Verb Tense Study Sheet

Goals of this Study Sheet

Many students might find it hard to handle verb tense changes throughout their paper. Many might think that tense changes should always be avoided when writing an academic paper. However, this is not the case. Sometimes, a shift in verb tense is necessary to convey a change in the timeframe of the actions. It is the occasional verb tense changes that result in awkward phrasing that can be confusing to the reader. The goals of this study sheet are to go over what verb tense is and when to change verb tense.

When to Change the Verb Tense

It is sometimes necessary to change the verb tense if the time frame of the action changes. For example, if the time frame shifts from past to present, you will need to change the verb tense to indicate this.

Example:

- Although the drive to school was only ten minutes, I hated it. In hindsight, I think my feelings about the drive were influenced by my poor relationship with my home room teacher.

The first sentence of the example indicates that this happened in the past. However, the next sentence starts with “in hindsight” which clearly shows that I am currently reflecting on it. This is the reason that “think” is in the present tense.

When to Avoid Changes in Verb Tense

You should avoid changes in verb tense if all the actions are taking place in the same time frame. There should be no change in verb tense if the time frame is consistent. Verb tense change is a common mistake and is often used in informal writing and can be heard in speech. So this kind of mistake can be easily overlooked.
Example:

- I opened the driver side door of the truck, pulled myself into the seat, and started the engine. I was just pulling out of the driveway when my tire blew out.

Notice how all the verbs stay in the past tense.

**Source Referenced**

Knouse, Jessica. “Shifty Tenses.” *Instructions for Playing Hangman - Sample Games to Be Used in the Classroom - 2008–09 - Past Reflective Practice Events - Reflective Practice - Teaching Excellence - IUP*,

www.iup.edu/writingcenter/writing-resources/grammar/tense-shifting/.