant’s parents (was, were) willing to defend him.
 5. Neither the judge nor the jury members (was, were) very sympathetic with the defense’s case.
 6. Ethics (was, were) apparently an unknown field of study to the defendant.
 7. Each and every day (was, were) consumed with intense debate.
 8. In the penalty phase, the judge said that ten years (was, were) the correct sentence.
 9. Then the judge added, “Fifty thousand dollars (is, are) the right sum for restitution.”
 10. The defendant, along with his attorney, (was, were) not pleased.
-

REVIEW 3

Correcting Verb Problems

Correct problems with verb form, tense, agreement, strength, and voice. As a summary of a novel, this piece should be mostly in the present tense.

SUMMARY OF *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

Santiago, one of many local fishermen, have not caught a fish in eighty-four days. Young Manolin, despite the objections of his parents, has a belief in the old man. His parents says Santiago is unlucky, and they will not let their son go fishing with him.

The next day Santiago sit sail. Soon he catch a small tuna, which he used for bait. Then a huge marlin hit the bait with a strike. The old man cannot rise the fish to the surface, and it pulled the boat throughout the rest of the day and during the night.

During the second day, Santiago's hand is injured by the line and he become extremely tired, but he holds on. When the fish moves to the surface, Santiago notes that it was two feet longer than his skiff. It is the biggest fish he has ever saw. He thinks in wonder if he will be up to the task of catching it. With the line braced across his shoulders, he slepted for a while. As he dreams gloriously of lions and porpoises and of being young, he is awoken by the fish breaking water again, and Santiago is sure the fish is tiring. He lays in the boat and waits.

On the third day, the fish came to the surface. Santiago pull steadily on the line, and finally it is harpooned and killed by Santiago. The fish is tied to the skiff by him. But sharks attacked and mutilate the huge marlin. Using an oar, he beats on the sharks courageously with all his strength, but they strips the fish to a skeleton.

With the bones still tied to the skiff, the exhausted old man returned to shore. Other fishermen and tourists marvel at the eighteen-foot skeleton of the fish as the old man lays asleep. The young boy knew he has much to learn from the old man and is determined to go fishing with him.

REVIEW 4**Using Strong Verbs**

Replace the weak verbs with stronger ones in the following sentences. Delete unnecessary words to make each sentence even more concise if you can.

1. Whitney is in the process of rebuilding her desktop.
2. Anika is a person who is capable of leading our group.
3. Matthew was the scorer of the last touchdown.
4. Maria is a worker at the department store.
5. Jonathan is one who attracts favorable attention.
6. Lauren has a smile that is sweet.
7. Shane is waiting for the next train.
8. Jarrett is a swift runner.
9. Jannell was the second to finish the race.
10. This review is something that makes me think.

REVIEW 5**Writing Sentences with Correct Verbs**

Each of the following verbs appears in its base form. Change the verb form to the tense specified in parentheses and include it in a sentence of ten or more words. (See pages 122–126 for verb forms.)

1. eat (to past) _____

2. begin (to future) _____

3. see (to past perfect) _____

4. walk (to future perfect) _____

5. speak (to present perfect) _____

6. go (to future progressive) _____

7. drink (to present progressive) _____

8. dance (to past progressive) _____

9. fly (to present perfect progressive) _____

10. grow (to past perfect progressive) _____

11. choose (to future perfect progressive) _____

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MICROTHEME

To practice your skills acquired in this chapter, return to the Microtheme on page 121 and complete Exercise B.