

What Is a Tense?

A **tense** is a form of a verb that usually shows whether the author is referring to the past, the present, or the future. For example, the past tense of the word plays (present tense) is played and its future tense is will play. A sentence must be consistent in tense. Look at the following sentence:

The student **completed** the article and **submits** it.

This sentence is grammatically incorrect because the verbs completed and submits do not have the same tense. The correct sentence will read as follows:

The student **completed** the article and **submitted** it.

Here, both verbs—completed and submitted—are in the past tense.

Further, the relevant tense should be used while writing specific sections in a paper. For example, the past tense should be used while describing a procedure performed in the study that is being reported. Look at the following example.

Incorrect: The mice **are** placed in a cage.

Correct: The mice **were** placed in a cage.

When stating a property that was discovered in the past but holds true even in the present, the present tense should be used.

Incorrect: DNA **was** a double helix.

Correct: DNA **is** a double helix.

The present tense should be used while referring to tables and figures.

Incorrect: The scores **were** shown in Table 1.

Correct: The scores **are** shown in Table 1.