

10 VERB TENSE SHIFT

Verbs have **tense** forms which indicate different times: **past**, for actions or states completed in the past; **present**, for actions or states occurring at the time of the speaking or occurring regularly; and **future**, for actions or states that will occur in the future. Tense is crucial to our understanding of when actions occur. The verb tense within a sentence or a related group of sentences **should not shift** without good reason.

No: One night, I was driving home late. Suddenly, I see Bigfoot in the path of my Taurus. I slam on my brakes and barely avoid hitting it. (shift from past to present tense)

Yes: One night, I was driving home late. Suddenly, I saw Bigfoot in the path of my Taurus. I slammed on my brakes and barely avoided hitting it. (all past tense verbs)



REMEMBER:

1. Do not shift from present tense to past tense within a sentence without good reason.
No: Beyoncé nets a cool \$54.4 million a year, while the average teacher earned \$46,284 each year.
Yes: Beyoncé nets a cool \$54.4 million a year, while the average teacher earns \$46,284 each year.
2. Do not shift from past tense to present tense within a sentence without good reason.
No: The judge told the defendant that Her Honor would not release him unless he promises to undergo drug treatment.
Yes: The judge told the defendant that Her Honor would not release him unless he promised to undergo drug treatment.
3. Sometimes the context of the sentence requires a change in tense in one or more of the clauses.
Ex: Because of “school choice” laws passed in the last few years, parents now have options for where to send their children if their schools are failing. (necessary shift from past tense to present tense.)
Ex: The *Wizard of Oz* is a film that has enchanted audiences since it was made in 1939. (necessary shift from present tense to past tense)