

# VERB TENSE



Verbs come in a variety of tenses, moods, and voices. In this worksheet we'll go over the types you're most likely to encounter on the SAT/ACT, how to use them in sentences, and how to recognize the types of verb conjugation errors you'll encounter on the SAT.

As you're probably already aware, verbs come in three basic tenses: **past, present and future**. But, each of these comes in an array of types:

Tense Name	Past	Present	Future
Simple	threw	throw(s)	will throw
Progressive	was throwing	is throwing	will be throwing
Perfect	had thrown	has/have thrown	will have thrown
Perfect Progressive	had been throwing	has/have been throwing	will have been throwing

Now, this might look extremely complicated, but don't freak out. First, because you don't need to memorize the names of the various tenses. And second, because the SAT tends to focus mainly on verb tense consistency. Here's an example:

*When we go to the movies, my friend Tom insisted on sitting in the front row.*

See anything wrong in that sentence? It probably sounds wrong to your ears because the verb in the first part of the sentence, "go," is present tense, while the verb in the second part of the sentence, "insisted" is past tense. The correct version of the sentence looks like one of the following options:

*Consistent present tense: When we go to the movies, my friend Tom insists on sitting in the front row.*

*Consistent past tense: When we went to the movies, my friend Tom insisted on sitting in the front row.* Although you don't need to memorize the rules for conjugating every verb form, it still helps to have a basic understanding of how the various tenses work. Here's a quick primer:

## Progressive Tense

The progressive tense is for when you need to show or describe that something was, is, or will be happening for a period of time or concurrently with something else.

Examples:

The airplane was flying while the storm raged.

The airplane is flying while the storm rages.

The airplane will be flying while the storm rages.

Note that the main verb, “flying,” remains the same, while the helping verb “to be” changes from past, to present, to future to indicate when the event is or will be happening.

## Perfect Tense

This can be tricky. Perfect tense is used to describe things that take place relative to other things. Put another way, the present tense comes into play when you want to describe in more detail when events happened. For example:

Moments before boarding the roller coaster, James had felt sick to his stomach.  
Ever since riding the roller coaster, James has felt sick to his stomach.  
By the time the roller coaster ride ends, James will have felt sick to his stomach for a while.

As you can see, the perfect tense helps give a sense of when things happen (or happened, or will happen) in relation to each other. It’s one thing to say that “James felt sick to his stomach.”

Adding the detail that the sickness began “moments before boarding the roller coaster” gives you a more detailed sense of when the event began and whether it’s still ongoing or has been completed.

As in the progressive tense, here the main verb “felt” stays the same. The helping verbs “had,” “has,” and “will have” change to indicate past tense, present tense, and future tense.

## Perfect Progressive Tense

No surprise, the perfect progressive tense is a combination of the perfect and progressive tenses. This tense is used to describe the time taken to do something that was (or still is, or will be) unfolding. For example:

Ben had been hoping to see his favorite band in concert since last winter.

Ben has been hoping to see his favorite band in concert.

Ben will have been waiting to see his favorite band in concern since last winter.

The perfect progressive tense usually results in long, complex sentences, which is why it’s rarely used in most kinds of writing you encounter.

## Main Takeaway

Again, the thing you should concentrate on and practice most is recognizing verb tense inconsistencies in sentences, as when the tense switches from past tense to present tense for no good reason.