

Basic English Grammar Module

Unit 2B: The Verbal Group: Tenses

Objectives of the Basic English Grammar module

As a student at any level of University study, when you write your assignments or your thesis, your writing needs to be grammatically well-structured and accurate in order to be clear. If you are unable to write sentences that are appropriately structured and clear in meaning, the reader may have difficulty understanding the meanings that you want to convey. Here are some typical and frequent comments made by markers or supervisors on students' written work. Such comments may also appear on marking sheets which use assessment criteria focussing on your grammar.

- *Be careful of your written expression.*
- *At times it is difficult to follow what you are saying.*
- *You must be clearer when making statements.*
- *Sentence structure and expression poor.*
- *This is not a sentence.*
- *At times your sentences do not make sense.*

In this module we are concerned with helping you to develop knowledge of those aspects of the grammar of English that will help you deal with the types of grammatical errors that are frequently made in writing.

Who is this module for?

All students at university who need to improve their knowledge of English grammar in order to write more clearly and accurately.

What does this module cover?

Unit 1A	Grammatical Units: the structure and constituents of the clause/sentence
Unit 1B	The Noun Group: the structure and constituents of the noun group
Unit 2A	The Verb Group: Finites and non-Finites
Unit 2B	The Verb Group: Tenses
Unit 3A	Logical Relationships between Clauses
Unit 3B	Interdependency Relationships between Clauses
Unit 4	Grammar and Punctuation

References

Collins Cobuild English Grammar (1990) London.

Freeborn, D.A. (1987) *A Course Book in English Grammar*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

Garner, M. (1983) *Grammar: warts and all*. River Seine Publications. Melbourne.

Halliday & Matthiessen, (2004) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 3rd edn.
London: Hodder.

Leech, G. & Svartvik, J. (1975) *A Communicative Grammar of English*. Longman
Group Ltd: Essex.

Murphy, R. (1991) *English Grammar in Use*. Cambridge University Press:
Cambridge.

Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech & J. Svartvik. (1972) *A Grammar of
Contemporary English*. Longman Group UK Ltd: Essex.

Thompson, R.A. (1991) *Sense and System in English Sentences*. CR Press,
Newtown.

Thompson, A.J. & A.V. Martinet. (1979) *A Practical English Grammar*. 2nd Edition. Oxford
University Press: Oxford.

Introduction

In the previous unit we looked at the verbal group with respect to finite and non-finite verbs. In this unit we want to look at the verbal group again but from a different perspective, that of tense.

You may find this unit helpful if you are having problems using tenses accurately and appropriately for academic writing. You may be making errors in your sentences such as:

Example 1: The practice of nursing **may including** informing the community of diseases in the community.




Example 2: This first element of Roy's Adaptation Model would be useful in caring for the aged in nursing homes. Nurses at the nursing home would use the nursing care plans and continuously **evaluated** the outcomes.

Objectives of Unit 2B

After you have completed this unit you should be able to:

- recognise where tense is indicated in the verbal group
- recognise the tenses which generally occur in written academic texts
- identify an incorrect tense in context
- correct a tense problem in context.

Exercises

These are marked with the icon  and you should try to complete them before checking your work in the **Answer Key**, marked .

Answer Key to all Exercises

This can be found at the end of the Unit.

1.0 Introduction

If you are not using tense accurately and appropriately in your writing, there are **three** possible sources of your problem:

1. the forms of the verbs
2. the structure of the verbal group
3. the context in which the verbal group occurs.

In this unit we will look at each of these areas in turn.

1.1 The Forms of the Verbs

One of the problems you may be having is that you are not familiar enough with the forms of the verbs you are using. As you may have seen in Unit 2A, verbs have several forms which can be used on their own or combined with other verb forms called auxiliaries. When you combine a verb with an auxiliary it is called a verbal group. These verbal groups can be finite or non-finite. If a verbal group is finite, it shows tense or judgement/modality.

Regular/ irregular verbs have the following forms:

Base Form	's' Form	Present Participle	Past Form(s)
state	states	stating	stated
say	says	saying	said
write	writes	writing	wrote, written



Exercise 1

Fill in the table with the correct forms of the verbs listed.

Base Form	's' Form	Present Participle	Past Form(s)
find			
think			
determine			
choose			
say			
mean			



You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

If you had difficulty with the forms of these verbs then you need to do some revision. If, when you're writing, you use a verb but its forms are unfamiliar to you, you should check a dictionary. You should also be aware of the uses of these different forms:

Form	Uses	Examples
base form	present tense	There <u>are</u> a number of variables.
	imperative	<u>Outline</u> the major issues.
	the infinitive	The aim is <u>to fund</u> various projects.
	after modals	They ought <u>to consider</u> the outcomes.
's' form	3rd person singular of the present tense	The project <u>needs</u> a lot of funding. The result <u>indicates</u> need for more research.
present participle	continuous tenses	The project manager <u>is assessing</u> it.
	'ing' adjectives	<u>Diminishing</u> resources may be a problem.
	'ing' nouns	<u>Costing</u> of the project is a priority.
	non-finite clauses	After <u>testing</u> the samples, destroy them.
past form	simple past tense	The agar <u>flowed</u> to the edge of the cover slip.
	past participle of regular verbs	The agar <u>was warmed</u> before being added.
	past participle of regular/irregular verbs	The report <u>has been tabled</u> .
	'ed' adjectives	The <u>warmed</u> solution was then added.
	some non-finite clauses	<u>Influenced</u> by public opinion, the council changed its policy.

1.2 The Structure of the Verbal Group

A second problem you may be having with verbs is that you are not familiar enough with the elements that make up the structure of the verbal group. For example you may want to use a particular tense but you don't know which elements of the structure to use. This section expands on that covered in Unit 2A.

You will remember from Unit 2A that the verbal group has the following parts:

main verb	contains the content information i.e. it tells us what type of activity is occurring.
finite verb	gives us information about the verb with respect to time (tense) or judgement (modality).
auxiliary verb(s)	give further information about tense.

So when a verbal group is broken down into these parts it looks like this:

will	have	finish	ed
Finite	auxiliary	main verb	verb ending

You will also remember from Unit 2A that the finite part of the verb can be expressed in two ways - using time operators (e.g. **did, was, is** etc.) or modal operators (**may, should, might** etc.)

If we put these different parts together we get a finite verbal group structure that looks like the following:

(finite operator) ^ (auxiliaries) ^ (main verb)
 time or modal have/ be /be

You choose elements from the brackets according to factors relating to the message you are trying to give your reader:

- If you are concerned about time you choose a time operator to show past, present or future.
e.g. he **went**, he **is** going, he **didn't** go
- If you are concerned about indicating possibility or your attitude on what is being said you choose a modal operator.
e.g. he **might** go, he **should** go
- If you want to indicate secondary tense you choose an auxiliary
e.g. he might **have** gone, she is not **being** paid, it will **be being** determined
- If you want to concentrate on the thing affected by an action rather than the doer of the action you choose passive rather than active.
e.g. he **completed** the experiment; the experiment **was completed**

We have already discussed time operators, modal operators and auxiliaries but we haven't looked yet at the difference between active and passive voice.

1.3 Active and Passive Voice

A statement of just one clause may have the following elements:

Subject ^ Verbal group ^ Object ^ Complement ^ Adjunct

We want to look at a statement with just four of these elements:

<i>He</i>	<i>will finish</i>	<i>the experiment</i>	<i>in two days.</i>
Subject	Verbal Group (Active)	Object	Adjunct

We say that this statement is active because the ‘doer’ of the action, **he**, is in first position as Subject and the ‘receiver’ of the action, **the experiment**, is the object.

Sometimes, however, we want to focus on the person or thing affected by the action, not the person or thing that does it and so we could re-write the above sentence in the following way:

<i>The experiment</i>	<i>will be finished</i>	<i>in two days.</i>
Subject	Verbal group (Passive)	Adjunct

We put the object in subject position and change the verbal group to a passive form. In this example we have left out the person who did the action but we could have left him in:

The experiment will be finished by him in two days.

The choice of a passive form of the verb is very common in academic writing and particularly in scientific writing.

Now let's go back to look at the structure of the verbal group in relation to tense. Here is our general model again.

(finite operator)	^	(auxiliaries)	^	(main verb)
time or modal		have/be /be		

When you are constructing your verbal groups you have to know the appropriate combinations within this structure for each tense. Table 1 may help you with this. In these tables a number of different verbs have been used to exemplify the elements of the verbal group structure that would be used for each tense. If you know the tense you want to use but you are unsure what elements should be included, refer to the table. Please note that not every case can be shown. For example, there are other modal operators that we have not been able to include.

★ Exercise 2

In the following examples mark the ones with the **correct** form of the tense. Make sure it agrees with the Subject!

a) *Simple present tense*

- i) ecosystems are consist of two parts
- ii) ecosystems consist of two parts
- iii) ecosystems is consist of two parts
- iv) ecosystems are consisting of two parts

b) *Simple past tense*

- i) James Cook first arrived in Australia in 1770
- ii) James Cook was first arrived in Australia in 1770
- iii) James Cook was first arrive in Australia in 1770
- iv) James Cook first was arrive in Australia in 1770

c) *Past passive*

- i) the experiments were conduct in the laboratory
- ii) the experiments were conducted in the laboratory
- iii) the experiments were being conduct in the laboratory
- iv) the experiments was being conducted in the laboratory

d) *Present perfect passive*

- i) it suggested that lipids form in the arterial wall
- ii) it is suggested that lipids form in the arterial wall
- iii) it has suggested that lipids form in the arterial wall
- iv) it has been suggested that lipids form in the arterial wall

e) *Present continuous*

- i) they is determining the levels now
- ii) they determine the levels now
- iii) they are determining the levels now
- iv) they determine the levels now

f) *Past perfect passive*

- i) in the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate been contaminated
- ii) in the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate had been contaminated
- iii) in the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate has contaminated
- iv) in the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate had being contaminated

g) *Past continuous*

- i) they were doing this type of procedure in the 1890s
- ii) they are doing this type of procedure in the 1890s
- iii) they were done this type of procedure in the 1890s
- iv) they were doing this type of procedure in the 1890s

h) *Present passive*

- i) the peroxide content correlates with the degree of atherosclerosis
- ii) the peroxide content correlated with the degree of atherosclerosis
- iii) the peroxide content is correlated with the degree of atherosclerosis
- iv) the peroxide content was correlated with the degree of atherosclerosis

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

TABLE 1

Tense	Finite Operators		Auxiliaries			Main Verb
	Time	Modal	have	be	be	
SIMPLE TENSES (he/she/it)						
simple present						states
simple past						stated
future	will					state
PASSIVE						
simple present	is					stated
simple past	was					stated
		should				state
		should			be	stated
CONTINUOUS						
present continuous	is					determining
past continuous	was					determining
future continuous	will				be	determining
PASSIVE						
present continuous	is				being	determined
past continuous	was				being	determined
future continuous	will			be	being	determined
		might		be		determining
		might		be	being	determined

TABLE 1 (cont.)

TENSES	Finite Operators		Auxiliaries			Main Verb
	Time	Modal	have	be	be	
PERFECT						
present perfect	has					shown
past perfect	had					shown
future perfect	will		have			shown
PASSIVE						
present perfect	has				been	shown
past perfect	had				been	shown
future perfect	will		have		been	shown
		ought to	have			shown
		ought to	have		been	shown
PERFECT CONTINUOUS						
present perfect continuous	has				been	finding
past perfect continuous	had				been	finding
future perfect continuous	will		have		been	finding
PASSIVE						
present perfect continuous	has			been	being	found
past perfect continuous	had			been	being	found
future perfect continuous	will		have	been	being	found
		may	have		been	finding
		may	have	been	being	found

1.4 Tense and Context

The third problem you may be having with verbs is choosing the correct tense for the context. As you have seen from Table 1, The English tense system, which gives you information about time, is complicated. It requires that in your writing you are able to shift your perspective from whether things are happening now (present), to whether they have already happened (past), to whether they will happen in the future.

Fortunately in academic written English, the range of tenses commonly used is much narrower than in spoken English. Mostly we find either simple forms e.g. simple present, simple past or forms with one secondary tense e.g. present perfect and past perfect.

The following two texts should illustrate this. One is an essay from the social sciences; the other is a research paper from the physical sciences.

Each finite verbal group in the main clauses of the texts have been highlighted and then the verbal group has been placed in a column which indicates whether it is past time, present time or future time. Please note that not all of the essay (Text 1) or the research paper (Text 2) has been reproduced.

★ Exercise 3

1. Read Text 1 and Text 2.

Text 1: The Essay

- In the past time column what are the two main tenses?
- In the present time column what is the main tense?
- In the future column what tense is used?

Text 2: The Research Paper

- In the past time column what are the two main tenses?
- In the present time column what are the two main tenses?
- In the future time column what tense is used?

Text 1 - Essay

	<i>Past/Present Perfect</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>
<i>Paragraph 1- Introduction</i>			

<p><i>As television has been labelled as an "influential teacher" by many professionals, the claim that "modern children spend more hours in front of television than they spend at school" is definitely worth further investigation. If it is found that the quality and content of the children's programs promote the development of social and cognitive skills then these citations have in fact, no relevance. Unfortunately however, many studies show that children's television is lacking and is even, in some instances, harmful. The devastating effects of T.V. violence on the development of the children's aggressive nature is one of the main concerns when evaluating the effects of T.V. on children.</i></p>	<p><i>has been labelled</i></p>	<p><i>is</i></p> <p><i>have show</i></p> <p><i>is</i></p>	<p><i>is found</i></p>
<p>Paragraph 7 <i>Typically, in early research, two films similar in their length, use of colour, characterisation are shown. One film also shows distinctive and novel aggressive behaviours while the other does not, and in the post-film sessions the different children who viewed the films are compared for their aggressive behaviours. Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961, 1963) showed that young children were intrigued by displays of violence, and that given the opportunity, they would readily mimic them. In a typical study, children were allowed to watch a live or filmed model or a cartoon in which the hero made aggressive verbal statements or played aggressively with a toy, for example, an inflatable rubber toy. Then the children were left alone in a room full of toys and their words and behaviour were observed and recorded. In all the studies, the children imitated the model's behaviour whether gentle or aggressive, with the imitation more pronounced if the model's actions brought a reward or if the model had been kind to the child (Gardner, 1962, p.321)</i></p> <p>Paragraph 8 <i>In these studies, no real harm comes to person or property and so they do not show whether imitation of an aggressor who does do damage or is reprimanded...</i></p>	<p><i>showed</i></p> <p><i>were allowed</i></p> <p><i>were left</i> <i>were observed,</i> <i>recorded</i> <i>imitated</i> <i>brought</i> <i>had been</i></p>	<p><i>are shown</i> <i>shows</i> <i>does not (show)</i></p> <p><i>comes</i> <i>do not show</i></p>	
<p>Paragraph 16 - Conclusion <i>Although many controls and regulations have been introduced to enhance the quality and content of children's programs in Australia, violence and crime still seem to filter through. The common finding across most age groups is that this television violence and crime instigates aggressive...</i></p>	<p><i>have been introduced</i></p>	<p><i>seem</i></p> <p><i>is</i></p>	

Text 2: The Research Paper

Introduction	Past, Present Perfect	Present	Future
<p><i>It <u>has been suggested</u> (1) that lipid peroxides formed in the arterial wall are active in atherogenesis. The suggestion <u>has been</u> widely <u>accepted</u> as reasonable, since these compounds <u>break down</u> readily, initiating chain reactions as they <u>do</u> so and forming various products that are potentially toxic. For example, lipid peroxides <u>denature</u> serum -lipoproteins (2) and <u>attack</u> the SH group of proteins (3). When vitamin E-deficient rats <u>are fed</u> a diet rich in polyunsaturated fats, lipid peroxides <u>appear</u> in their adipose and muscular tissues (4); similarly, it <u>is thought</u>, unsaturated lipids present in atherosclerotic arteries <u>may autoxidise</u> and then <u>polymerise</u> to form "ceroid" (5).</i></p> <p><i>Lufton and Sowerby (1) <u>provided</u> some evidence for the atherogenic role of lipid peroxides. They <u>showed</u> that the content of peroxides in lipids extracted from the human aortic wall increased with the degree of atherosclerosis. They <u>extracted</u> the lipid, however, by mixing the tissue exposed to the air, with anhydrous sodium sulphate and extracting the mixture with chloroform at room temperature. These treatments <u>may have caused</u> the artifactual formation, by oxidation, of peroxides from unsaturated lipids during the extraction. We <u>have</u> therefore <u>reopened</u> the question of whether lipid peroxides occur in aorta lipids...</i></p>	<p><i>has been suggested</i></p> <p><i>has been accepted</i></p> <p><i>provided</i></p> <p><i>showed</i></p> <p><i>extracted</i></p> <p><i>may have caused</i></p> <p><i>have reopened</i></p>	<p><i>break down</i></p> <p><i>do</i></p> <p><i>denature,</i></p> <p><i>attack</i></p> <p><i>are fed</i></p> <p><i>appear</i></p> <p><i>is thought</i></p> <p><i>may autoxidise</i></p> <p><i>(may)</i></p> <p><i>polymerise</i></p>	
<p>Materials and Methods</p> <p><i>Aortas <u>were obtained</u> at autopsy, within 6-12 hours of death, at the University Hospital, Barchester. Aortas <u>were classified</u> as being at stage 0, I, II or III of atherosclerosis according to the appearance of the intima (6), and the adventitia <u>was</u> rapidly removed.</i></p>	<p><i>were obtained</i></p> <p><i>were classified</i></p> <p><i>was removed</i></p>		
<p>Discussion</p> <p><i>If the peroxides measured in lipid extracts from the arterial wall <u>are</u> artifacts, how <u>can</u> we <u>explain</u> Lufton and Sowerby's findings (1) that the peroxide content is correlated with degree of atherosclerosis? It <u>has</u> recently <u>been discovered</u> (6) that arterial lipids become progressively more unsaturated with increasing degree of atherosclerosis. Among the lipid classes, cholesteryl esters <u>show</u> the most striking increase in unsaturation, and the proportion of cholesteryl esters <u>show</u> the most striking increase in unsaturation, and the proportion of cholesteryl esters relative to the other lipids also <u>rises</u> (9, 10). The more atherosclerotic the aorta, therefore, the more susceptible <u>will</u> its lipids <u>be</u> to explain the observed correlation.</i></p>	<p><i>has been discovered</i></p>	<p><i>are</i></p> <p><i>can explain</i></p> <p><i>show</i></p> <p><i>show</i></p> <p><i>rises</i></p>	<p><i>will be</i></p>

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

2.0 Meanings of the tenses

In the next section we will do two things. First, we will look at the meanings of these tenses and then we will go on to look at when the writers of academic texts use these tenses.

As a writer you take your position in present time. You then have to decide from your position in the present whether the things you are writing about are happening now (present), whether they have already happened (past) or whether they will happen in the future.

2.1 Present time

If you decide to stay in present time you will probably have to make a choice between simple present and the present continuous.

2.1.1 The Simple Present

The simple present tense does not specifically locate an event in time. It is used for things that either happen habitually or are always true. It is a general tense which applies for all time. For this reason it is used to apply to things which are assumed to be always true, to things which are general principles or to describe the current state of affairs.

Example: *I smoke.*

This indicates that I smoke as a habit even though I might not be smoking now.

Example: *A molecule of water has two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen.*

This indicates something that is always or generally true.

2.1.2 The Present Continuous

This is like a "temporary present" and its meaning is that of limited duration. This tense applies to events which are currently happening at the time of speaking or writing.

Example: *I am smoking.*

This means if you look at me now you would see that I am smoking.

Example: World energy demand is increasing at a rate of 3% per year.

This indicates a change or trend or development that is currently happening.

★ Exercise 4

To give you practice with the present tenses fill each gap in the following paragraph with a verb that is either in the simple present tense or the present continuous tense.

Care of persons who.....(be) unable to manage for themselves, whether by reason of illness or social factors(be) one of the few areas of employment that not only..... (need) to grow but.....(grow). This has probably come about through the increasing numbers of conditions that can now be treated, the increasing technology available to those disorders, and the population changes. In particular, the aged and handicapped sections of the population(grow), creating a greater demand for care.

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

2.2 Past time

Writing from your position in present time you will also have to decide what took place before the time at which you are writing.

2.2.1 The Simple Past

The simple past tells us that the event we are talking about is over but it does not necessarily specify when it was.

Example: There was no obvious correlation between peroxide content and stage of atherosclerosis.

However, we can choose to indicate when it occurred with a time expression or additional information.

Example: Lufton and Sowerby (1970:23) provided some evidence for the atherogenic role of lipid peroxides.

In this example the year 1970 tells us when the evidence was provided.

2.2.2 The Past Continuous

This is like a "temporary past". If you want to talk about continued states or repeated actions or events which occurred in the past, you use the past continuous.

Example: Work was progressing but not as quickly as he would have liked.

2.2.3 The Present Perfect

There is a special problem when talking about past time. The simple past tense is used when talking about a happening related to a definite time in the past, as we have already discussed. However, a **perfect** tense is used for a past happening which is seen in relation to a later event or time. Thus the present perfect means 'past-time-related-to-present-time'. If you want to talk about an activity or situation that started at some time in the past and is still happening now or has an effect or result in the present you use the present perfect.

Example: It has been suggested (1) that lipid peroxides formed in the arterial wall are active in atherogenesis. The suggestion has been widely accepted as reasonable.

This indicates that the 'suggestion' and its 'acceptance' took place in the past but are still having an effect now at the time of writing.

2.2.4 The Past Perfect

If you want to talk about a past event or situation that occurred before a particular time in the past, you use the past perfect.

Example: In the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate had become contaminated by a mould.

This indicates the "noticing" took place in the past and the culture plate was contaminated before the "noticing" took place.

★ Exercise 5

The original tenses in the following passage have been replaced with the infinitive forms of the main verb and the auxiliary, if appropriate. Write in the most appropriate tense in each space. (**Assume this was written in 1994**)

In 1981 there (be) 41,097 people in Australia who (be/born) in Vietnam. The male:female ratio (be) 54:46. By the end of 1982, a total of 51,966 people from Vietnam (have/settle) in Australia. Most of these people (live) in large cities, with Sydney and Melbourne accounting for 67%. Most (be)..... between the ages of 20 and 55 years. In 1981 the majority (have/be)in Australia for three years or less. 60% of people with more than three years' residence (have/become) Australian citizens. In the 5 to 14 age group, 84% (speak) a language other than English at home. 92% of those 15 and older (be) also in this category.

Over 29% of Vietnamese in Australia (be) Buddhist, 18% (be) Christian and 52% (be/classify) as 'other' religions. The most common religion in this last group (be) Taoism.

Now let's compare the writers in both the Essay and the Research Paper in Exercise 3 to see when they used the tenses they did.

Present Tense Choices in the Essay & the Research Paper

Text 1: The Essay

Most of the Introduction has been written in the simple present tense. In the Introduction the writer moves through 4 stages. He/She

1. introduces us to the topic of the essay,
2. states the purpose of the essay
3. states his/her position on the topic
4. outlines the scope of the paper.

With the exception of the opening sentence, all this is done in the present tense.

Purpose of stage	Tense	Example
give general background to topic	present perfect/simple present	<i>As television <u>has been labelled</u> as an "influential teacher" by many professionals, the claim that "modern children spend more hours in front of television than they spend at school" <u>is</u> definitely worth further investigation.</i>
state purpose	simple present	<i>If it <u>is found</u> that the quality and content of the children's programs promote the development of social and cognitive skills then these citations <u>have</u>, in fact, no relevance.</i>
state essay's thesis/position	simple present	<i>Unfortunately, however, many studies <u>show</u> that children's television is lacking and <u>is</u> even, in some instances, harmful. The devastating effects of T.V. violence on the development of the children's aggressive nature</i>
state scope	simple present	<i><u>is</u> one of the main concerns when evaluating the effects of T.V. on children.</i>

In the Body of the essay, the writer again uses the simple present tense to describe the way a particular piece of research is usually carried out (**paragraph 7**). This constitutes part of her evidence:

Typically, in early research, two films...are shown. One film also shows distinctive and novel aggressive behaviours while the other does not, and in the post-film sessions the different children who viewed the films are compared for their aggressive behaviours.

The writer uses the present tense again in **paragraph 8** when he/she criticises the evidence:

In these studies, no real harm comes to person or property and so they do not show whether imitation of an aggressor who does do damage or is reprimanded...

In the Conclusion the simple present tense is used when the writer confirms and qualifies the thesis:

Therefore the claim that 'modern children spend more hours in front of television than they spend at school' is indeed cause for alarm. For the young pre-schooler, the child with a high base level of aggression and the unsupervised 'latch-key' child, the implications of television are quite serious.

The simple present tense will probably be your main tense choice when writing essays. There will, however, be variations on this depending on the field you are working in. For example, in the field of history where you have to refer to many events that have occurred in the past, you would expect that there would be more use of the simple past tense. You would be presenting your argument in the present but would constantly be referring to past time for evidence to support that argument.

The following paragraph from a history essay will illustrate this:

In 1899, G. Arnold returned to Sydney from England to employment in the History Department of the University of Sydney. While in England he had been carefully following the South African issues, involving the Uilanders and the Boers, from British and South African capitalist controlled newspapers (17). However, war is a controversial issue and interpretation of events by an individual is questionable due to the lack of accessibility to confidential documents.

Notice the shift to simple present tense when the writer says "However, war is..." when he/she wants to make a generalisation concerning war that is part of the argument that is being presented.

Exercise 6

Read the short texts below and then answer the questions.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the boarding houses in Waverley Municipality have the important function of providing relatively low rent accommodation. The Council is attempting to retain B/LH's in the area. The Council offers some incentives to the proprietors of the boarding houses.

1. Why does the writer switch from simple present to present continuous in sentence 2 above?

.....

In countries X and Y women are mainly responsible for purchasing and preparing food for their family and their decisions largely influence the health and well-being of a broad section of the community. Therefore, women were considered the target group for this program.

1. Why does the writer use the simple present tense in the first sentence?

.....

Text 2: The Research Paper:

A research paper is a highly structured piece of writing as is an essay, with each section in the paper having a clearly defined purpose and a number of stages. A general pattern of tense choices throughout has been observed:

Section	Purpose of stage	Tense choice
Introduction	• introduce general topic to be discussed	simple present/present perfect
	• discuss previous research	past/present perfect
	• identify aims and objectives	simple present or future
	• state hypothesis	simple present
Materials and Methods	• describe how experiment was carried out	simple past passive
Results	• describe what was found	simple present and simple past
Discussion	• explain what is significant from the results	simple present simple past present perfect
Conclusion	• make generalisations	simple present

In the research paper we looked at the writer uses the present tense mainly in the Introduction and the Discussion.

In the Introduction the writer uses the present tense to state what is generally held to be true and then to exemplify it:

The suggestion has been widely accepted as reasonable, since these compounds break down readily, initiating chain reactions as they do so and forming various products that are potentially toxic. For example, lipid peroxides denature serum - lipoproteins (2) and attack the SH group of proteins (3). When vitamin E-deficient rats are fed a diet rich in polyunsaturated fats, lipid peroxides appear in their adipose and muscular tissues (4); similarly, it is thought, unsaturated lipids present in atherosclerotic arteries may autoxidise and then polymerise to form "ceroid" (5).

Notice the verb group that is **in bold**. The researcher is showing his/her judgement of a particular finding in the field by using the modal "may".

In the Discussion section the writer again uses the simple present to discuss experimental findings that are generally accepted within the scientific community:

Among the lipid classes, cholesteryl esters show the most striking increase in unsaturation, and the proportion of cholesteryl ester show the most striking increase in unsaturation, and the proportion of cholesteryl esters relative to the other lipids also raises (9, 10).

 **Exercise 7**

Answer the questions after the text.

There are two types of reproduction: asexual reproduction and sexual reproduction. In sexual reproduction organisms produce special sex cells called gametes. These are male and female and must combine in a process called fertilisation to produce new offspring. In asexual reproduction there are no gametes produced and no fertilisation.

1. What is the only tense used in this text?

.....

2. Why do you think the writer uses only this tense?

.....

  You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

Past Tense Choices in the Essay & the Research Paper

The Essay

In the Essay there is very little shift to past time. When it does occur, it is not simple past but the present perfect. Each of the instances indicates something that began in the past but is still having an effect in the present.

The writer opens the Introduction with:

As television has been labelled as an 'influential teacher' by many professionals, the claim that....

The use of the present perfect here indicates that television has been described in the past as an "influential teacher" and continues to be described that way.

In the Conclusion the writer also says:

Although many controls and regulations have been introduced...

These "controls and regulations" were introduced in the past but are still in effect at the time of writing.

★ Exercise 8

Answer the questions after the text.

European occupation of Australia had a catastrophic impact on Aboriginal health. This resulted in widespread population decline. The most significant cause of depopulation was smallpox. Epidemics occurred in 1789 and 1829-31. It was noted that about half of the Aborigines in the neighbourhood of the first European settlement at Port Jackson had died from smallpox by 1790. This is consistent with the mortality rates among previously unexposed people in the Americas.

1. Which tense is used most frequently in this text? Why?

.....

2. Why does the writer use "had died" in the second to last sentence? What is this tense called?

.....

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

The Research Paper

The Research Paper makes much more use of past time. In the second paragraph of the Introduction the writer is describing the experimental work of Lufton and Sowerby and what they found:

*Lufton and Sowerby (1) **provided** some evidence for the atherogenic role of lipid peroxides. They **showed** that the content of peroxides in lipids extracted from the human aortic wall **increased** the degree of atherosclerosis. They **extracted** the lipid however, by mixing the tissue exposed to the air, with anhydrous sodium sulphate and extracting the mixture with chloroform at room temperature. These treatments may have caused the artifactual formation, by oxidation, of peroxides from unsaturated lipids during the extraction. We have therefore reopened the question of whether lipid peroxides occur in aorta lipids, using aerobic extraction at much lower temperatures in order to minimise oxidation.*

In the first part of this paragraph the writer is discussing experimental research that was completed and the findings that have been accepted by the scientific community as facts. The simple past tense is used.

However, notice how the writer shifts to the present perfect tense (underlined) when he/she wants to challenge part of the findings that are of direct relevance to the

research work that is currently being carried out. The researcher challenges the methodology by using the modal "may" and by the use of the present perfect tense, which indicates that although this took place in the past, it is still of relevance to the present research.

In the Materials and Methods section there is consistent use of the simple past passive as this is a description of procedures that were completed in the past.

Aortas were obtained at autopsy, within 6-12 hours of death, at the University Hospital, Barchester.

The Discussion section also makes use of the present perfect when reference is made to previous research that is related to the current research

"It has recently been discovered (6) that arterial lipids become progressively more unsaturated with increasing degree of atherosclerosis.

 Exercise 9

The following is an Introduction from a research paper. The main verbs have been underlined. Answer the questions below the text.

Aquatic hyphomycetes in freshwater habitats can be distinguished into the Ingoldian and the aeroquatic groups (Webster & Descals, 1980). The Ingoldian hyphomycetes are known to grow profusely on well-decayed leaves and twigs in running streams and lakes. Their spores were first observed on stream surface scum by Ingold (1942). Since then, over 150 species have been described but mostly from temperate countries. Few such fungi have been reported from the tropics. This paper presents some observations made on a survey for Ingoldian hyphomycetes in the local freshwaters.

(Tan and Lim, 1980:36)

1. What tense is used to introduce the general topic to be discussed?

.....

2. What tense (s) are used to discuss the previous research?

.....

3. What tense is used to identify the aim of the paper?

.....

  You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

2.2.5 Editing Strategy

Finally, the practice you have had in this Unit in forming the verbal group correctly, understanding the form and meanings of the tenses and choosing tenses appropriate for the context should help you to edit your own writing.

Practice following these steps:

1. Read your text carefully
2. Underline the finite verbs
3. Check the Subject – does it agree with the Finite?
4. Is the tense choice appropriate for the context?

Unit 2B: Answer Key to Exercises

★ ★ Exercise 1: Answer

Base Form	's' Form	Present Participle	Past Form(s)
find	finds	finding	found
think	thinks	thinking	thought
determine	determines	determining	determined
choose	chooses	choosing	chosen
say	says	saying	said
mean	means	meaning	meant

★ ★ Exercise 2: Answer

- (a) (ii) ecosystems consist of two parts
- (b) (i) James Cook first arrived in Australia in 1770
- (c) (ii) the experiments were conducted in the laboratory
- (d) (iv) it has been suggested that lipids form in the arterial wall
- (e) (iii) they are determining the levels now
- (f) (ii) in the second trial it was noticed that a culture plate had been contaminated
- (g) (i) they were doing this type of procedure in the 1890s
- (h) (iii) the peroxide content is correlated with the degree of atherosclerosis

★ ★ Exercise 3: Answer

Text 1: The Essay

- In the past time column what are the two main tenses?
- **Simple past, present perfect**
- In the present time column what is the main tense?
- **Simple present**
- In the future column what tense is used?

- **Simple present passive**

Text 2: *The Research Paper*

- In the past time column what are the two main tenses?
- **Simple past, present perfect**
- In the present time column what are the two main tenses?
- **Simple present**
- In the future time column what tense is used?
- **Simple future**

★ ★ Exercise 4: Answer

Care of persons who **are** unable to manage for themselves, whether by reason of illness or social factors **is** one of the few areas of employment that not only **needs** to grow but **is growing**. This has probably come about through the increasing numbers of conditions that can now be treated, the increasing technology available to those disorders, and the population changes. In particular, the aged and handicapped sections of the population **are growing**, creating a greater demand for care.

★ ★ Exercise 5: Answer

In 1981 there **were** 41,097 people in Australia who **were born** in Vietnam. The male:female ratio **was** 54:46. By the end of 1982, a total of 51,966 people from Vietnam **had settled** in Australia.

Most of these people **lived** in large cities, with Sydney and Melbourne **accounting** for 67%. Most **were** between the ages of 20 and 55 years. In 1981 the majority **had been** in Australia for three years or less. 60% of people with more than three years' residence **had become** Australian citizens. In the 5 to 14 age group, 84% **spoke** a language other than English at home. 92% of those 15 and older **were** also in this category.

Over 29% of Vietnamese in Australia **were** Buddhist, 18% were Christian and 52% **were classified** as 'other' religions. The most common religion in this last group **was** Taoism.

★ ★ Exercise 6: Answer

As discussed in the previous chapters, the boarding houses in Waverley Municipality have the important function of providing relatively low rent accommodation. The Council is attempting to retain B/LH's in the area. The Council offers some incentives to the proprietors of the boarding houses.

1. The use of the simple present in the first sentence indicates that the statement is generally true. The writer changes to the present continuous in the second sentence to indicate that this is what is happening at the time of writing.

In countries X and Y women are mainly responsible for purchasing and preparing food for their family and their decisions largely influence the health and well-being of a broad section of the community. Therefore, women were considered the target group for this program.

2. The writer uses the simple present tense in the first sentence to indicate that this is a statement that is generally considered to be true.

★ ★ Exercise 7: Answer

There are two types of reproduction: asexual reproduction and sexual reproduction. In sexual reproduction organisms produce special sex cells called gametes. These are male and female and must combine in a process called fertilisation to produce new offspring. In asexual reproduction there are no gametes produced and no fertilisation.

1. The simple present tense is the only tense used in this text.
2. The writer is making statements that are generally accepted as scientific fact.

★ ★ Exercise 8: Answer

European occupation of Australia had a catastrophic impact on Aboriginal health. This resulted in widespread population decline. The most significant cause of depopulation was smallpox. Epidemics occurred in 1789 and 1829-31. It was noted that about half of the Aborigines in the neighbourhood of the first European settlement at Port Jackson had died from smallpox by 1790. This is consistent with the mortality rates among previously unexposed people in the Americas.

1. The simple past is the tense most frequently used in this text because the writer is describing events that occurred in the past and are completed.
2. The writer uses the **past perfect** tense to indicate that one happening or event in the past - the death of half the Aborigines - had taken place before another event or happening in the past.

★ ★ Exercise 9: Answer

*Aquatic hyphomycetes in freshwater habitats can be distinguished into the Ingoldian and the aeroquatic groups (Webster & Descals, 1980). The Ingoldian hyphomycetes **are known** to grow profusely on well-decayed leaves and twigs in running streams and lakes. Their spores were first observed on stream surface scum by Ingold (1942). Since then, over 150 species **have been described** but mostly from temperate countries. Few such fungi **have been reported** from the tropics. This paper **presents** some observations made on a survey for Ingoldian hyphomycetes in the local freshwaters.
(Tan and Lim, 1980:36)*

1. The **present passive** is used to introduce the general topic to be discussed.
2. The **simple past** and the **present perfect** are used to discuss the previous research.
3. The **simple present** is used to identify the aim of the paper.