

Verb Tense, Article Usage, and Word Form Examples

Verb Tense Use

The verb tense system in English is very complicated—English has past, present and future tenses and all of these have both simple and perfect iterations. The good news is that for most academic work, simple past or present are the only tenses required. Here is an overview of verb tenses and some tips for editing.

Simple Tenses

Simple tenses are generally used to refer to a whole event or state – in the present, future, or past—rather than a specific moment or event that is ongoing.

Tense	Explanation	Example
Simple Present	True now and generally	She writes for the Vancouver Sun.
	The event occurs at regular, repeated intervals including now.	She writes three feature articles per month.
Simple Past	The event was completed in a specifically stated or understood past time.	She wrote an article about the election last year.
Simple Future	The event is predicted to happen at a stated or understood future time	She will write an article about climate change next spring.

Progressive Tenses

The action is in progress at a specified time in the past, present or future. Always use the –ing form of the main verb with a form of the verb “to be” (ex: is or was) as the auxiliary.

Tense	Explanation	Example
Present Progressive	The action is in progress right now, possibly temporarily.	He is writing a paper on Picasso this week.

Past Progressive	The action was in progress at a specific time in the past or for a duration of time in the past.	He was looking up sources for his paper when I arrived at the library.
Future Progressive	The action is predicted to be in progress at a specific time or event in the future.	He will be writing the final draft tomorrow.

Perfect Tenses

Perfect tenses indicate that an action has been completed before a known or specified time or event. Always use the appropriate form of the verb “to have” as the auxiliary, followed by the past participle form of the main verb.

Tense	Explanation	Example
Present Perfect	<p>The action was completed some time before now, but the time in the past is not known or is not important. What is important is the connection to now.</p> <p>The action began in the past and continues to the present.</p>	<p>He has painted three portraits.</p> <p>He has studied at Emily Carr University since 2012.</p>
Past Perfect	The action was completed before a specified time or event in the past.	He had found only one source for his Picasso paper when I ran into him in the library.
Future Perfect	The action is predicted to be completed at a specific time or event in the future	He will have finished his paper on Picasso by the time we have dinner next week.

Perfect Progressive Tenses

Perfect progressive tenses indicate that an action is in progress before a known or specified time or event. Form this tense with the appropriate form of verb “to have” as the auxiliary followed by “been” and the -ing form of the main verb.

Tense	Explanation	Example
Present perfect progressive	The action begins in the past and continues until present. The time period of the action is often stated. The length of the action and the end time of the action are both stated.	He has been working on that essay since noon.
Past perfect progressive	The action lasts a stated length of time and ends at a specific time or event in the past.	He had been working on his research paper for two hours when his computer crashed.
Future perfect progressive	The length of the action and the end time of the action are both stated.	By 5 pm, I will have been working on this project for 2 hours.

Editing Tips: Since the verb tense system is complex, verbs should be on the top of your editing checklist. Always check that your verb tenses are used consistently. Ask yourself if each verb should be in past or present – don't switch back and forth between these tenses unless you have a reason to do so. Be aware of your time markers (such as 'yesterday'), which can indicate tense.

Article Usage

Articles (a, an, the) come with a complicated set of rules. You will acquire the nuances of article usage slowly, though extensive reading and writing and living with English, but there are a few rules you can keep in your editing toolbox to help you with this difficult point in your writing. The first thing to know is that articles are always used with nouns, so it is helpful to think of article usage in terms of the various kinds of nouns they accompany. This handout will outline two categories of nouns: proper and common nouns.

Most of the nouns in the first category do not need articles.

Proper Nouns

Proper nouns that fall into certain categories rarely need an article:

Category of Proper Nouns	Example
People's Names	Justin Bieber
Cities and States	Baltimore, Maryland
Countries and Continents	Canada, Asia
Months and Days of the Week	November, Friday
Streets	Charles Street, Remington Street
Mountains	Mount Toby, Mount Baker
Parks	Stanley Park, Central Park
Religious Buildings	Chartres Cathedral, Temple Shalom

Some proper nouns require the definite article, "the": A/an is rarely used with proper nouns.

Category of Proper Noun	Example
Museums and Art Galleries	The Baltimore Art Gallery, The Museum of Modern Art
Buildings	the Kuala Lumpur Tower, the Space Needle
Highways	The Trans-Canada Highway, the Coquihalla Highway
Seas and Oceans	The Pacific Ocean
Rivers	the Fraser River
Deserts	the Black Rock Desert, the Sahara Desert

Common Nouns

Common nouns can be classified in two categories: countable and uncountable. A countable noun refers to something that can be counted and therefore can be made plural. For example, one chair, two chairs. Singular, countable nouns must have an article or other determiner. For example, a chair, the chair, or one chair. Plural countable nouns may or may not have an article. Uncountable nouns represent things which cannot be counted and therefore cannot be made plural, such as “rice,” “fun,” or “furniture.” Uncountable nouns never use a/an (since a/an mean “one.”)

Articles with Common Nouns

Type of Noun	Specific Reference	Nonspecific or General Reference
Countable Singular	the	a/an
Countable Plural	the	(no article)
Uncountable	the	(no article)

Singular Countable Nouns

The indefinite “a/an” is used with a singular countable noun that is not specific. Ex: A storm is approaching.

The definite article “the” is used with a singular count noun that has a specific referent. Ex: A storm is approaching. The storm should hit Baltimore around midnight. (Because “storm” has been mentioned in the previous sentence, it is a specific reference in the second sentence, thus requiring the use of “the.”)

Plural Countable Nouns

Plural countable nouns with no specific reference need no article:

Ex: In Maryland, storms are frequent in winter.

Countable nouns with a specific reference require the definite article, “the.”

Periods and Events in History	the Renaissance, the Second World War
Bridges	the Golden Gate Bridge

Ex: The storms that hit Baltimore last winter were fierce. (Because “storms” refers to a specific set of storms that were in Baltimore last year, the reference is specific, requiring “the.”)

Uncountable nouns function similarly. When non-specific, use no article.

Ex: John went to his advisor for advice. (Here, advice is non-specific, so no article is used.) When an uncountable noun has a specific reference, “the” is used.

Ex: The advice John received from his advisor was helpful.

Word Form Examples

Verb	Noun	Adjective	Adverb
act	action	active	actively
advise	advice	advisable	advisably
analyze	analysis	analyzable	
care	care	caring/ careful	carefully
clear/clarify	clarity	clear/ clarity	clearly
comfort	comfort	comfortable	comfortably
consider	consideration	considerate	considerately
craze	craze	crazy	crazily
create	creation	creative	creatively
decide	decision	decisive	decisively
delight	delight	delightful	delightfully
differ	difference	different	differently
distract	distract	distracted/ ing	distractedly
disrupt	disruption	disruptive	disruptively
hate	hate	hateful	hatefully
hope	hope	hopeful	hopefully
impress	impression	impressive	impressively
include	inclusion	inclusive	inclusively
indicate	indication	indicative	indicatively
insult	insult	insulted/ ing	insultingly
intend	intention	intentional	intentionally
interrogate	interrogation	interrogative	
madden	madness	maddening/ mad	madly

protect	protection	protective	protectively
quicken	quickness	quick	quickly
rely	reliability	reliable	reliably
sadden	sadness	sad	sadly
secure	security	secure	securely
speed	speed	speedy	speedily
strengthen	strength	strong	strongly
succeed	success	successful	successfully
synthesize	synthesis	synthesized	