

VERB TENSE CONSISTENCY

Tense means time. Some languages have no verb tenses to show time, but English has a complicated system with twelve tenses. We use present, past and future most often, but when we need to show variations in time, we use the other tenses. Tense consistency is crucial in writing, but when we must shift tense to show a change in time, it is important to know how to use the other tenses. Consider the seven changes in tense (time) in the passage below:

I currently live in Atlanta, Georgia. When I was a child, **I lived** in Florida, Alaska, and Oklahoma, but I always told my parents that I wanted to live in New York. Because my father was a naval officer, **I have lived** in twelve cities in the United States. Before I finished high school, **I had lived** in various cities in the U.S. and Europe. **I had been living** in Oklahoma for five years when my family moved for the last time. After college, I moved to Atlanta. In September, **I will have lived** in Atlanta for twenty years. Originally, **I was living** here to give myself and my family a sense of stability. Now, **I am living** with expectations of a wonderful retirement. When I retire, **I will live** in New York and spend winters in Florida. For years **I have been living** to meet other people’s needs. When I retire, **I will be living** on my own terms. This is the way all adults should strive to live. When I die, I hope that **I will have been living** on my own terms for a long time.

The chart below uses the verb “to live” to show what the tenses mean and how to form them.

Tense	Meaning	Form of Verb
Present	The present or a continuation from past to future <i>I currently live in Atlanta, Georgia.</i>	I live He <i>lives</i> She <i>lives</i>
Past	Past, completed action <i>When I was a child, I lived in Florida.</i>	I lived
Future	Future, action yet to occur <i>When I retire, I will live in New York...</i>	I will live present tense preceded by helping verb <i>will</i>
Present Perfect	Action completed recently in past, may continue to the present time <i>I have lived in twelve cities in the United States.</i>	I have lived past participle with helping verb <i>have</i>
Past Perfect	Shows time before a specific time in the past <i>Before I finished high school, I had lived in various cities...</i>	I had lived past participle preceded by helping verb <i>had</i>
Future Perfect	Shows time prior to a specific time in the future <i>In September, I will have lived in Atlanta for twenty years.</i>	I will have lived past participle preceded by <i>will have</i>
Present Progressive	Action in progress now <i>I am living with expectations...</i>	I am living progressive (-ing) preceded by <i>is, am, or are</i>
Past Progressive	Action in progress in the past <i>Originally, I was living here to give myself...</i>	I was living progressive (-ing) preceded by <i>was or were</i>
Future Progressive	Action in progress in the future <i>When I retire, I will be living on my own terms.</i>	I will be living progressive (-ing) preceded by <i>will be</i>
Present Perfect Progressive	Action in progress before another event in the present <i>For years I have been living to meet other people’s needs.</i>	I have been living progressive (-ing) preceded by <i>have been</i>
Past Perfect Progressive	Action in progress before another event in the past <i>I had been living in Oklahoma for five...</i>	I had been living progressive (-ing) preceded by <i>had been</i>
Future Perfect Progressive	Action in progress before another event in the future <i>When I die, I hope that I will have been living...</i>	I will have been living progressive (-ing) preceded by <i>will have been</i>