

SKILL 33: KNOW WHEN TO USE THE PAST WITH THE PRESENT

One verb tense problem that is common both in student writing and on the TOEFL test is the switch from the past tense to the present tense for no particular reason. Often when a sentence has both a past tense and a present tense, the sentence is incorrect.

He *took* the money when he *wants** it.

This sentence says that *he took the money* (in the past) *when he wants it* (in the present). This meaning does not make any sense; it is impossible to do something in the past as a result of something you want in the present. This sentence can be corrected in several ways, depending on the desired meaning.

He *took* the money when he *wanted* it.

He *takes* the money when he *wants* it.

The first example means that *he took the money* (in the past) *when he wanted it* (in the past). This meaning is logical, and the sentence is correct. The second example means that *he takes the money* (habitually) *when he wants it* (habitually). This meaning is also logical, and the second example is also correct.

It is necessary to point out, however, that it is possible for a logical sentence in English to have both the past and the present tense.

I *know* that he *took* the money yesterday.

The meaning of this sentence is logical: *I know* (right now, in the present) that *he took the money* (yesterday, in the past). You can see from this example that it is possible for an English sentence to have both the past and the present tense. The error you need to avoid is the switch from the past to the present for no particular reason. Therefore, when you see a sentence on the TOEFL test with both the past tense and the present tense, you must check the meaning of the sentence carefully to see if it is logical in English.

The following chart outlines the use of the past tense with the present tense in English:

USING THE PAST WITH THE PRESENT	
1.	If you see a sentence with one verb in the <i>past</i> and one verb in the <i>present</i> , the sentence is probably incorrect.
2.	However, it is possible for a correct sentence to have both <i>past</i> and <i>present</i> together.
3.	If you see the <i>past</i> and <i>present</i> together, you must <i>check the meaning</i> to determine whether or not the sentence is correct.

EXERCISE 33: Each of the following sentences has at least one verb in the past and one verb in the present. Underline the verbs twice and decide if the meanings are logical. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

I 1. I tell him the truth when he asked me the question.

C 2. I understand that you were angry.

_____ 3. When he was a child, he always goes to the circus.

- _____ 4. Last semester he reads seven books and wrote five papers.
- _____ 5. Steve wakes up early every morning because he went to work early.
- _____ 6. Mark studied at the American University when he is in Washington, D.C.
- _____ 7. He is telling the teacher why he did not have time to finish his homework.
- _____ 8. He put some money in his account when he goes to the bank.
- _____ 9. Tom keeps studying hard because he intended to go to dental school.
- _____ 10. She is where she is today because she worked hard when she was a student.

SKILL 34: USE HAVE AND HAD CORRECTLY

Two tenses that are often confused are the present perfect (*have* + past participle) and the past perfect (*had* + past participle). These two tenses have completely different uses, and you should understand how to differentiate them.

The present perfect (*have* + past participle) refers to the period of time *from the past until the present*.

Sue *has lived* in Los Angeles for ten years.

This sentence means that Sue has lived in Los Angeles for the ten years up to now. According to this sentence, Sue is still living in Los Angeles.

Because the present perfect refers to a period of time from the past until the present, it is not correct in a sentence that indicates past only.

At the start of the nineteenth century, Thomas Jefferson *has become** president of the United States. Every time Jim *worked* on his car, he *has improved** it.

In the first example, the phrase *at the start of the nineteenth century* indicates that the action of the verb was in the past only, but the verb indicates the period of time from the past until the present. Since this is not logical, the sentence is not correct. The verb in the first example should be the simple past *became*. The second example indicates that Jim *worked* on his car in the past, but he improved it in the period from the past until the present. This idea also is not logical. The verb in the second example should be the simple past *improved*.

The past perfect (*had* + past participle) refers to a period of time *that started in the past and ended in the past, before something else happened in the past*.

Sue *had lived* in Los Angeles for ten years when she *moved* to San Diego.

This sentence means that Sue lived in Los Angeles for ten years in the past before she moved to San Diego in the past. She no longer lives in Los Angeles.

Because the past perfect begins in the past and ends in the past, it is generally not correct in the same sentence with the present tense.

Tom *had finished* the exam when the teacher *collects** the papers.