KEEPING TENSES CONSISTENT IN PARAGRAPH WRITING

Objectives:

* To supply the appropriate form of the verb in the sentences of a paragraph so that consistency of tense is maintained.
* To write a paragraph maintaining consistency of tenses.

Pre-test

I. The following paragraph fails to maintain a consistency of tenses. Underline the verbs that are incorrect.

The school cafeteria is usually crowded, but the other day things were worse than usual. A visiting band plays for the morning assembly and our band master invited the young men for lunch. Forty more people isn't much more when you are in a large auditorium but when you bring them to an already crowded cafeteria something had to give. It did! The moveable partition separating the faculty dining room from the student section came out laughing. For one day at least we had plenty of room and the faculty had the rare pleasure of student guests at lunch.

II. Rewrite the above paragraph correcting verbs having inconsistent tenses.

Instructions: How to Maintain Consistency of Tenses

It is easy enough to keep tenses consistent when you write single sentences. However, when you write paragraphs, especially ones that describe something that has happened, there is always a danger of shifting back and forth between the past and present tense.

Once you begin a paragraph in one tense, keep on using that tense consistently throughout
the paragraph unless you need to indicate another time. In the following paragraph, you have all the tenses in the past time because all the action took place in the past.

My mother had a strange and shocking experience when she was five years old. While she was riding her bike out on the driveway, a car pulled up and the driver whisked her into the front seat and drove away. After some time he picked up a woman at a bus stop and sped off along the expressway into the country. As he turned onto a narrow road leading into the mountains, the woman suddenly grabbed the man's arm crying out that she couldn't go on with this wild scheme to have a child of their own. That night the woman dropped my mother dose to her home and drove off into the dark night. My mother raced in the opposite direction toward the lighted house on the corner.

Because all the action in the preceding paragraph is in the past, each verb is in the past tense. All the verbs are underlined.

Frequently, however, you will want to indicate different times within a single paragraph. Let's change the paragraph so that different times are indicated. This means different tenses will be needed.

My mother loves to tell me the story of a frightening experience she had when she was just five years old. I can't tell you how often I've heard that story and every time it is exciting. She describes how she was riding her bike out on the driveway when a car pulled up and the driver whisked her into the front seat of the car and drove away. Then she explains how she calmed down a little when he picked up a woman at a nearby corner. My mother really gets dramatic when she tells the rest of the story. It is as though she is living it all over again. "We sped along the expressway for hours. Just as we were turning into a narrow land the woman suddenly grabbed the man's arm and screamed hysterically that she couldn't go on with their wild scheme to obtain a child of their own in this way."

At this point in the story the ending is always the same. "I will never forget that night when the woman drove me toward the city and home. She gently lifted me out of the car about three blocks away from the house. As she drove away into the dark, I ran as fast as I could run to the lighted house on the corner."

I think I can tell the story as well as my mother by this time.

In this version of the story there are three different tenses. It is necessary to keep shifting back and forth from on to the other in this way because the action of the story deals with the present, the past, and the future. All the verbs are underlined.

Activities:

I. Write a paragraph describing an experience you or someone you know has had. Keep all the action in the past tense.
II. Underline all verbs in your paragraph.

III. Now rewrite your paragraph using both past and present tense in the same way the paragraph in the above Instructions was rewritten. If you need to, study this paragraph again.

IV. Underline verbs in the above paragraph.

*Post-test*

I. Underline the appropriate forms of the verbs in the parentheses to maintain consistent tenses in the following paragraph.

   My grandmother was not at all the way my friends describe their grandmothers. They still (speak, spoke) of Grandma as a grey-haired old woman who (is, was) always forgetting things she should remember and remembering things no one else is very interested in. My grandmother (is, was) not at all like that. She (is, was) always very lucid. No matter what we (do, did) as children, Grandma always (wants, wanted) to hear about it. I will never (forget, forgot) my first date. I didn't even want my brothers and sisters to know about Ray. But Grandma! She (is, was) different. Even before I
(tell, told) my mother, I (rush, rushed) over to grandma's and let her in on the secret. She just (smiles, smiled) and kept rocking and (tells, told) me to be sure to bring Ray over to meet her sometime. That night, on the way to our first dance together, Ray and I (stop, stopped) in for a minute to see Grandma. She (is, was) someone we always wanted to share our secrets with.

II. Write a paragraph of your own, keeping tenses consistent. If you have trouble thinking of a subject, why don't you write about someone in your family who means a lot to you?