

DukeWrites Enrichment Suite

Verbs, part three

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Now that we've talked about active verbs, let's move on to academic verb tenses. These three verb tenses, present, past, and present perfect, make up 80 percent of the verb tenses used in academic writing.

Present tense is usually the default academic verb tense. We use it in general statements, when introducing a topic, or for a statement about what is true today.

Past tense we use when discussing an event which occurred or was completed in the past, when we're discussing others' completed research, or reporting completed methods in research.

We use present perfect when reporting something that was true in the past and continues to be true today or when you're connecting your research with previous related research.

So we've color-coded these verb tenses. Let's look at how these verb tenses are used in parts of paragraphs from two different articles in *Deliberations*:

This paragraph beginning functions as an introduction. The verbs are highlighted by color according to which tense it is. We can see "has raised" is in the present perfect color. The concerns raised started in the past and are continuing today.

Then we see that "is," further down, is in present tense, the default tense, in this sentence it is stating that something that is generally true

The next sentence has both present perfect and present tense. The writer uses present perfect with "have investigated" to again give the idea that the action of investigating has started in the past and continues today.

Whereas the writer then uses the present tense with "are", "affect", "migrate", and "adapt" to state something that is true today.

Okay, another example. This paragraph beginning is discussing something that happened in the past and the author is treating it as a completed action. Even though just by scanning over the paragraph, we can see that most of the verbs are in the past tense highlighted color, this verb, "attempting," in the very beginning, however, is in present tense because the writer is defining the term "revisionists."

This whole definition part is a fact that is still true today. The remaining verbs, “latched,” “were”, “painted”, and “cared” are all in past tense. And they refer to actions performed and completed all in the past.

So far in this module about verbs, we’ve looked at how strong verbs and active voice can make your sentences clearer and more concise. And we’ve also looked at the three main verb tenses used in academic writing: present, past, and present perfect.

Your choice of verbs and the verb tenses you use is an important part of creating clear, concise, effective writing.

Thanks for listening ~ and happy writing.