

Tense Shift

Definition/Explanation of Term: The use of a different tense than the rest of a paper without intending to mean that the verb is happening at a different time.

General Rule: Unless you are intending to reflect that an event is happening at a different time than in the surrounding clauses, then the tense should be the same on all verbs.

Examples:

Incorrect: Tim and I are hanging out today. We decided to go get ice cream, then Tim left.

Correct: Tim and I hung out today. We decided to go get ice cream, then Tim left.

Incorrect: We are just sitting there, and he threw the ball at me.
Correct: We were just sitting there, and he threw the ball at me.

Need More Help?

- Bedford: pgs. 171-172
- Exercises: hackerhandbooks.com/bedhandbook > Grammar Exercises > Clear Sentences > E-ex 13-6
- Online Exercises:
http://wps.ablongman.com/long_faigley_penguinhb_1/7/1978/506544.cw/index.html
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/exercises/2/22/49>
<http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/correctText/cable2.htm>

Shifts in verb tense

Edit the following paragraphs to eliminate distracting shifts in tense.

The English colonists who settled in Massachusetts received assistance at first from the local Indian tribes, but by 1675 there had been friction between the English and the Indians for many years. On June 20 of that year, Metacomet, whom the colonists called Philip, leads the Wampanoag tribe in the first of a series of attacks on the colonial settlements. The war, known today as King Philip's War, rages on for over a year and leaves three thousand Indians and six hundred colonists dead. Metacomet's attempt to retain power in his native land failed. Finally he too is killed, and the victorious colonists sell his wife and children into slavery.

The Indians did not leave records of their unfortunate encounters with the English settlers, but the settlers recorded some of their experiences at the hands of the Indians. One of the few accounts to survive was written by a captured colonist, Mrs. Mary Rowlandson. She is a minister's wife who is kidnapped by an Indian war party and held captive for eleven weeks in 1676. Her history, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, tells the story of her experiences with the Wampanoags. Although it did not paint a completely balanced picture of the Indians, Rowlandson's narrative, which is considered a classic early American text, showed its author to be a keen observer of life in an Indian camp.