



and West Berliners since August 1961. They are also able to watch the joyous celebrations that erupted when all citizens of Berlin are reunited.

**Tip: Interestingly, and significantly, in academic writing, the present tense, particularly the simple present, is used three times more often than the past tense.**

### **The simple present tense**

With the exception of references to specific actions and events that occurred in the past, such as in case studies, historical analyses, etc., **large sections of your written assignments will be written in the simple present tense.** The simple present tense refers to actions/events that take place generally in the present, but not necessarily at the present moment of time.

**Task 2: The excerpt below is extracted from an essay on gender and reasoning skills. Underline all the uses of the simple present tense. How many are there? Do you understand why the simple present tense has been used?**

Women are a minority in school science classes and in the scientific society in the U.S., which are well-known phenomena. Research on gender and science shows us that gender differences in science education come from achievement, attitude, and motivation, or science course selection. The purpose of the study by Michael Shemesh, a professor in the Department of Education, is to investigate gender-related differences between gender-related reasoning skills and learning interests during the early adolescence stage, in the hope that the results can provide explanations for the differences that exist in school courses participation.

In this research, a videotaped group test is used to measure students' development. The test contains 12 videotaped simple experiments and demonstrations. At the end of each demonstration, students answer questions and justify their solutions. Students with correct answers receive two points. Then students are categorized by their points into concrete, transitional, or formal reasoners.

**Source:** Hinkel, E. (2004). Teaching Academic ESL Writing. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

**Task 3: Read the text below (the introduction to an essay) underlining all uses of the simple present tense. Again, can you understand - and explain - why this particular tense has been used?**

Whether or not to allow genetically modified food is a very controversial issue at the present time. A considerable amount of money has been spent over the past decade on research into altering the genes of cereals, fruits and vegetables in such a way that larger harvest can be obtained. If this research continues, the whole field of food production will change radically. Foods that contain genetically altered ingredients are commonly called GM foods, short for genetically modified food. This means that genes from plants or animals are taken and joined (spliced) with other genes from a different plant in order to change or alter the original plant. This essay explores some of the issues surrounding GM food and considers arguments from both the food companies and groups opposed to those companies.

**Task 4: In each of the three following paragraphs, which carry on from the paragraph above, decide upon a tense for the verbs in brackets. How many uses of the simple present? How many other tenses? Can you name and explain the uses of the other tenses? Watch out for passives and gerunds!**

On one side of the discussion ..... (1. *be*) the food companies who ..... (2. *say*) that using GM crops ..... (3. *mean*) that food in supermarkets ..... (4. *be*) of a higher quality and cheaper. On the other side of the discussion ..... (5. *be*) the various groups who ..... (6. *oppose*) the food companies because these groups ..... (7. *be*) very worried about the dangers of ..... (8. *introduce*) manufactured crops into the environment before there ..... (9. *be*) adequate time for full-scale testing. They ..... (10. *be*) also worried about the livelihoods of farmers who ..... (11. *become*) more closely ..... (12. *control*) by these multinational organisations.

The aim of ..... (1. *modify*) the generic structure of food crops ..... (2. *be*) to enable larger harvests from the same area of land. This can ..... (3. *achieve*) by ..... (4. *make*) the plants more resilient to pests and diseases, and by ..... (5. *increase*) their yields. The first point ..... (6. *mean*) that fewer plants ..... (7. *damage*), thus ..... (8. *increase*) the quality of the produce. Also, increases in yields ..... (9. *mean*) that there ..... (10. *be*) more produce from which to select, ..... (11. *result*) in higher quality food ..... (12. *be*) available to the consumer.

The food companies ..... (1. *claim*) that the increases ..... (2. *mention*) above ..... (3. *lead*) to food prices ..... (4. *fall*). This ..... (5. *apply*) not only to produce that ..... (6. *be*) unprocessed, but also to the ingredients in a wide variety of food on sale in the supermarket. If the ingredients can ..... (7. *sell*) more cheaply, this ..... (8. *result*) in a fall in the price of the foods that ..... (9. *contain*) them.

**Tip: Research has identified a number of important verbs that tend to occur predominantly in the simple present tense. These include:**

<i>care</i>	<i>doubt</i>	<i>imply</i>	<i>matter</i>	<i>mind</i>	
<i>tend</i>	<i>differ</i>	<i>know</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>suppose</i>	<i>want</i>

“In general terms, in academic writing the present tense is strongly associated with verbs that refer to mental and logical states, whereas the past tense denotes specific actions and events in the past....The present tense provides a relatively safe venue because, in academic text, the uses of the simple present tense are highly conventionalized and hence may be appropriate in various contexts.”

Source: Hinkel, 2004 p145

## The simple past tense

In academic writing, **past tense verbs represent fewer than 18% of all verbs that have tense** (phrases with modal verbs, e.g. *can*, *should*, which represent 10% to 15% of all verb phrases, are not marked for tense). Specifically, the past tense refers to activities and states that are not connected to the present.

The past form of regular (weak) verbs takes the marker *-ed*, whilst the past form of irregular (strong) verbs is unpredictable. Lists of irregular past verb forms are to be found in any good grammar book.

Be careful, many of the most common verbs in English are irregular (strong).

### **Task 1: Supply past tense forms for the following irregular (strong) verbs.**

*rise:*

*forecast:*

*choose:*

*mislead:*

*cost:*

*mistake:*

*fall:*

### **Task 2: In the box below, list the past forms of irregular verbs with which you are most familiar.**

### **Task 3: Underline/Highlight examples of the past tense in the following texts. Why has this particular tense been used? What tense is used in the final sentence, and why?**

a. In the summer of 1995, the Gatorade Company introduced Gatobar into test markets. The fruit flavoured energy bar was the company's first effort to extend its name beyond its sports drink. Gatobar, with only 110 calories, was targeted at active people who sought a low-fat bar for snacking. Gatorade also introduced another product - Sunbolt - which was a caffeinated drink. At present, the company works to find new venues for its products.

b. In 1994, Hilton Hotels Corporation announced plans for a reorganization of its internal operations, including the relocation of some functions of Las Vegas. The new corporate organization includes five key lines of responsibility.

**Source:** Hinkel, E. (2004). Teaching Academic ESL Writing. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

### **Task 4: Uses of the simple past**

In academic writing, the simple past is usually used to describe research conducted in the past if it is **not strongly linked to the present situation**. If it **is** linked to the present situation, a simple present tense is more appropriate.

#### **Examples**

*Zhao and Hancock (1995b) **proposed (propose?)** design rules for tear-out failure in steel connections. The yield strength of steels was **found** by Davis (1992) to range from...*

In report writing, simple past tense verbs are often used to describe the method employed.

### Examples

The researchers **surveyed** twenty organisations...

The samples **were tested** under two different conditions.

(Compare with the use of verb tense in Task 2, paragraph 2, page 2.)

They are also often used in the findings section.

### Examples

The survey **revealed** (*reveals?*) that...

Results **showed** (*show?*) that...

### Decide upon appropriate tenses for the verbs in the following sentences.

1. Cook (1995) ..... (*find*) that the solution ..... (*can*) be improved by ...
2. Early studies by Blake and Iwaki ..... (*show*) that ...
3. Haberditzl ..... (*claim*) that the velocity of many enzyme reactions .....  
(*decrease*) if the end product ..... (*have*) an increased paramagnetism.
4. Three types of request ..... (*identify*) as occurring with great frequency in the overall data.
5. Table 1 ..... (*show*) the imposition of students' requests as ..... (*determine*) by a survey among university students.
6. The request types and subset ..... (*examine*) in the present study ..... (*indicate*) in the shaded cells of Table 1.

Sources: <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/grammar/engineering/tense/1.xml>  
<http://lit.msu.edu/vol11num2/biesenbachlucas/default.html>

### Task 5: Homework

#### Read the short text below underlining/highlighting uses of the past tense.

a. Ballard and Clanchy (1991) proposed a continuum of attitudes to knowledge and specified learning approaches and strategies that corresponded to these attitudes. Drawing mainly on anecdotal evidence, they suggested that their three learning approaches, namely the "reproductive", "analytical" and "speculative" approaches, were characteristic of certain stages of schooling (in Australia) or of certain cultures (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991, p.11). In their consideration of learning strategies, however, they presented only a limited understanding of the ways in which the strategies assist learning. For example, they saw memorisation as a way of retaining "unreconstructed" (p.11) knowledge. In contrast, the work of Biggs (1996) demonstrates that memorisation serves the purpose of retaining ideas so that they can be considered and understood.

Now read the next text, comparing it with the one above. What subtle difference in message might you receive as a reader?

**b.** Ballard and Clanchy (1991) propose a continuum of attitudes to knowledge and specify learning approaches and strategies that correspond to these attitudes. Drawing mainly on anecdotal evidence, they suggest that their three learning approaches, namely the "reproductive", "analytical" and "speculative" approaches, are characteristic of certain stages of schooling (in Australia) or of certain cultures (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991, p.11). In their consideration of learning strategies, however, they have presented only a limited understanding of the ways in which the strategies assist learning. For example, they see memorisation as a way of retaining "unreconstructed" (p.11) knowledge. In contrast, the work of Biggs (1996) demonstrates that memorisation serves the purpose of retaining ideas so that they can be considered and understood.

### **NB (Nota Bene)**

**The Past tense can give more than a time perspective; it can distance the reader from the ideas being expressed. The tense you select for your verbs in your essay, report or literature review reveals a great deal more to your reader than just the time frame!**

Source: <http://www.education.monash.edu.au/students/current/study-resources/referencingconventions.html>