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 the book on a landmark concussion lawsuit.

U.S. District Judge Anita B. Brody on Monday granted preliminary approval of a settlement that would compensate retired NFL players suffering the long-term effects of head injuries. The agreement figures to cost, but implies future action the NFL several hundred million dollars, although there is no specific limit on how much the league might be required to pay eligible retirees.

Brody had rejected the original proposal in January because the sides had not provided enough evidence that a limit of $675 million in compensatory damages would be sufficient to cover 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