

VERB SHIFTS

PS-17

Sentences often include more than one verb, and, if so, the verbs often refer to actions taking place at different time periods. Verb tenses must refer to the same time period unless a change in time is required.

EXAMPLE:

INCORRECT: The hikers **took** off their shoes before they **swim**.

CORRECT : The hikers **take** off their shoes before they **swim**.

-OR-

The hikers **took** off their shoes before they **swam**.

Depending on the author's meaning of the sentence, the hikers either **TAKE** off their shoes before they **SWIM** or **TOOK** off their shoes before they **SWAM**. Here is another example of faulty verb shifts. Pay close attention to the verb tenses.

INCORRECT: Justin **makes** coffee every morning while the sun **rose**.

CORRECT: Justin **makes** coffee every morning while the sun **rises**.

-OR-

Justin **made** coffee every morning while the sun **rose**.

Again, depending on the intent of the writer, Justin either **MAKES** coffee while the sun rises or **MADE** coffee while the sun **ROSE**.

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PRACTICE: Cross out the verb which contains an inappropriate tense shift and write the correct tense of the verb above it.

1. Jeanie dropped out of the race after noticing one of her shoes is untied.
2. After Mrs. Wigglesworth eats minestrone, she remembered seeing a fly in her dish.
3. Poly Ponopolous feeds her one-eyed fish, walks her three-legged dog, and groomed her deaf cat before she washes her old wig.
4. When I was a child, I sprinkled Cap'n Crunch between the pieces of bread and enjoy Cap'n Crunch sandwiches.
5. During the week, Joseph works from 9 to 5, but on Saturdays, he relaxes while he watching the Disney Channel.
6. The library was closed for spring break, so Valerie, the student assistant, has a week off without pay.
7. My professor, Mr. Franklin, liked to take out his teeth while he lectures us about gum brushing.
8. Sometimes Dennis telephones Missy but has nothing to say once he called her.
9. It wasn't even mid-June when the schedules for fall semester come out.
10. Fredrica was in extremely poor condition before she takes dancing classes.

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ANSWERS

1. is was
2. eats ate
3. groomed grooms
4. enjoy enjoyed
5. watching watches
6. has had
7. liked likes OR lectures lectured
8. called calls
9. come came
10. takes took

Website for Practice

<http://wwwnew.towson.edu/ows/indexexercises.htm>

Towson Education Online Exercises. Go to “Sentence Structure” at top of page. This will take you to online practice for Verb Shifts.