

## **Title of Module: *Tense use in Academic Writing***

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### **Module Overview**

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### **Video 1: *Tense use in Academic Writing***

Students often have questions about the tenses that are appropriate to use in academic writing. This video introduces the three most commonly used tenses in academic writing, discusses when and for what purpose they are used, and provides examples of those tenses. After watching this video you should be able to identify the tenses in a text and be able to use these tenses appropriately in a given context.

#### *Common Verb Tenses in academic Writing*

The most common verb tenses used in academic writing are present simple, past simple, and the present perfect tense.

#### *Present Simple Tense*

The present simple tense is the most typical tense in academic writing. It is usual in the introduction or the conclusion. In an introduction, we usually describe what we already know about a topic, which is background information, while in a conclusion we say what we have learned or now know about the topic as well as what further research is still needed.

#### *Use of the Present Simple Tense*

This tense is therefore used to make general statements, conclusions, and interpretations about previous research. It is also used in writing summaries when discussing events or results from research.

#### *Present Simple Tense: Examples*

Here are some examples of the present simple tense. In sentences (1) and (2) the verbs ‘discusses’ and ‘describes’ are both in the simple present tense. In sentences (3) and (4), the underlined verbs ‘*is*’ and ‘*are*’ also have the present simple form. Notice that in all four sentences, the present simple tense is used when reporting on texts. Even though these texts may have been published quite a few years back, it is the present simple tense that is used to describe or report on those texts.

### **Video 2:** *The Past tenses*

#### *Past Simple Tense*

The second most commonly used tense in academic writing is the past simple tense. This tense has two main functions in most academic fields. First, it introduces existing research or academic studies. Second, it describes the methods, data, and findings of a completed experiment or research study.

#### *Past Simple Tense: Example*

Here we have an example of the past simple tense. The verb *experienced* in the first sentence has the simple past form. In this case, the past simple tense is used to describe an event that happened in the past. Notice that the verb *provides* is in the present simple tense form and is used to make a general statement about Wasserstrom’s text. However, to describe a specific event (in the text), which occurred in the past, the past simple tense has to be used. Thus, sentence (2) would not be appropriate.

#### *Present perfect tense*

The present perfect tense is used when referring to previous studies or research in a given field and implies that the research is still relevant today. The purpose of this tense is to form a connection between the past when the particular study was conducted and the present, when you are reporting on that study and doing your own research or a review of the field.

#### *Slide 10: Present perfect tense: Example*

The verb *has become* in sentence (1) is in the present perfect form. Here, the present perfect tense is used to describe the phenomenon of globalization, because it is something that started in the past but its effect continues. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to use the present simple tense (for globalization), as is shown in sentence (2).

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) **has developed** at an astonishing rate in its short history. With the launch of the World Wide Web in 1990 and the mass popularization of the Internet, many forms of CMC **became** widely used. These different types of CMC can be differentiated on two parameters: (1) the number of recipients of a message and (2) the synchronicity of the communicative event. Though it **is** possible to have multiple recipients in instant messaging IM, (it **is** primarily used for one-to-one dialogue. IM **is** also synchronous, since participants **are** “electronically present at the same time” (Paolillo 1999). Instant (or near-instant) reply **is** the norm, as spontaneous, real-time dialogue **takes** place. IM **is** unique in that it **is** the only one-to-one synchronous type of CMC.

Adapted from “Linguistic ruin? Lol! Instant messaging and teen language” by Sali Tagliamonte and Derek Denis (2008)

### **Video 3:** *The Use of Tenses in a Given Text*

#### *The Three Tenses in an Academic Text*

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) **has developed** at an astonishing rate in its short history. With the launch of the World Wide Web in 1990 and the mass popularization of the Internet, many forms of CMC **became** widely used. These different types of CMC can be differentiated on two parameters: (1) the number of recipients of a message and (2) the synchronicity of the communicative event. Though it **is** possible to have multiple recipients in instant messaging IM, (it **is** primarily used for one-to-one dialogue. IM **is** also synchronous, since participants **are** “electronically present at the same time” (Paolillo 1999). Instant (or near-instant) reply **is** the norm, as spontaneous, real-time dialogue **takes** place. IM **is** unique in that it **is** the only one-to-one synchronous type of CMC.

For example, in this paragraph the verb tense changes for different purposes. The authors used the present perfect tense to describe how even though computer-mediated integration started in the past, its relevance continues till now: (Computer-mediated communication **has developed** at an astonishing rate in its short history).

In this paragraph, the verb tense shifts to the past simple tense to indicate changes that were made at the end of the century, such as the verb ‘became’ in this sentence: (... many forms of CMC **became** widely used).

And you see that in the same paragraph, in this sentence: *IM is unique in that it is the only one-to-one synchronous type of CMC*, the present simple tense of the verb is being used to describe the ways in which IM exists at present time.

### **References**

Celce-Murcia, Diane Larsen-Freeman. *The Grammar Book*. Heinle & Heinle, 1999.

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“Verb Tenses.” *The Writing Center*, [writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/verb-tenses/](http://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/verb-tenses/).