

SEM Education Winter Session

SAT Writing - Tenses

There are a lot of different tenses but here are some of the ones you'll encounter:

Tense	Verb		
	To Hug	To Swim	To Be
Present	<i>He hugs...</i>	<i>He swims...</i>	<i>He is...</i>
Past	<i>He hugged...</i>	<i>He swam...</i>	<i>He was...</i>
Future	<i>He will hug...</i>	<i>He will swim...</i>	<i>He will be...</i>
Present Perfect	<i>He has hugged...</i>	<i>He has swum...</i>	<i>He has been...</i>
Past Perfect	<i>He had hugged...</i>	<i>He had swum...</i>	<i>He had been...</i>

Don't worry about when to use the present perfect and the past perfect. They are no longer tested directly on the SAT. You'll see them as answer choices, but you won't need any knowledge of their uses to get those questions correct. **In fact, answer choices containing the present perfect or past perfect tenses are almost always wrong.**

So if you see the following answer choices:

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) connects
- C) connected
- D) had connected

You can be almost certain the answer won't be D. See the tip later in this chapter for another example.

The most common verb-related error you'll see on the SAT is tense inconsistency. You need to ensure that the tenses in a sentence make sense. **Most of the time, that means changing everything to either past tense or present tense.**

Example 1	
Wrong:	Whenever we stopped by the market, my mom always tries to negotiate the prices.
Correct:	Whenever we stop by the market, my mom always tries to negotiate the prices.
Correct:	Whenever we stopped by the market, my mom always tried to negotiate the prices.
Example 2	
Wrong:	After winning Wimbledon in 2012, Federer regained the top ranking and declares himself the best in the world.
Correct:	After winning Wimbledon in 2012, Federer regained the top ranking and declared himself the best in the world.
Example 3	
Wrong:	The end of World War II came when German forces surrender in Berlin and Italy.
Correct:	The end of World War II came when German forces surrendered in Berlin and Italy.
Rule:	Often times, dates or historical events in the question tell you the past tense is needed.
Example 4	
Wrong:	Although the cheetah holds the record for fastest land animal, many other mammals outlasted it.
Correct:	Although the cheetah holds the record for fastest land animal, many other mammals outlast it.
Rule:	Statements of fact or of the way things are (things that are always true and will continue to be true) must be in present tense.

There are some cases where verbs don't have to be consistent because of the meaning of the sentence. Sometimes we DO want to talk about two actions that happened in different time periods.

Example 5	
Correct:	When I was young, I hated vegetables, but now I love them.
Correct:	Because he was late for the anniversary dinner, she is thinking about leaving him.

Both of the sentences above are correct because the meaning **intends** for the verb tenses to be inconsistent. As you're checking for tenses on the SAT, make sure you take the meaning of the sentence into consideration. Don't be too robotic.

As a side note, answer choices with *would* or *would have* are typically correct only when dealing with hypotheticals:

- If I were rich, I **would** buy a Ferrari.
- If she had done her homework, she **would have** gotten an "A" this semester.

Tip

On the SAT, the answers to tense-related questions will almost always be the shortest ones. If you had the following answer choices, for instance:

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) jumped
- C) had jumped
- D) begun to jump

The answer would most likely be **B**. The reason this tip works is that most of the passages are in simple past or simple present, which means most of the verbs should be in simple past or simple present. In fact, you can usually guess the tense from the title of passage. Is it a history passage? Simple past. A narrative? Simple present. If the choices include both the simple past and the simple present, you'll have to look for the correct tense in the surrounding context.

1. While online tutorials make learning convenient and accessible, teachers hold students accountable in a way that promotes action and retention.
A) NO CHANGE
B) held
C) had held
D) holding
2. Before he was finally caught and condemned as a blood doping cheater during his Tour de France victories, Lance Armstrong has been at the top of the cycling world for over ten years.
A) NO CHANGE
B) will have been
C) had been
D) is
3. Until internet browsers were standardized across all computing platforms, each programmer had to refer to different guidelines, each presenting the requirements according to a specific browser.
A) NO CHANGE
B) has
C) will have
D) having
4. Ronny Stravinsky did not amass his fortune quietly; he had been suing competitors for over twenty years before he will finally close his legal office.
A) NO CHANGE
B) finally closed
C) finally closes
D) had closed finally
5. Performing on the streets, I sing popular pop songs at the same time my partner can play the guitar in the back.
A) NO CHANGE
B) played
C) had played
D) plays

1. A
2. C
3. A
4. B
5. D

1. While you were at the hotel eating lunch, I will be at the gym for my daily workout.

- A. [NO CHANGE]
- B. you are
- C. you were being
- D. you have been

2. It's a bad idea to go to an international airport without having your passport ready!

- A. [NO CHANGE]
- B. idea going to
- C. idea will go to
- D. idea went to

3. When your grandfather came to America two generations ago, he runs a small factory in New York.

- A. [NO CHANGE]
- B. ago, running a
- C. ago, he will run a
- D. ago, he ran a

4. This mountain began as a resort that will attract famous international visitors to its spa and hotel.

- A. [NO CHANGE]
- B. attracts
- C. is attracting
- D. once attracted

5. This wolf has not only learned to howl on cue, but also will jump over fences.

- A. [NO CHANGE]
- B. jumping
- C. has jumped
- D. to jump

6. Lizards rustled through the grass as we hiked up the hills of the wild island.

- A. [NO CHANGE]
- B. Lizards rustling
- C. Lizards are rustling
- D. Lizards will rustle

7. Someday we went to the North Pole to be like our favorite adventurers of olden days.

- A. [NO CHANGE]
- B. we will go to

- C. we had gone to
- D. we have gone

8. Having a computer allowed you to view more free entertainment than even a king and queen of a hundred years ago.

- A. [NO CHANGE]
- B. allows you
- C. allowing you
- D. is allowing you

9. Since I've studied hard for medical school for years, I believed I would become a doctor.

- A. [NO CHANGE]
- B. believed I will become
- C. believe I can become
- D. would become

10. The oceans will have rose from their ancient levels to their present-day levels because of powerful natural forces.

- A. [NO CHANGE]
- B. will be rising
- C. rose from
- D. will rise

BADDDABBCC