# past tense

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There are two tenses in English – past and present.

The past tense in English is used:

* to talk about the **past**
* to talk about **hypotheses**– things that are imagined rather than true.
* for **politeness**.

There are **four**past tense forms in English:

| **Tense** | **Form** |
| --- | --- |
| Past simple: | I worked |
| Past continuous: | I was working |
| Past perfect: | I had worked |
| Past perfect continuous: | I had been working |

We use these forms:

* to talk about the **past**:

He **worked**at McDonald’s. He **had worked**there since July..  
He **was working**at McDonald’s. He **had been working**since July.

* to refer to the **present**or **future**in **conditions**:

He could get a new job if he really **tried**.  
If Jack **was playing**they would probably win.

and **hypotheses**:

It might be dangerous. Suppose they **got**lost.  
I would always help someone who really **needed**help.

and **wishes**:

I wish it **wasn’t**so cold.

* In **conditions**, **hypotheses**and **wishes**, if we want to talk about the **past**, we always use the **past perfect**:

I would have helped him if he **had asked**.  
It was very dangerous, What if you **had got**lost?  
I wish I **hadn’t spent**so much money last month.

* We can use the past forms to talk about the **present**in a few **polite expressions**:

Excuse me, I **was wondering**if this **was**the train for York.  
I just **hoped**you **would**be able to help me.

<https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/english-grammar/verbs/past-tense>

# The Definition of a Retrospective Narrative

Written by Kori Morgan

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Written using past-tense, first-person narration, a retrospective narrative is told from the point of view of a character looking back on past events. The character narrating the story is sometimes an older person recalling when they were younger, while other retrospective narrators may be relating events from the recent past. No matter who the narrator is, the distance between the fictional character's past and present can make for a challenging, complex reading experience.

## Retrospective Reflection

One function of retrospective narratives is to add layers to a character by revealing a contrast between their past and present selves. Much like reflective essays, these stories clearly demonstrate how the events they recall changed them or led to personal growth. Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" provides a key example, as Scout Finch narrates the story of her childhood from a present-day vantage point. The narrative reveals how the trial of Tom Robinson and her encounter with Boo Radley showed her the importance of having empathy for others.

# A List of Techniques for Narrative Writing

*Kevin Lee* Updated April 17, 2017

## Flashback

In Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," the main character jumps back and forth between events in the past and present to tell his story. Writers use the flashback technique to provide background information about a narrative. Characters in a story can flash back in time using a variety of methods such as dream sequences and retelling of memories. The 2007 version of the movie "Titanic" begins with a flash back as the main character Rose recalls her time aboard the ill-fated ship. Flashbacks interrupt a narrative's linear time flow. They are a useful storytelling technique when implemented in a comprehensible fashion.

## Foreshadowing

Using the foreshadowing technique, a writer can give readers clues about events to come. These clues may be obvious or subtle. Narrative writers foreshadow future events using literary devices, such as dialog and symbols. For instance, a story might begin with a boy rescuing a woman. The writer may may portray him as a man who later works as a police officer. The "rescue" event foreshadowed his future occupation. Moviegoers often see this technique in mystery films where a camera lingers briefly over an object that has significance later in the story. Writers must consider their target audience when using foreshadowing. An adult narrative, for example, might contain subtle symbolic clues that younger readers might not catch.

## Third Person Omniscient

Writers create stories using first-, second- or third-person points of view. When telling a story, using a third person omniscient point of view, writers tell a story without the use of an explicit narrator. The omniscient voice is cast as aware of everything that is happening and can describe any scene at any location and know what characters are thinking. A narrator using a third-person omniscient point of view also communicates directly with readers. For instance, the narrator may suddenly say, "I'm sure you have experienced such an incident." This pulls the reader into the story by avoiding the intervention of the narratorial voice.

## Dual Narrative

Writers using the dual narrative technique tell stories using two perspectives. This is an effective way to give readers details about an event, character or scene. For instance, a firefighter in a story may speak of his experience in a burning building. Another character witnessing the event might next provide additional details about the scene. This technique allows readers to gain a larger perspective of the whole event. Crime writers often using dual narratives to give readers glimpses of intense action on one hand and a character's personal reflection on the other.

# Literary Elements of Fiction

*Cynthia Tucker* Updated April 04, 2017

## Characterization

Characterization refers to the use of literary elements to create realistic characters and elicit a particular reaction to them. Characters may be one-dimensional, meaning they are not fully developed and serve only a small purpose in the story. Main characters are normally fully developed and carry the story, often undergoing character development along the way. The main character is called the protagonist, and the character who opposes him is the antagonist.

## Plot

Plot refers to the series of events and activities and the way they work together within the story. The author often writes in chronological fashion. He may also use techniques such as flashback or "in medias res," which means beginning the story in the middle. Most plots contain a series of conflicts that reach a climax or resolution by the end. Characters often experience growth throughout the book and have learned valuable lessons.

## Setting

A story's setting refers to the time and place in which events occur. Events may take place in New York, Paris or Maine. They could take place in the current year, in 1950 or even in the future. Both time and place set the story's atmosphere and mood. The writer may establish setting through either narration or dialogue.

## Point of View

Point of view refers to the person through whose eyes the reader is viewing the story. The most common points of view are first person and third person. The first-person narrator is a character in the story and speaks using the pronoun "I." The third-person narrator can be omniscient, limited or objective. An omniscient narrator can provide any information about events and characters, including the thoughts, feelings and motives. The limited narrator relates only the thoughts and feelings of the main character or a few select characters. The objective narrator provides only observable details.

## Style

Style refers to the language conventions a writer uses to create a particular effect such as dialogue, diction, phrases and sentence structure. An author's style is often referred to as his voice and refers to the kind of person the narrator appears to be. A story's voice may be comical, serious or dramatic. Both style and voice contribute to a story's tone, which refers to the attitude of the story towards its subject. <http://education.seattlepi.com/definition-retrospective-narrative-5291.html>

### ****First-Person Narration****

Perspective matters in storytelling.

In this mode, the narrator is usually the protagonist or central character in the story.  But even if this character is not the protagonist, he or she is directly involved in the events of the story and is telling the tale “first hand.”  First-person narration is easy to identify, because the narrator will be telling the story from “I’s” perspective.  Readers should watch for the narrator’s use of first-person pronouns- “I, me, my, our, us, we, myself, and ourselves,” as these will usually indicate that the passage is narrated from first-person perspective.  Remember, with this skill readers are trying to identify the perspective of the narrator; therefore, **one must ignore the dialogue of characters**(indicated by “quotation marks”) **and solely focus on narration, otherwise one is not analyzing the narrator’s point of view.** <https://www.ereadingworksheets.com/point-of-view/>

**It's a matter of personal taste and judgment.**

**Here's what I'm familiar with: a lot of people see present-tense as a description of something happening right now, while past-tense is a narration of events that have already concluded. So:**

**Some readers find present-tense more immediate and, well, tense.**

**Some readers take issue with past-tense narration, seeing it as an unjustified device: If somebody's telling us this story, who is it? Why is he telling us the story? If the narration is first-person, that means the narrator must have made it through the story pretty OK, no?**

**Most readers accept above issues as unimportant side-effects of convention. E.g. if a narrator dies at the end of the story, they won't shout "wait, so who just wrote the whole thing?" - they don't see the narration as being part of the established facts of the story.**

**I think a lot of people find past-tense more natural because present-tense storytelling is not something you encounter in day to day life. In real life, people tell you things that have happened; it's rare to be subjected to a real-time report. Think of the exceptions - e.g. sports commentaries and on-the-spot new reports; they can be very exciting, but they're rarely personal or possessing narrative structure. And those kind of reports would probably be exhausting to listen to for too long of a stretch.**

**Fiction presents things happening "now" in a medium used primarily to describe things already over. That's where the issue comes from. But in most cases, I think that readers prefer the comfort of more familiar phrasing over the increased accuracy of using a more appropriate tense. The familiarity makes the inaccuracies accepted and invisible.**

**As Kate said, current convention favors past-tense writing, so all other considerations aside - anything else may feel somewhat jarring or unusual to many readers. And both are popular, familiar and accepted enough that you can really pick whichever feels most comfortable and appropriate for you, as long as you remain consistent within a single piece.**

[Narrative time questions](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/73569/narrative-time-questions)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| up vote2down vote[favorite](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/73569/narrative-time-questions) | I am writing a fiction story in first person with the narrative in past tense but I find I want to use many words that indicate present time such as *now, this, tonight, tomorrow*, etc. I've seen this in some fiction novels, but I've heard from some people that this is mixing tenses. Here are some examples:  "Now, I didn't know what to think."  "I knew this time, once school resumed..."  "He was supposed to start school today."  "They were now happy to remain on the easy runs."  "She was now practically running."  "This would give me a full day... "  I would like the novel to have a present feel rather than feel it is being told about a distant past... but I want to be grammatically correct.  [tense](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/tagged/tense) [past-tense](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/tagged/past-tense)   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/q/73569)[improve this question](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/73569/edit) | [edited Jun 10 '16 at 0:45](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/73569/revisions)  [[https://i.stack.imgur.com/4BAP0.png?s=32&g=1](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8084/araucaria)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8084/araucaria)  [Araucaria](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8084/araucaria)  **22k**33582 | asked Nov 18 '15 at 22:48  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/d399f5656fd9ef0304e99158c6db4989?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/26601/christy-g)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/26601/christy-g)  [Christy G](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/26601/christy-g)  **14**1 | |
|  | * 3   **Now** and **today** can refer to the characters' present-time set in a fictive past. That's OK. – [Tᴚoɯɐuo](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/10264/t%e1%b4%9ao%c9%af%c9%90uo" \o "71,827 reputation) [Nov 19 '15 at 11:04](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/73569/narrative-time-questions#comment141019_73569)   * 1   None of the phrases you've posted sound awkward, and I think they convey the timing you want – [Peter](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/26439/peter" \o "53,803 reputation)[Dec 6 '15 at 4:07](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/73569/narrative-time-questions#comment144404_73569)   * I agree most of these phrases sound right. But I think "He was supposed to start school today" could use "that day" or "the same day" instead of "today", otherwise it sounds as if you are referring to persent time (it could be OK in a newspaper headline). – [laugh](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/27840/laugh) [Dec 24 '15 at 15:04](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/73569/narrative-time-questions#comment148235_73569) * I think this may be correct if it appears between inverted commas meaning that you are reproducing exactly the words someone said, referring to someone else who did not turn up on that specific day. – [lalynacar.](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/31384/lalynacar" \o "136 reputation) [May 12 '16 at 18:50](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/73569/narrative-time-questions#comment174172_73569)   Top of Form  Bottom of Form  add a comment |

1 Answer

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|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| up vote1down vote | In *normal* writing mixing tenses is frowned upon as bad grammatical form. For example, one wouldn't say:  I **run** to the store and **picked** up some food.  In the case of narratives and stories in general however, often times the narrator and the characters speak in different tenses entirely. It is not uncommon to see things like this:  She **cranked** the ancient lever heaving its weight high above her head. She shouted "Why **is**this so heavy!"  In short:  Your use of character dialogue is correct, you can *"switch"* tenses in this case. |

<https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/73569/narrative-time-questions>

[Is it correct to use multiple tenses within a paragraph in a story?](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/23579/is-it-correct-to-use-multiple-tenses-within-a-paragraph-in-a-story)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| up vote5down vote[favorite](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/23579/is-it-correct-to-use-multiple-tenses-within-a-paragraph-in-a-story?rq=1) | I was wondering what tense I should use for writing a story. What I use is a Present and past tense mixture. But I am not sure whether they are right or wrong. If I write something general, I use present tense.  The temple is situated on the river bank.  But if I describe some action, or a situation when the action occurs, I use past tense.  The temple **is situated** on the river bank. In the evening many people **gather** in the temple.The river **runs** dry most of the year. By the time I **reached** the river bank the sun **had** already set. I **came** far, and the journey **was** very troublesome. There **are** cut marks all over my face, and hands.  *(Note that this is NOT a proofreading request.)*  I am not sure how to determine the tense. Is there a general rule to follow in situations like this? I would prefer an answer that's applicable beyond just this specific short paragraph.  [grammar](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/tagged/grammar) [tense](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/tagged/tense)   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/q/23579)[improve this question](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/23579/edit) | [edited May 16 '14 at 14:05](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/23579/revisions)  [[https://i.stack.imgur.com/QvrTc.gif?s=32&g=1](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/748/jonathan-garber)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/748/jonathan-garber)  [Jonathan Garber](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/748/jonathan-garber)  **3,101**11435 | asked May 16 '14 at 13:58  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/370bbbbb77c32486c923552e77a09c08?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG&f=1](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/3463/man-from-india)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/3463/man-from-india)  [Man\_From\_India](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/3463/man-from-india)  **8,637**51555 | |
|  | * 2   As far as mixing tenses in the manner of your example, you need to split it into multiple paragraphs. Otherwise the reader simply gets confused trying to determine when things happen (or have happened? Or will? Or sort of did? We don't know.) But that gets into questions of writing style rather than language. – [Jonathan Garber](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/748/jonathan-garber) [May 16 '14 at 14:09](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/23579/is-it-correct-to-use-multiple-tenses-within-a-paragraph-in-a-story?rq=1#comment44275_23579)   * Related questions on Writers.SE: [writers.stackexchange.com/q/8696/1993](http://writers.stackexchange.com/q/8696/1993), [writers.stackexchange.com/q/4428/1993](http://writers.stackexchange.com/q/4428/1993), [writers.stackexchange.com/q/6895/1993](http://writers.stackexchange.com/q/6895/1993). (Hat tip to Neil Fein for finding these.) – [Monica Cellio](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/1517/monica-cellio) [May 18 '14 at 22:03](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/23579/is-it-correct-to-use-multiple-tenses-within-a-paragraph-in-a-story?rq=1#comment44563_23579)   Top of Form  Bottom of Form  add a comment |

2 Answers

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| up vote8down vote | I think where you run into trouble is in the last two sentences of the paragraph.  I came far, and the journey was very troublesome. There are cut marks all over my face, and hands.  From the previous sentence (“By the time I reached the river bank. . .”) the reader is pointed to a specific moment in time. These last two sentences are then phrased in the simple past and present continuous, respectively. If I am correct that these last two sentences refer to the time you reached the river bank, they would be clearer as:  I **had come** far, and the journey **had been** very troublesome. There **were** cut marks. . .  As far as a general rule, there aren’t strict prohibitions on combining any number of tenses in a single paragraph. My advice would be to study [past perfect](http://www.englishpage.com/verbpage/pastperfect.html), and diagram your paragraph temporally, like so:  enter image description here   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/a/23584)[improve this answer](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/23584/edit) | [edited May 16 '14 at 17:39](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/23584/revisions) | answered May 16 '14 at 15:05  [[https://i.stack.imgur.com/pNDKO.png?s=32&g=1](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/2274/tyler-james-young)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/2274/tyler-james-young)  [Tyler James Young](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/2274/tyler-james-young)  **10.5k**12451 | |
|  | add a comment |
| up vote0down vote | If it's a story, then it must have occurred in the past. Accordingly I recommend that you use the simple past, past continuous, past perfect, and past perfect continuous tenses exclusively. I see no point in using any present tense. |

<https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/23579/is-it-correct-to-use-multiple-tenses-within-a-paragraph-in-a-story?rq=1>

[Switching from past to present tense?](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| up vote8down vote[favorite](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense)  2 | I'm thinking of writing a novel where my character narrates flashbacks through the hardest times of his life written in past tense, leading up to the present tense. I was considering switching to present tense only directly before and throughout the climax of the book so that the reader can understand the character's actions.  By writing the beggining of the book as a series of flashbacks I can skip through many years without boring the reader. Then, when he has described the events up to the present day, he will describe his current location and condition and proceed to initiate the climax.  So would this kind of switch be ok for a book written in first person point of view?  By the way, I'm not a pro writer at all this was just an idea that I had and would like to try.  [tenses](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/tagged/tenses)   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | [share](https://writing.stackexchange.com/q/6895)[improve this question](https://writing.stackexchange.com/posts/6895/edit) | [edited Dec 25 '12 at 2:12](https://writing.stackexchange.com/posts/6895/revisions) | asked Dec 25 '12 at 1:54  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/7f2ddff0e5801dc705eecdf9336f3eeb?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4518/nick)](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4518/nick)  [Nick](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4518/nick)  **168**5 | |
|  | * 2   If you want the Nobel prize, you should probably put the climax *before* the flashbacks, or in the middle. That's *artsy.* They'll love that. And make sure to borrow a line from a famous poet for your title. If you want to go all the way, screw around with your punctuation. But that takes real nerve. – [Aerovistae](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/3421/aerovistae" \o "2,083 reputation) [Dec 25 '12 at 7:27](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11039_6895)   * 1   Now now, Aerovistae, be gentle to the newbie. Have some eggnog and read a more conventionally-structured novel. You'll feel better. :) – [Lauren Ipsum](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/553/lauren-ipsum) [Dec 25 '12 at 13:00](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11042_6895)  Top of Form  Bottom of Form  add a comment |

3 Answers

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| up vote5down voteaccepted | That actually might be really interesting. Particularly if you label the flashbacks as "1958" or "Forty years ago," and then the present is "now" or "Present day." And if your flashbacks get closer together (one year ago, six months ago, four months ago, six weeks ago, three weeks ago, one week ago, three days ago, thirty-six hours ago...) and speed up, that adds its own tension.  I say go for it and see if you can make it work. At worst, if it fails, you'll only have to change the last part to past tense.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | [share](https://writing.stackexchange.com/a/6896)[improve this answer](https://writing.stackexchange.com/posts/6896/edit) | answered Dec 25 '12 at 4:21  [[https://i.stack.imgur.com/bsBNw.jpg?s=32&g=1](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/553/lauren-ipsum)](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/553/lauren-ipsum)  [Lauren Ipsum](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/553/lauren-ipsum)  **57.5k**468164 | |
|  | * 1   "Even if it doesn't work, it'll be easy to salvage" is a great rule of thumb for when to try something new in any endeavor! :] – [C. A. McCann](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4373/c-a-mccann) [Dec 26 '12 at 15:26](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11052_6896)   * 1   Why be so obvious about them? Wouldn't it be far better to let the reader figure out that they're flashbacks by the narrative? – [spiceyokooko](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4459/spiceyokooko" \o "660 reputation) [Dec 27 '12 at 17:07](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11063_6896)   * 1) Because it might not be obvious, especially if you open the book with a flashback. How are we supposed to know we are "flashing back" to childhood and that the "present" narrator is an adult if the first chapter starts with a child? 2) There's a fine line between "let the reader figure it out" and "making the reader struggle to figure out what's happening." I may want my readers to wrestle with moral issues, but I don't want them to fight for location and time. Which see Jay's answer. – [Lauren Ipsum](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/553/lauren-ipsum) [Dec 27 '12 at 18:28](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11067_6896)   Top of Form  Bottom of Form  add a comment |
| up vote5down vote | I think that beginning with a series of flashbacks might be difficult for the reader to follow if there was no sense of what they are moving towards. This might not be exactly what you are doing, but in any case my advice would be to consider an [*in medias res*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_medias_res) structure. Instead of narrating consecutive flashbacks leading up to the present, begin with a moment just before the climax in present tense, and then revert to flashbacks. This introduces the narrator, introduces the conflict, and gives some context to the flashbacks. It also gives the reader added motivation to figure out what links the flashbacks. The key when using flashbacks of any kind, though, is in the effectiveness of the narrative transitions into and out of the present.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | [share](https://writing.stackexchange.com/a/6897)[improve this answer](https://writing.stackexchange.com/posts/6897/edit) | answered Dec 25 '12 at 5:14  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/16eba3e8364e21c020aef8a7382cfbc8?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4390/tylerharms)](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4390/tylerharms)  [tylerharms](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4390/tylerharms)  **750**1614 | |
|  | * 1   AUGH NO PLEASE NO That technique does work but it has been DONE. TO. DEATH. in every narrative medium in the last five years. I cannot turn on the TV without seeing an episode of something opening right before the climax and then cutting to "Twelve hours ago..." or "Two days ago...." If you label your flashbacks, you can even start your book with "Twenty-five years ago" and people will get it. But opening with the end is starting to feel like a cheap way to get the reader hooked. You can do better. – [Lauren Ipsum](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/553/lauren-ipsum) [Dec 25 '12 at 13:02](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11043_6897)   * 2   this technique is as old as storytelling. homer employed it, so did virgil, so did the norse epic singers. if it has been used contritely that is no fault of the technique. for that matter, comparing the tropes of television writing to novel writing is dangerous for precisely this reason. television is laden with contrived storytelling elements due to time constraints. an *in medias res* narrative structure doesn't have to begin just before the climax. the purpose, as i see it, is in creating early conflict. thus, homer begins the odyssey with odysseus on the brink of death. to be cont... – [tylerharms](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4390/tylerharms" \o "750 reputation) [Dec 25 '12 at 16:18](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11045_6897)   * 2   sure, there are countless bad examples of a story that begins with someone dangling from a cliff edge and a narrator saying something like, "before we go any further, let me back up to last week, when this precarious position..." that's contrite, that's been done, but that's an issue of personal style and not a criticism of the form. the same could be said of dateline tags leading us through flashback sequences. i'm not going to go any further. i agree that it could be contrite, but so could anything done poorly... – [tylerharms](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4390/tylerharms" \o "750 reputation) [Dec 25 '12 at 16:24](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11046_6897)   * 1   i'm offering a counter-perspective to OPs conflict. i don't know what the story is, but i think the *in medias res* structure is valid and has precedent, regardless of how television butchers it. – [tylerharms](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4390/tylerharms" \o "750 reputation) [Dec 25 '12 at 16:28](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11047_6897)   * 1   I really want the climax to be a surprise so the reader is kept in suspense, instead of them already knowing the ending. – [Nick](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4518/nick) [Dec 25 '12 at 20:45](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11048_6897)   * @Nick: This structure does not require that you begin in the heat of the climax, but just that you not begin at the beginning in order to establish conflict and character. Dostoyevsky's *The Gambler* is a good example of a 1st p. narrative that begins in medias res, at a moment near the climax, and provides a nice cliffhanger wherein the reader is wondering who the main character is and what mess he has gotten himself into. The denouement is withheld until the appropriate time, and the in medias res beginning makes us hunger for that moment. – [tylerharms](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4390/tylerharms" \o "750 reputation) [Dec 26 '12 at 16:43](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11054_6897) * Yes and no. If you begin in medias res, then the reader knows that somewhere near the end, John is going to end up next to a pool with a vest full of Semtex strapped to him. If you begin at the beginning, we don't know about the Semtex, the bad guy, or even the pool. So anyone could end up anywhere doing anything. On the other hand, if we begin at the pool, then every time a pool is mentioned, or John leaves the room, we might freak out wondering if THIS is the moment. So both techniques could work, but I prefer the former. – [Lauren Ipsum](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/553/lauren-ipsum) [Dec 27 '12 at 18:31](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11068_6897) * I have to agree that both ideas are appealing and could fit the book. However I am still leaning toward the flashback beginning for a few reasons, first I avoid having to use a line like 20 years earlier. second, I can introduce the character while hes still young and surprise the reader when hes suddenly 10 years older. but then there is still the issue of rising action during the more boring flashbacks necessary for the reader to understand the character. – [Nick](https://writing.stackexchange.com/users/4518/nick) [Dec 28 '12 at 1:24](https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense#comment11075_6897)   Top of Form  Bottom of Form  add a comment |

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| up vote3down vote | One can debate the validity of the flashback technique, as Lauren Ipsum and Tylerharms do in the comments on another answer. Like many techniques, it can be done well and it can be done lamely.  (Oh, how I hate movies that start out with a character brooding over the scene of the disaster -- whether it's the end of his marriage or the end of the world or whatever -- and then he stares soulfully at the camera and says, "Let me remember, how did it all begin ..." Lame lame lame!!)  What's the difference between a good use of flashbacks and a lame use of flashbacks? I wish I knew simple criteria I could give.  One point: Make it clear to the reader what's the present and what's a flashback. I've read many books where I got really confused because it wasn't clear what was what. I'd be halfway through a scene before I realized it was a flashback. I recall one book where I was halfway through the book before I realized that it was all a flashback from the first scene. Whether that's a simple, "Twenty years ago ..." or something more artistic, make it obvious. |

<https://writing.stackexchange.com/questions/6895/switching-from-past-to-present-tense>

[Do verb tenses have to remain absolutely consistent through a piece of writing?](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/27624/do-verb-tenses-have-to-remain-absolutely-consistent-through-a-piece-of-writing)

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| up vote10down vote[favorite](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/27624/do-verb-tenses-have-to-remain-absolutely-consistent-through-a-piece-of-writing?rq=1)  1 | Generally, I've been told that I should maintain consistency of tenses in my writing. That is, if I begin a piece of writing in the past tense, I should ensure that all verbs agree with that through the document. But as I read more articles, books, and other such things, I get confused by the verb tenses used by these other authors.  For example, I copied a portion of an article below. I believe it started in the past tense, yet the second paragraph switched to the present tense (it **sounds** like the...) In the third paragraph, the past and present usage is mixed (the word **gave** is in past tense, yet **remain** is in the present tense). I understand that the writing in the article is most likely correct. But why can it switch verb tenses and be ok while I was told in school by my professor to keep my essays in a single tense? Is there a guideline I can adhere to?  **REPRESSED** for decades, the anger burst like a summer storm. Rioting youths **flooded** city streets. The shaken regime granted hasty concessions: freer speech; an end to one-party rule; real elections. But when Islamists **surged** towards victory in the first free elections the army stepped in, provoking a bloody struggle that lasted until the people, exhausted, acquiesced to a government similar in outlook, repression and even personnel to that which they had revolted against in the first place.  It **sounds** like the recent history of several Arab countries: Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen, the states of the 2011 Arab spring, have seen some or all of the story unfold. But this is also, and originally, Algeria, a quarter of a century earlier—the first major political crisis in the age of modern Islamism.  A flurry of freedom in the late 1980s **gave** way to a vicious civil war in the 1990s that left as many as 200,000 dead and Algeria’s Islamists more or less defeated, but not eradicated. Today the country’s citizens **remain** powerless spectators to a continued stand-off between what they call le pouvoir—the entrenched oligarchy that controls the state, the oil money and the army—and the now-marginalised Islamist radicals, who serve more as a justification for ongoing repression than as any sort of inspiration to ordinary people.  [tense](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/tagged/tense) [verbs](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/tagged/verbs)   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/q/27624)[improve this question](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/27624/edit) | [edited Jul 7 '14 at 16:53](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/27624/revisions)  [[https://i.stack.imgur.com/QvrTc.gif?s=32&g=1](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/748/jonathan-garber)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/748/jonathan-garber)  [Jonathan Garber](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/748/jonathan-garber)  **3,101**11435 | asked Jul 7 '14 at 16:31  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/c19a5b19bc4cec2b18555cac21f3b78e?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8600/user133466)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8600/user133466)  [user133466](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8600/user133466)  **176**14 | |
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5 Answers

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| up vote9down vote | The excerpt changes tenses because it's talking about things at different times. The first paragraph describes completed actions which took place in the past, hence the use of past tense. The second uses the present because it's talking about things at the current time or the recent past. The third begins by talking about the past, then proceeds to discuss the current state.  Think of the first paragraph like a big quotation. It's not describing any specific actual events - indeed, the second paragraph says that the first could describe several places - just some generic history. Because it's talking about *history*, it's in the past tense.  *It sounds* in the second paragraph is talking about the first paragraph. This is in the present because you're currently reading the article. Its words *sound* a certain way at the time you read them. Incidentally, I find this:  But this is also, and originally, Algeria, a quarter of a century earlier—the first major political crisis in the age of modern Islamism.  somewhat confusing; specifically, the aside about Algeria. I get the meaning (I think!), but I think the remark should be expanded a bit, and probably in the past tense.  The third paragraph opens by discussing completed actions in the past:  A flurry of freedom in the late 1980s gave way...  This first sentence sets the stage with some historical context. After giving us a bit information about the past, it goes on to describe the present state of affairs, appropriately shifting to the present tense to do so:  Today the country’s citizens remain powerless spectators...  Past, present and future match up with the times being described. Very generally speaking, you should work towards maintaining a single tense in your writing, especially if you aren't comfortable with the fine details of changing them. But there are plenty of reasons to change tenses. For example:   * Simple descriptions of events, as commonly seen in news, should be in the relevant tense (past events in past tense, etc). * Literary foreshadowing might call for future tense: *he gazed over his shoulder at her. He would never do so again.* * Dialogue written as spoken or thought by persons involved should be tensed as it normally would when speaking; e.g. *she said, "I will go to the store tomorrow."*  |  |  | | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/a/27626)[improve this answer](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/27626/edit) | answered Jul 7 '14 at 17:00  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/36acb82112338e08f1a7e1975799d1a0?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/6407/esoteric-screen-name)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/6407/esoteric-screen-name)  [Esoteric Screen Name](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/6407/esoteric-screen-name)  **6,985**11332 | |
|  | * thank you for you thorough reply. Switching verb tenses in a writing seems daunting for me. It's confusing to me baucause it's contradictory to what my professor had told me, which was to keep the tense in my essays in the past tense. Is it because there are different categories of writing? Is there a general guide on categories of writing, whats the tense of verbs should be used. And how one can go about the writing correctly without making shifts in verb tenses? Thank you! – [user133466](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8600/user133466) [Jul 7 '14 at 18:17](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/27624/do-verb-tenses-have-to-remain-absolutely-consistent-through-a-piece-of-writing?rq=1#comment52000_27626) * The main body of your writing should be in a single tense (either past or present). In, say, a novel, this means the general narrative and exposition, not the dialogue. In a news report, it's the discussion of the main point or argument, not predictions or additional context. I'm afraid there's no easy guide to this. Learning to write English well is extremely challenging, and many, perhaps even most, native speakers never master it. For now, try to keep everything in the past tense except for direct quotations and spoken dialogue. Use "after that", "then", etc to help set the time frame. – [Esoteric Screen Name](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/6407/esoteric-screen-name) [Jul 8 '14 at 0:58](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/27624/do-verb-tenses-have-to-remain-absolutely-consistent-through-a-piece-of-writing?rq=1#comment52031_27626) * I think a more general guideline might be: "**Always use the same tense for the same point on the timeline from a given perspective**" For example writing from the present about the past could use the historical present or the simple past, but once selected, you should stick with your chosen tense. – [Jim](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/147/jim) [Jul 8 '14 at 2:02](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/27624/do-verb-tenses-have-to-remain-absolutely-consistent-through-a-piece-of-writing?rq=1#comment52040_27626)   Top of Form  Bottom of Form  add a comment |
| up vote3down vote | It is not a hard-and-fast rule that there needs to be the same prevailing tense throughout an entire article or even in one paragraph. You are allowed to change verb tenses to reflect the temporal relationships between what has happened in the past (seen in the entire first paragraph) and the authors commentary that is being made at the present time (in the second paragraph). The present nature of the second paragraph is emphasized in the expression to "have seen some ... of the story unfold"--the story is not over yet and cannot be expressed entirely in the past tense. In the third paragraph the use of two tenses is necessary for explaining how the current state of affairs is influenced by past events.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/a/27625)[improve this answer](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/27625/edit) | [edited Jul 7 '14 at 16:55](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/27625/revisions) | answered Jul 7 '14 at 16:47  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/a92fce76d5270cce83ba87d539e35d37?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG&f=1](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8501/obfuskater)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8501/obfuskater)  [Obfuskater](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8501/obfuskater)  **2,028**417 | |
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| up vote0down vote | The first paragraph is telling us what happened in the past, so it's properly past tense.  The second is talking about the story told by the first. Even though the story is about the past (Algeria, 28 years ago) you are reading the story now, so it is present tense.  The last paragraph mixes it up. It starts taking about the past state, and then in the next sentence talks about the current state.  It ok to use different tenses, as long as they remain consistent to the information being delivered. You don't want to use present tense with history, or past tense for describing future plans. It's ok to talk about history and future plans in the same piece though, or even the same sentence  You asked a question so I will submit this answer.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/a/27628)[improve this answer](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/27628/edit) | answered Jul 7 '14 at 17:26  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/1f57eeeebb4c48d8405c11446f679f05?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG&f=1](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8390/chris)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8390/chris)  [Chris](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8390/chris)  **191**3 | |
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| up vote0down vote | This block of text seems so clear to me as an English speaker that I get the impression you're adventuring into reading texts which are beyond your own level of comprehension - which is often a very good way to learn.  What concerns me is that you misunderstand what is being said in the second paragraph - which is pretty much what would be said in any language.  I'm sure that if your read this paragraph again carefully, it should become clear that the writer is talking about "how the history reads" today.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/a/27642)[improve this answer](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/27642/edit) | answered Jul 8 '14 at 0:36  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/4624d2d0145d5fb51eabe8273dada64c?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG&f=1](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8608/doc)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8608/doc)  [doc](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/8608/doc)  **659**36 | |
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| up vote-1down vote | The 2nd paragraph above is a good example of why you wouldn't want to change tense. It shifts to present tense to discuss relatively recent history, but it's still history. The events happened 3 years ago and should probably be in past tense. The switch is especially confusing in the sentence about Algeria doing something both now and a quarter-century ago. That's probably the sort of confusion your professor wants to help you avoid.  Rewritten 2nd para:  The recent history of several Arab countries mirrored these earlier events. Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen, the states of the 2011 Arab spring, saw some or all of the same story unfold. Algeria, a quarter of a century earlier, was the first major political crisis in the age of modern Islamism.  Rewriting this paragraph keeps the verb tense more consistent until the last paragraph when the discussion explicitly shifts to "today" and present tense. It's not entirely clear from the text whether the author considers "Algeria a quarter century ago" to be the first major political crisis, or rather is saying that "the Arab Spring" was the first.  It is generally good advice to remain consistent through a paper as a whole, but you must consider the context. It's clear in the 3rd paragraph above that the time frame switches to compare "the 1980s" to "today," so it wouldn't make sense to use all past tense. The important thing is that you have enough context and correct subject-verb tense agreement to make clear which events happened when.  Example where 1 action has happened; the other is happening now or hasn't happened yet.  OK: (different tenses, each appropriate for the time when the action occurs)  "I ran to the store last week, but today I am walking/will walk."  NOT OK: (consistent verb tense, but it doesn't make sense)  "I ran to the store last week, but today I will walked."  "I run to the store last week, but today I will walk." |

<https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/27624/do-verb-tenses-have-to-remain-absolutely-consistent-through-a-piece-of-writing?rq=1>

# [Consistency when it comes to using verbs](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/5689/consistency-when-it-comes-to-using-verbs)

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| up vote2down vote[favorite](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/5689/consistency-when-it-comes-to-using-verbs?rq=1) | Should I be consistent when using verb tenses? Once I use simple past, do I need to stick to it through out my conversation? Please see my examples below, as I think they would better explain what I'm trying to ask.  "Mom **asked** me to go grocery shopping, but I **was wondering** if you **could** go instead. Here **is**the list of items she **wants**."  "Mom **asked** me to go grocery shopping, but I **was wondering** if you **could** go instead. Here **is**the list of items she **wanted**."  I'm not sure if I should keep my tenses consistent and use "wanted". It seems like Mom still wants the items on the list, so I'm not sure if I should go with "wants".  [tense](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/tagged/tense) [verbs](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/tagged/verbs)   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/q/5689)[improve this question](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/5689/edit) | [edited Jul 11 '13 at 22:23](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/5689/revisions)  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/6608ed51ef162cd9ebbbaf62c9c95746?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/32/stoneyb)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/32/stoneyb)  [StoneyB](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/32/stoneyb)  **163k**9216386 | asked Apr 23 '13 at 2:51  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/9f6d8b7528cfab1da0b692ddd9e5156b?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/1319/jess)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/1319/jess)  [jess](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/1319/jess)  **746**41833 | |
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## 2 Answers

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| up vote2down vote | Grammatically "the list of items she wants" and "the list of items she wanted" are both correct. What it changes is the meaning.  I would use the past tense in the following case.  Mom asked me to go grocery shopping, but I was wondering if you could go instead. Here is the list of items she **wanted**. Ask her if she wants something else.  The past tense in this case would mean the list is not updated; you are not sure she wants something more, or changed her mind about something she asked you to buy. It could be she asked you to go to the grocery store one hour before you could effectively go, and now that you are asking to somebody else to go to the grocery store you are not sure the list is updated.  The present tense would imply the list is updated.  In "here **is** the list" you use the present tense; you don't say "here **was** the list."   |  |  | | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/a/5695)[improve this answer](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/5695/edit) | answered Apr 23 '13 at 9:20  [[https://i.stack.imgur.com/wCDLH.png?s=32&g=1](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/95/kiamlaluno)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/95/kiamlaluno)  [kiamlaluno](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/95/kiamlaluno)  **15.3k**1670144 | |
|  | add a comment |
| up vote1down vote | You need to use the tense that conveys the meaning you intend. In other words, using consistent tenses is not the same as using the same tense throughout.  You discern correctly that since Mom still wants the items on the list it is preferred to use she wants.  You would only use she wanted if, for example, you think enough time has passed since she asked you to go, that she may have changed her mind about some of the items. |

<https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/5689/consistency-when-it-comes-to-using-verbs?rq=1>

[Is incomplete sentence bad to use? [duplicate]](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/91324/is-incomplete-sentence-bad-to-use)

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| up vote0down vote[favorite](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/91324/is-incomplete-sentence-bad-to-use/91325) | **This question already has an answer here:**   * [Why do people, incorrectly, begin a sentence with the word “But”?](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/52239/why-do-people-incorrectly-begin-a-sentence-with-the-word-but) *4 answers*   I like to begin some sentence with "And", especially when I wrote some stories at Reddit. I have someone there who voluntary fix my grammar, and I noticed that he often fix my sentence that begins with "And". But I found beginning sentence with "And" feels more natural to the context of the paragraph. And there, I did it again, I started a sentence with "But". Oh, and another "And" there. Duh. Is there any rule of how to use incomplete sentence correctly? Or is it a big no no ever after in English?  [sentence-construction](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/tagged/sentence-construction)   |  |  | | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/q/91324)[improve this question](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/91324/edit) | asked May 30 '16 at 2:08  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/17f1e4ed531bf4b9b2c0ce3e273e3485?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/34727/chen-li-yong)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/34727/chen-li-yong)  [Chen Li Yong](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/34727/chen-li-yong)  **316**18 | |
| **marked** as duplicate by [Alan Carmack](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/29924/alan-carmack), [Nathan Tuggy](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/10820/nathan-tuggy), Rathony, [M.A.R.](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/14111/m-a-r), [Brian Tompsett - 汤莱恩](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/20600/brian-tompsett-%e6%b1%a4%e8%8e%b1%e6%81%a9)May 31 '16 at 8:10  This question has been asked before and already has an answer. If those answers do not fully address your question, please [ask a new question](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/ask). | |
|  | * 1   Example dialogues would be helpful. You have to consider why you are adding them when there is no functional purpose. – [user3169](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/1423/user3169) [May 30 '16 at 2:48](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/91324/is-incomplete-sentence-bad-to-use/91325#comment178194_91324)   * 4   You can start a sentence with conjunctions such as *and* and *but*. But doing so doesn't make them incomplete sentences. See this question: [ell.stackexchange.com/questions/52239/…](http://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/52239/why-do-people-incorrectly-begin-a-sentence-with-the-word-but) But note that it is okay to start a sentence with a conjunction. – [Alan Carmack](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/29924/alan-carmack) [May 30 '16 at 4:14](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/91324/is-incomplete-sentence-bad-to-use/91325#comment178201_91324)   * @user3169 example dialogues is like the one in my question. I like to start sentence with a "But" or "And" if the sentence is related to the previous sentence, but the sentence is strong enough to to hold its own meaning. And when I also feel that a sentence is too long if I don't break it apart. The example in this comment, I combine the "but" with the previous sentence, but I break the "And" into another sentence, because the sentence after "but" can't hold on its own, but the sentence after "And" can. – [Chen Li Yong](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/34727/chen-li-yong)[May 31 '16 at 1:29](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/91324/is-incomplete-sentence-bad-to-use/91325#comment178403_91324) * @AlanCarmack thanks, it's a great reading. I wasn't aware that similar question has been asked before. I guess I need to look into the archive a little bit more. :) – [Chen Li Yong](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/34727/chen-li-yong) [May 31 '16 at 1:30](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/91324/is-incomplete-sentence-bad-to-use/91325#comment178404_91324)   Top of Form  Bottom of Form  add a comment |

3 Answers

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| up vote1down voteaccepted | You will often start sentences with *and* or *but* in speech to link back to previous things you said. This is OK because in speech you often don't plan out what you say too far in advance and often need to express new thoughts and relate them to previous things you said.  In formal writing, or a formal speech that you are reading, you have (or should have had) time to plan everything out. So this is less acceptable in such a situation.  *And* and *but* are meant to link two things. If one of those things is missing and context cannot fill in the blank then you are  I walked to the store. And there I saw Bobby. (First sentence establishes a context, thus from the second sentence we assume Bobby was at the store.)  I walked to the store. And then I got in the car. (Was the car at the store? Typically a car is in a parking lot. So we are missing details here, unless they were in previous sentences.)  I decided to eat dinner and then go home. (The two things here don't depend on anything outside of the context so it's complete.)   |  |  | | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/a/91368)[improve this answer](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/91368/edit) | answered May 30 '16 at 15:27  [[https://i.stack.imgur.com/mrnZr.jpg?s=32&g=1](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/5144/lawrencec)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/5144/lawrencec)  [LawrenceC](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/5144/lawrencec)  **24.2k**1243 | |
|  | * Wow, this is a great example of the correct way to do this! Yeah I can see how the conjunction can be used in a correct and incorrect way now. Thanks! – [Chen Li Yong](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/34727/chen-li-yong) [May 31 '16 at 1:35](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/91324/is-incomplete-sentence-bad-to-use/91325#comment178407_91368)   Top of Form  Bottom of Form  add a comment |
| up vote2down vote | The proscription against using conjunctions to start sentences (so called "sentence-initial conjunctions", see google makes you look smart) seems to be taught in school in some places, but descriptive linguists don't agree with it. See [Initial coordinators in technical, academic, and formal writing](http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=1875) for a nice Language Log post by Mark Lieberman filed under [prescriptivist poppycock](http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?cat=5).   |  |  | | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/a/91342)[improve this answer](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/91342/edit) | answered May 30 '16 at 6:50  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/bcc10f0e4b08d0d5927f07e62456768a?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/19315/drf)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/19315/drf)  [DRF](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/19315/drf)  **1,452**314 | |
|  | * Yeah, I don't know what to call it, I just know that it's called incomplete sentence. I read a long article about this which emphasise on why starting a sentence with preposition is a bad thing, but I can't shake it off my literacy habit. :D Thanks for the links! – [Chen Li Yong](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/34727/chen-li-yong) [May 31 '16 at 1:32](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/91324/is-incomplete-sentence-bad-to-use/91325#comment178405_91342)   Top of Form  Bottom of Form  add a comment |

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| up vote1down vote | In school, teachers train students to never start sentences with "and" or "but". However, in the real world, like writing fiction or doing journalism, authors start sentences with "and" or "but". One would likely want to avoid it in formal writing.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | [share](https://ell.stackexchange.com/a/91325)[improve this answer](https://ell.stackexchange.com/posts/91325/edit) | answered May 30 '16 at 2:14  [[https://www.gravatar.com/avatar/a602fad35669d9e179ff7446a56781da?s=32&d=identicon&r=PG&f=1](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/16074/the-square-cow)](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/16074/the-square-cow)  [The Square Cow](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/16074/the-square-cow)  **191**2 | |
|  | * That's a nice use case example. I will remember to avoid starting sentence with conjunctions in formal writing. Thanks. – [Chen Li Yong](https://ell.stackexchange.com/users/34727/chen-li-yong) [May 31 '16 at 1:33](https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/91324/is-incomplete-sentence-bad-to-use/91325#comment178406_91325) |

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