

# Writers' Workshop

## Mastering Verb Usage

In this Writers' Workshop you will:

- Practice using a variety of verb forms in your writing.

### Mastering Verb Usage

#### Mini-Lesson: Are You Coloring with Just Three Crayons?

The English verb, like a box of 64 Crayolas, breathes potential like the smell of new crayons. It comes in at least 12 tenses, passive and active forms, declarative, interrogative, imperative (Stop!) and subjunctive (If *I were* to vote, it would not be for you) moods. It partners with auxiliary verbs (such as can, may, must, might) and morphs into gerunds that act as nouns (*dancing* is fun), participles that act as adjectives, (the *written* requesting, the *writing* hand moved on), and infinitives that can be either nouns (He refused *to lie*) or adverbs (He strained *to hear*).

But with all those wonderful possibilities, many young writers use only a handful of tenses—usually present, past and their progressive forms—though they understand almost every verb form and what it implies. A mastery of many verb forms allow writers, with very few words, to indicate the sequence of events and the future actions that are tentative as well as certain.

Look at the verbs in this story from Sam Farmer of the Los Angeles Times. The blue text below each verb identifies the verb tense.

The NFL **is** one step closer to **closing**  
simple present gerund as noun  
the book on a landmark concussion  
lawsuit.

U.S. District Judge Anita B. Brody on  
Monday **granted** preliminary approval  
simple past  
of a settlement that **would compensate**  
auxiliary and verb  
retired NFL players **suffering** the  
participle as adjective  
long-term effects of head injuries. The

agreement **figures to cost**, but implies  
present tense  
future action the NFL several hundred  
million dollars, although there **is** no  
simple present  
specific limit on how much the league

**might be required**  
auxiliary plus verbs  
to pay eligible retirees.

Brody **had rejected** the original  
past perfect (for action completed before January)  
proposal in January because the

sides **had not provided** enough  
past perfect  
evidence that a limit of \$675 million  
in compensatory damages

**would be sufficient to cover**  
auxiliary verb plus infinitive  
all the injured parties during the  
65-year life of the deal.

#### Apply It!

This excerpt is from the Los Angeles Times editorial section, Sunday, September 26, 1999. The article is about the U. S. ambassador to Mexico.

Jeffery Davidow, 55, who has served as the ambassador for one year, is well aware of the difficulties inherent in the job. Before this assignment, he spent two years as assistant secretary of state in charge of Latin American affairs, becoming immersed in the region's politics and culture. Now he is experiencing first-hand the day-to-day pressure of the troubled relationship. Yet, he has managed to earn the respect of a cross-section of the people in both countries.

1. Working alone or with a partner, identify each verb in the editorial about Davidow. Indicate its tense.
2. Mark the verb tenses used in a story from a professional publication that requires analysis and background.
3. Mark the verb tenses used in your own work, your publication or another student publication. For the best results, choose a story that required background.
4. Choose a well-known fairytale or fable and write the first three paragraphs of a news story in journalism style, using at least five appropriate verbs and verb forms. For instance

*Big Bad Wolf, 7, **will be sentenced**  
future passive  
 tomorrow in Northwood Court for*

***imprisoning** Little Red Riding Hood in a  
participle  
 wardrobe and **swallowing** Granny Hood  
participle  
 whole. He **is expected to receive** ten  
present passive  
 years to life in prison.*

*Wolf **had accosted** the younger  
past perfect  
 Hood in the forest as she **walked** to her  
past tense  
 grandmother's house. He **sped** ahead  
past tense  
 of her, **wolfed down** the older woman  
past tense  
 and **hid** himself in her bedclothes. Both  
past tense  
 women **have made** a full recovery.  
present perfect*