Being Consistent in Writing: Verb Tense

Consistent tense means using the same verb tense whenever necessary within the same sentence or paragraph. Consistent verb tenses clearly establish the time of the actions being described. Shifting from one tense to another without a good reason is not only incorrect but is confusing and distracting as well.

Example of Inconsistent Tense: We were seven miles from shore. Suddenly the sky turns dark.

In the first sentence, the writer uses the past tense (with the verb <u>were</u>), but then shifts to present tense (with the verb <u>turns</u>) in the second sentence. The tenses are inconsistent because both actions happen at the same time -in the past.

<u>To correct the inconsistency, make both verbs the same tense:</u> We <u>were</u> seven miles from shore. Suddenly the sky <u>turned</u> dark.

Practice

Underline the verbs in these sentences. Then correct any inconsistencies. Write your correction above the line.

got <u>Example:</u> As soon as I get out of bed, I <u>did</u> fifty pushups.

Or

do As soon as I <u>get out</u> of bed, I <u>did</u> fifty pushups.

- 1. We were walking near the lake when a large moose appears just ahead.
- 2. When we ask the time, the cab driver told us it was after six.
- 3. The man behind me was slurping soda and crunching candy. I am getting angrier by the minute.

- 4. Dr. Choi smiled and welcomes the next patient.
- 5. Flat and rusty red, the Oklahoma prairie stretches for miles. Here and there, an oil rig broke the monotony.
- 6. Whenever Fred practices the trombone, we covered our ears.
- 7. Linda walked in without a word and flops down in front of the TV.
- 8. They were walking down Main Street when the lights go out.
- 9. My cousins questioned me for hours about my trip. I describe the flight, my impressions of Paris, and every meal I ate.
- 10. We started cheering as he approaches the finish line.
- 11. Cynthia collapses into laughter and made us all giggle.
- 12. If Terry takes short naps during the day, she didn't feel tired in the evening.
- 13. Last year, Harold worked full time, take two courses at night, and played soccer on the weekends.

14. Yesterday, we march in the New Year's Day parade. Colorful floats accompany us. At the end of the route, Grinley's Department Store served hot chocolate to all the marchers.