

Grammar for Writing

Consistent Verb Tense Usage

Good writers are careful to use the same verb tense throughout an essay. While it is true that an essay may have, for example, some information about the past and some information about the present, most of the information will be about one time, most likely either past or present. Do not change verb tenses without a specific reason for doing so.

Explanation	Examples
When describing an event in the past tense, maintain the past tense throughout your explanation.	In our experiment, we placed three live fresh-water plants (each approximately 20 centimeters in length) into a quart jar that was filled with fresh water at 70 degrees Fahrenheit. We left the top two centimeters of the jar with air. We then carefully added a medium goldfish.
When talking about facts that are always true, use present tense in your explanation.	The sun is the center of the solar system. The earth and other planets revolve around the sun. Most of the planets have at least one moon that circles the planet, and these moons vary tremendously in size, just as the planets do .
In writings such as a report, it is possible to have different verb tenses reflecting different times.	According to this report, the police now believe that two men stole the truck and the money in it.

ACTIVITY 11 Working with Consistent Verb Tense Usage

In the paragraph, correct the verbs where the tense shifts for no reason.

Paragraph 4

The Experiment

In our experiment, we placed three live fresh-water plants (each approximately 20 centimeters in length) into a quart jar that is filled with fresh water at 70 degrees Fahrenheit. We left the top two centimeters of the jar with air. We then carefully added a medium goldfish. Next, we tighten the lid and wrapped tape tightly around the lid. This very last step is done to ensure that no air can enter or exit the bottle. The jar was placed on a shelf where it is exposed to indirect sunlight for approximately eight hours each day. At 1 p.m. every day for a week, we observed the fish swimming in the jar. On several occasions, we notice that the plants emit multiple bubbles of a gas. The fish survived for the entire week. No food or air was provided. Thus, these green plants in the jar produced a gas, and we believed this gas was oxygen.