Verb Tense Consistency

Verb tense is the time in which an action or state of being occurs. All verbs have a tense. In the sentence “Mary works at the hospital,” the verb “works” is in the present tense. In the sentence, “He played tennis yesterday,” the verb “played” is in the past tense.

Some important points to remember regarding verb tense are:

1. When writing, one must be consistent in one’s use of tenses. This means that the tense being used in a paper, essay, or other assignment should generally be the same throughout the assignment. For example, if an assignment is being written about the dangers of drug use, the assignment should be written in the present tense, and that is the tense that should be used throughout the paper. If a student is writing a paper about what qualities made Abraham Lincoln a great president, then the appropriate tense to use would be the past tense.
2. A tense can only change within a piece of writing if the context of the particular piece/assignment warrants it. For instance, if in the above example about drug use, the author of the piece is citing a study that was conducted in the past, the writer can say, “Smith and Jones studied this issue in 1998.” However, generally speaking, the tense being used in a piece of writing should be consistent throughout the work.
3. When writing about fiction, the present tense is the correct tense to use.

Incorrect: : In *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck and Jim sailed down the Mississippi on a raft.

Correct: In *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck and Jim sail down the Mississippi on a raft.