Verb tense agreement is important. Mixing tenses within a sentence can change the meaning of the sentence, or even take away the sentence's meaning altogether. Mixing tenses between sentences can confuse the reader and can cause your paper to make no sense. Let's look at how to use tense properly.

**THERE ARE SIX BASIC VERB TENSES:**

- **Simple Present:** I walk.
- **Present Perfect:** I have walked.
- **Simple Past:** I walked.
- **Past Perfect:** I had walked.
- **Future:** I will walk.
- **Future Perfect:** I will have walked.

**PERFECT TENSES** give you more information about an action's beginning or end.

- **Present Perfect:** The action began in the past but continues into the present.
  Ex: *George has spent his childhood eating boogers.*
  In this sentence, George is still a child, and his booger eating continues to this day.

- **Past Perfect:** The action began and ended before another action.
  Ex: *Susie had finished her homework by the time the zombies started breaking down her door.*
  In this sentence, the action of Susie finishing her homework occurred before the action of zombies breaking down the door.

- **Future Perfect:** The action will be completed by a specified time, regardless of when it began.
  Ex: *By the time you read this, I will have already hidden the body.*
  In this sentence, the action of hiding the body will be completed by the time the sentence is read.

**MAKE SURE YOUR TENSES AGREE:** All you have to do is be consistent. If your actions occur in the same time frame, use the same tense. Only shift tense to indicate a change in time from one action to another. Here are some examples of correct and incorrect sentences:

*Billy bakes a cake and sold it for a million dollars.*

This sentence is incorrect because the verb *bakes* is in the present tense, but the verb *sold* is
in the past tense (which would only be correct if somehow Billy was able to sell his cake before he baked it).

Yesterday a grizzly bear jumped out of the bushes, stole my sandwich, and runs off down the street laughing triumphantly.

This sentence is incorrect because the verb runs is in the present tense, which contradicts the time frame (Yesterday).

Clowns had bothered Jenny all her life, so she built a subterranean clown-attack shelter to keep the brutes at bay.

This sentence is correct, even though the verbs are not in the same tense. The verb had bothered is in the past perfect tense and the verb built is in the past tense because the actions occurred at different times. After Jenny built her shelter, the clowns no longer bothered her.

Remember: After you have checked to make sure all of your sentences maintain proper tense agreement, it is also important to make sure your tenses agree from one sentence to the next.

Here is an example in which changing verb tense between sentences obscures the meaning of the sentences.

Every weekend my sister and I venture into the woods in search of candy houses. She brought a cucumber sandwich and I brought a bag full of raw pork.

In the first sentence the present tense venture indicates that the action is ongoing. However, the second sentence uses the past tense brought, which indicates that the action happened in the past. If the action of bringing various foods recurs every time I venture into the woods with my sister, then the verb should likewise be in the present tense:

Every weekend my sister and I venture into the woods in search of candy houses. She brings a cucumber sandwich and I bring a bag full of raw pork.

If, on the other hand, I am referring to a specific weekend out of the many spent in the woods, then I should state that:

Every weekend my sister and I venture into the woods in search of candy houses. Last weekend, she brought a cucumber sandwich and I brought a bag full of raw pork.