Verb Tense
Resource: *The OWL at Purdue* website, English Composition worksheet created by Jerry Passon

**Verbs** are words that show action (she walks) or a state of being (I am).

A **verb tense** is a grammatical category that indicates when a situation takes place.

The six verb tenses in English are present, present perfect, past, past perfect, future, and future perfect. They are described with examples below:

**Simple Present:** They *walk* every day at noon. (Simple present tense shows this activity occurs regularly, permanently happening, and/or now.)

**Present Perfect:** They *have walked* every day since the year started. (Present perfect tense shows this activity still continues.)

**Simple Past:** They *walked* yesterday. (Simple past tense shows events that occurred already.)

**Past Perfect:** They *had walked* to the store after I left. (Past perfect tense shows this activity occurred before another activity in the past.)

**Future:** They *will walk* tomorrow at noon. (Future tense shows this activity has not taken place yet, but will occur at a later time.)

**Future Perfect:** They *will have walked* every day at noon by the end of this year. (Future perfect tense predicts this activity has the potential to continue to occur until the year’s end.)

Potential Problems:
Problems in sequencing tenses usually occur with the **perfect tenses**, all of which are formed by adding an auxiliary or auxiliaries to the past participle, as discussed below.

**Present Perfect**
The present perfect consists of a **past participle** (the simple past form of the verb) with "has" or "have." It is used for action which began in the past but *is still going on in the present.*
1. Betty taught for ten years. (simple past)
2. Betty has taught for ten years. (present perfect)
The implication in (1) is that Betty has retired; in (2), that she is still teaching.

**Past Perfect**
The action of the past perfect is action completed in the past *before another action.*
1. John raised vegetables and later sold them. (past)
2. John sold vegetables that he had raised. (past perfect)
The implication in both sentences is that the vegetables were raised before they were sold.

**Future Perfect**
The future perfect tense indicates action that will have been completed in the future.
1. Saturday I will finish my housework. (simple future)
2. By Saturday noon, I will have finished my housework. (future perfect)

Infinitives, too, have perfect tense forms when combined with "have." Sometimes problems arise when infinitives are used with verbs such as "hope," "plan," "expect," "want," and "intend," all of which usually point to the future:
1. I wanted to go to the movie.
The perfect tense sets up a sequence by marking the action which began and usually was completed before the action in the main verb.
1. John had hoped to have won the trophy.
The main verb points back in time; the action of the perfect infinitive has been completed.