

### Grammar Explanation

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#### Using verb tenses to write about the past

When you write about a past event (an action or condition), you need to use a different verb tense depending on the situation you are describing.

- When you describe a past event that happened or was completed during a specific period or time, use the simple past.
  - Example: *In 1990, they **came** to America for a better life and **settled** in New York.*
- When you describe a past event that has occurred during a non-specific time, or has continued to the present, use the present perfect or present perfect progressive.
  - Example: *Since they arrived in America, they **have learned** many new customs.*
- When you need to let the reader know that an event had occurred before another past time or event that you mention, use the past perfect for the earlier action.
  - Example: *By the time I came to the United States in 1999, I **had** already **learned** English.*
- When you describe a past action that was in progress while another action occurred or was in progress, use the past progressive.
  - Example: *They **were doing** well and **were becoming** comfortable with life in America when suddenly a crisis happened in their life.*
- When you describe a constant condition or state in the past, do not use a progressive tense.
  - Incorrect: *They **were needing** help when they arrived; since then they have managed to improve their lives.*
  - Corrected: *They **needed** help when they arrived; since then they have managed to improve their lives.*

Excerpted from: Verb Tenses: Exercise 4