



Grammar for Writers

LESSON 10

Keeping Time



Essential Question: How do writers use verb tense consistently to create clear, professional writing?

Bellringer

Read both paragraphs carefully. Vote first — then explain *why* one is correct and the other isn't.

Paragraph A

Sarah walked through the forest.
She hears a strange sound
behind her and turned quickly.

Paragraph B ✓

Sarah walked through the
forest. She heard a strange
sound behind her and turned
quickly.

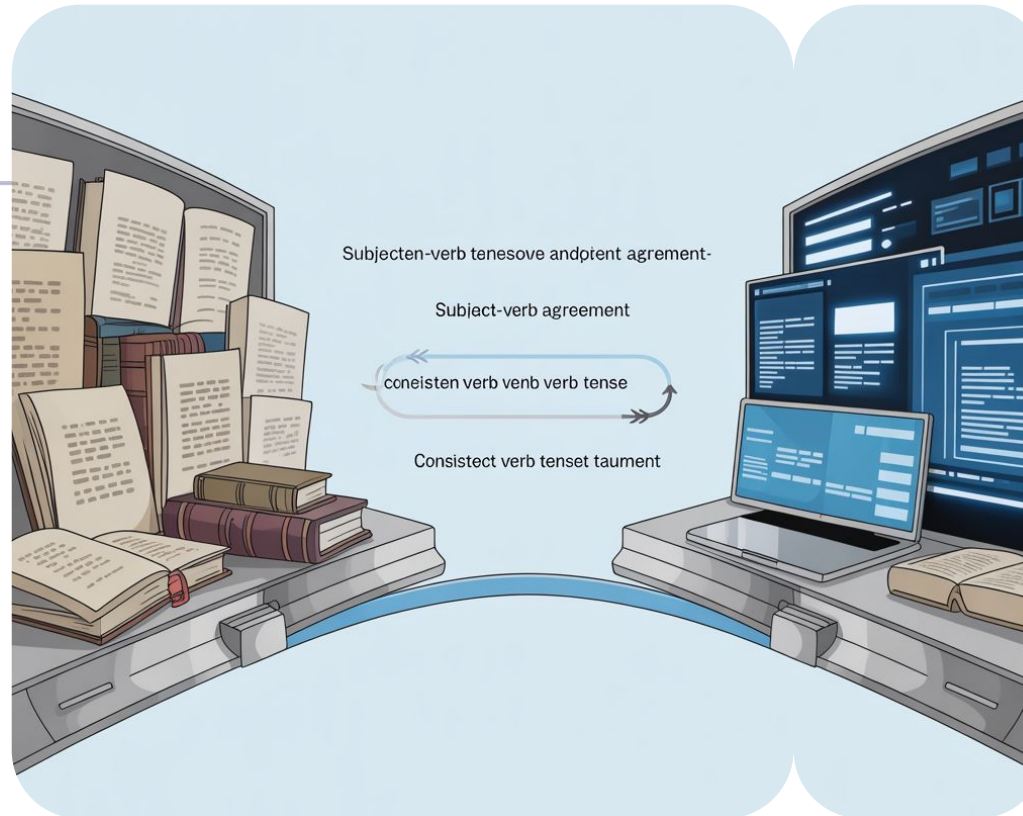
Paragraph B is correct because every verb stays in the past tense. In Paragraph A, *hears* unexpectedly jumps to the present — breaking the timeline and confusing the reader.



Yesterday's Learning → Today's Lesson

Yesterday

**Subjects and
verbs must agree**



Today

**Keep verb tense
consistent**

Yesterday, we mastered subject-verb agreement — making sure subjects and verbs match in number. Today we tackle another essential responsibility every writer carries: keeping verb tense consistent. These two skills work together to make your writing clear, controlled, and professional.

Why Verb Tense Matters

Tells Readers WHEN

Verb tense places every event on a clear timeline — past, present, or future.

Accidents Confuse

Unintentional tense shifts pull readers out of the story and disrupt their understanding.

Consistency = Clarity

Skilled writers guide readers smoothly through time, making every moment feel intentional.



The Three Basic Tenses

Every verb belongs to a tense. Choose one — and stay with it throughout your writing unless you have a deliberate reason to shift.

1

Past

walked
heard
opened

2

Present

walk
hear
open

3

Future

will walk
will hear
will open



The golden rule: Choose one tense. Stay with it. Every verb should point to the same moment in time.

Maintaining Tense

A single paragraph should live on one timeline. When every verb matches, the writing flows naturally. When one verb shifts, the reader stumbles.

Correct

The detective entered the room. He examined the desk before opening the drawer.

Every verb is past tense. One timeline. Total clarity.

Incorrect

The detective entered the room. He examines the desk before opening the drawer.

***Examines* is present tense — it breaks the timeline without any reason.**



Writers Sometimes Change Tense — On Purpose

Tense shifts are not always errors. Skilled writers change tense deliberately to serve the story. The key word is intentional. Every shift must have a clear reason — and the reader should always know exactly where they are in time.



Flashbacks

Stepping back in time to reveal backstory or memory.



Dialogue

Characters speak naturally, often in present tense, within past-tense narration.



Reflections

A narrator pauses to comment or reflect from a different moment in time.

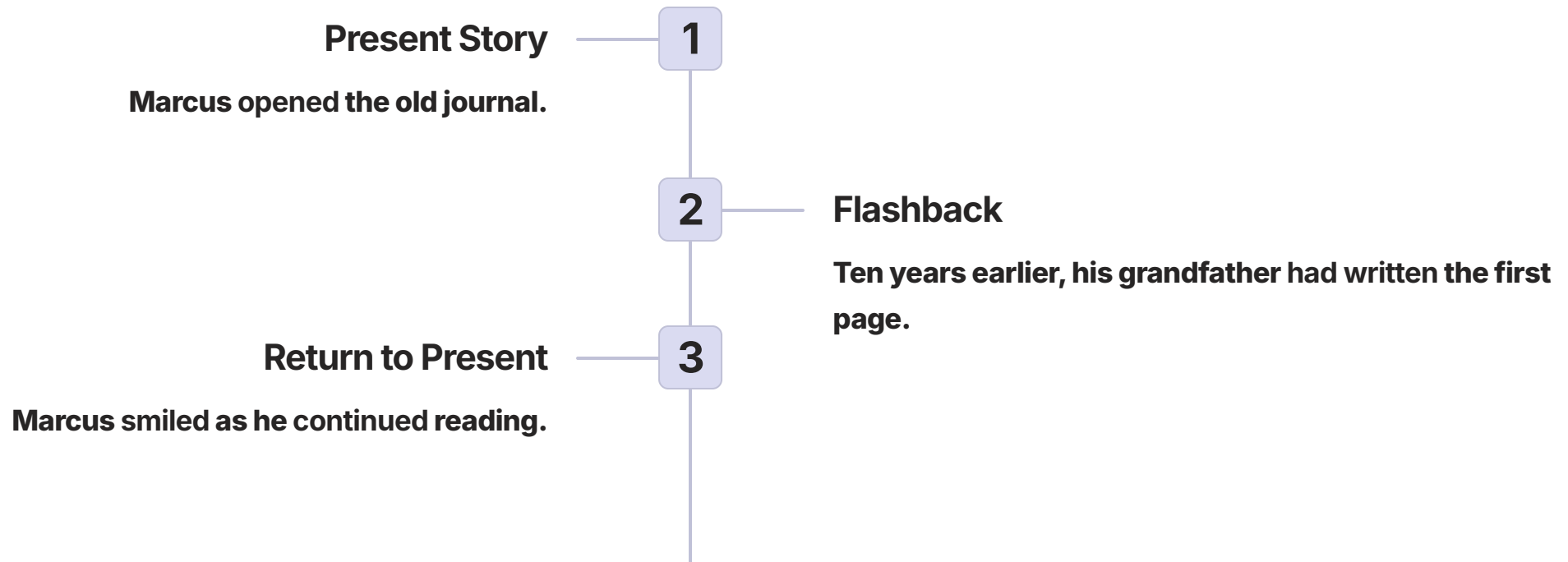


Commentary

Moving from narration to general observation or analysis.

Flashbacks: Changing Time Clearly

A well-written flashback signals to the reader that the timeline is shifting — then returns cleanly to the present story. The reader should never feel lost.



Notice how *"Ten years earlier"* signals the shift and *"had written"* places the action further back in time. The reader always knows exactly where — and *when* — they are.

Dialogue Doesn't Change the Narration

When characters speak, their words reflect natural speech — but the surrounding narration keeps its original tense. Dialogue lives inside the story without disrupting the timeline.

Narration (Past Tense)

Emma walked into the classroom. She glanced at the clock on the wall.

Dialogue (Natural Speech)

"I think we're going to be late," she said.

The word *said* anchors the dialogue back to past-tense narration — keeping everything consistent.

 The story stays in past tense. The character's voice sounds natural. Both can be true at the same time.

Spot the Error

Each sentence below has a tense error. Find it, correct it, and explain why the original verb doesn't fit the timeline.

Sentence 1

The dog barked loudly and runs toward the gate.

Sentence 2

We watched the movie before we eat dinner.

Sentence 3

The students finished their work and submit it to the teacher.

Correct every sentence. Then write a brief explanation: what tense is the sentence in, and which verb breaks the pattern?

Editing Like an Author

Professional writers don't just write — they edit. Look how correcting verb tense transforms a rough paragraph into polished writing.

✗ Original Draft

The rain fell harder. Lightning flashes across the sky. The children screamed and run toward the house.

Two verbs break the past-tense pattern — disrupting the tension of the scene.

✓ Edited Version

The rain fell harder. Lightning flashed across the sky. The children screamed and ran toward the house.

Every verb is past tense. The scene flows — and the tension lands perfectly.

Consistency makes writing smoother, more professional, and far more powerful.

Cambridge Connection

One of the most common grammar errors in student writing is accidental tense shifting — and examiners notice it immediately.

Readers Notice

A tense shift pulls readers out of the story. They pause — and the moment is lost.

Examiners Notice

In Cambridge exams, verb tense consistency is a key marker of writing quality and control.

Strong Writers Edit

Before submitting, skilled writers do a dedicated verb-tense read — checking every single verb.



Writer's Workshop

Revise the paragraph below. First, correct every tense error. Then improve the paragraph using stronger verbs and sentence variety to make it more vivid and engaging.

 **Original: Jake climbed the hill and looks across the valley. He smiled because the sun shines brightly behind the mountains.**

1 Step 1: Find the Errors

Identify which verbs break the past-tense pattern. Circle them.

2 Step 2: Correct the Tense

Replace each incorrect verb with its correct past-tense form.

3 Step 3: Strengthen & Vary

Swap weak verbs for powerful ones. Vary sentence length for rhythm and impact.



Grammar Lab

Work with a partner to write a short narrative that demonstrates full control of verb tense — including one deliberate, well-crafted flashback.

1

Write

8–10 sentences. Maintain one consistent tense throughout.

2

Include a Flashback

Signal the time shift clearly, then return correctly to the original tense.

3

Exchange Papers

Swap with another pair. Can they identify exactly where your flashback begins and ends?

Notebook Challenge

Write one paragraph about a memorable day from your own life. This is your chance to apply everything — tense consistency, strong verb choices, and varied sentence structure.



150–200 Words

Develop your ideas fully. Don't rush.



ONE Tense

Stay consistent from start to finish.



3+ Strong Verbs

Choose vivid, specific verbs — not just *walked* or *said*.



Sentence Variety

Mix short and long sentences for rhythm and energy.

When you finish, underline every verb. Check that each one belongs to the same tense. If something looks off, fix it before moving on.

Self-Editing Checklist

Before you submit any piece of writing, slow down and ask yourself these four questions. Great writers edit for time as carefully as they edit for spelling.

→ **Did I accidentally change tense?**

Read your draft with one job only: look for verbs that don't belong in the timeline.

→ **Are my tense changes intentional?**

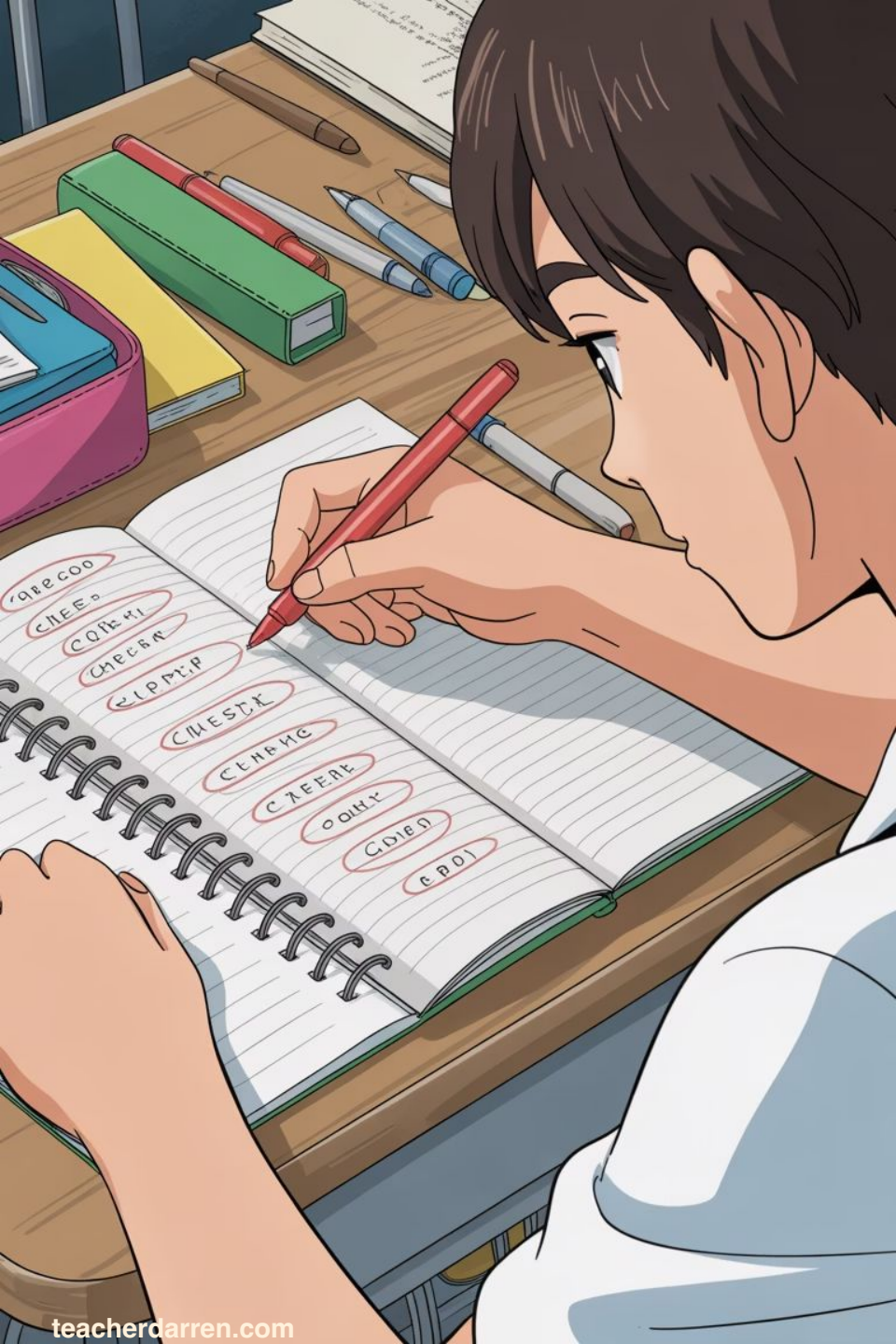
If you shifted tense, ask: does the reader know why? Is it a flashback, dialogue, or reflection?

→ **Does every verb match the timeline?**

Every verb should point to the same moment — past, present, or future.

→ **Did I reread slowly?**

Speed-reading misses errors. Read aloud, one sentence at a time, to catch what your eyes skip over.



Peer Review

Exchange notebooks with a classmate. Your only job right now is to read for verb tense. This focused review is how professional editors and authors catch errors before publication.

01

Exchange Notebooks

Swap your writing with a partner's.

02

Circle Every Verb

Go sentence by sentence. Circle each and every verb you find.

03

Identify the Timeline

Decide: what tense is this piece written in?

04

Flag & Explain

If a verb doesn't fit the timeline, mark it and write a note explaining why it needs to change.

Exit Ticket

Before you leave today, complete this exit ticket on your own. Your answer tells us whether you're ready for tomorrow's Grammar Lab.

 **Correct this sentence:** "The explorer entered the cave, lights his torch, and slowly walked forward."

Step 1: Find It Which verb breaks the past-tense pattern? Write it down.	Step 2: Fix It Write the corrected sentence with the right verb form.	Step 3: Explain It In one or two sentences, explain why the original was incorrect and how your correction fixes the timeline.
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Looking Ahead

TOMORROW: GRAMMAR LAB

Tomorrow we bring it all together. You'll think like an editor and write like an author — combining every skill from this unit into one powerful, polished piece of writing.

Strong Verbs

Vivid, precise verb choices that make writing come alive.

Sentence Variety

Mixing short and long sentences for rhythm and reader engagement.

Subject–Verb Agreement

Subjects and verbs that match in number, every time.

Consistent Verb Tense

One clear timeline — with intentional, well-signaled shifts when needed.