Cultivating Proficiency with Verbs

Goals

This workshop focuses on the accurate and effective use of verbs as well as subject-verb agreement. The first fifteen minutes will consist of reviewing the key terms and concepts, and the preparatory activity, from these pre-workshop materials, which student attendees are expected to read and complete in advance (the workshop is not a teacher-centered lesson in rules). Following that brief review, in the remaining thirty minutes students will dynamically interact with each other and the Writing Center consultant while actively engaging their own and others’ work.

Materials Needed

In order to participate fully in the workshop, bring the following:

- A laptop or tablet with wireless internet capability (to access these materials during the workshop)
- Your completed preparatory exercise (see “Preparatory Activity” below)
- An essay you have written or are writing, whose verb tenses and agreement you would like to explore

Topic Overview

Verbs are used to convey a subject’s action or its state of being, and within a sentence this means that verbs have a tense. These tenses are broadly indicative of past, present, and future; moreover, they fall into the categories of simple, progressive, and perfect; in addition, some verbs are regular whereas others are irregular. Because verbs describe the action or state of being of a subject, the principle of subject-verb agreement ensures that a verb accords with its corresponding subject.

Beyond these conventions, effective use of verbs demands consistency beyond individual sentences; this requires a writer to, among other things, keep genre in mind (for example, argumentative essays are usually in present tense, and journalistic writing employs past tense), while balancing tenses (for instance, analyzing a past experience in the present). Along another dimension, there is not usually a right or wrong verb for every situation, but strong verb choices call upon writers to use clear, appropriate, and active verbs to maximize their impact.

Key Terms and Concepts

- **Simple Past, Present, and Future Tenses**: Most sentences are structured using the temporal framework of simple past, simple present, or simple future tense. A tense is simple if a subject does, did, or will perform an action.
- **Progressive and Perfect Tenses**: If simple tenses identify past, present, or future action in a “pure” form, progressive tenses show an action was occurring, is currently occurring, or will be occurring; and perfect tenses describe an action that has been completed, is being completed, or will be complete. Verbs can also be perfect progressive, expressing an action that has been happening, had been happening, or will have been happening. Each past, present, and future tense has a progressive and perfect form.
- **Regular and Irregular Verbs**: When using the perfect tense, regular verbs remain unchanged but irregular verbs take on a different form. That is, regular verbs are easily modified with -ed or -s; however, irregular verbs are modified without a consistent pattern.

- **Subject-Verb Agreement**: If a verb conveys an action or state, its subject noun embodies that action or state. In a sentence, the number of the subject must match that of the verb, and whether a sentence contains multiple verbs, multiple nouns, or multiple clauses, the verb or verbs should always describe their subject referent.

- **Verb Consistency Beyond Sentences**: There are instances when verb tenses may shift, because changes in tense help readers understand temporal relationships among events, as well as the position of the writer in relation to the past. Generally, a writer will establish a primary tense and use occasional shifts to other tenses to indicate alterations in time frame.

- **Strong Verb Choices**: The most effective verb choices are clear (create a detailed picture in the reader’s mind), appropriate (convey a degree of meaning to the reader), and active (directly connect the subject to the action in the sentence). Using a variety of strong verbs helps prevent repetition, vagueness, and over-inflation of vocabulary.

**Additional Resources**

- For a concise overview of verbs, please review the following materials from the USC Writing Center’s website: “Verb Tenses,” “Subject-Verb Agreement,” and “Tightening Passive Sentences.”
- For additional information on verbs, visit the Purdue Online Writing Lab’s pages:
  - Basic tenses
  - Irregular verbs
  - Helping verbs (modals)
  - Subject-verb agreement
  - Switching tenses in a paragraph

- To practice these lessons in your own time, try these exercises:
  - Verb tense consistency exercises
  - Additional verb tense tutorials and exercises

**Preparatory Activity**

The passage below contains many opportunities to identify verb tenses in simple, perfect, and progressive form. Prior to the workshop, please print the paragraph and review it for errors in verb usage, considering both subject-verb agreement and the appropriate verb tense for each suggested time frame. Begin by crossing out incorrect verbs and writing their correct form above the text. Please bring this completed exercise with you, and be prepared to share your suggestions at the beginning of the workshop.

The origin of medical ethics dates back to 4th century B.C. when Hippocrates, the father of medicine, establish the Hippocratic Oath. To this day, medical school graduates still reciting variations of this original, influential oath. When taking this oath, among other things, doctors are asked to practice for the good of the patient to the best of their ability, to preserve the art of medicine, to keep away from intentional ill-doing, and to keep
confidentiality (Edelstein). While the Hippocratic Oath mention neither honesty nor lying, they were not new to medicine in the least. Rather, the issue only become more complicated and convoluted as the field of medical ethics evolve.

There is two unique schools taught on the concept of lying: deontology and consequentialism. Deontology, taught by the 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, assume that lying and deception are morally wrong and that humans has a moral obligation to tell the truth. Regarding medicine, he had stated that the information belong to the patients and that they have a right to know the truth, regardless of the consequences. On the other hand, consequentialism was claiming that the decision to tell the truth will be depending on circumstances. In other words, it was the physician’s duty to decide which course of action will provide the best results for the patient (Marzanski 111).

The American Medical Association had adopted a formal set of ethical guidelines in 1847, which encourage physicians to treat patients with respect and dignity. However, it discouraged making negative prognoses and be too open with information. Rather the document advises to pass on these responsibilities to someone with better judgment or delicacy. It is not until 1980 that AMA revise these guidelines to “be honest in all professional interactions” and “report...deception” (AMA Principles).