

## Verb Issues for ESL Writers

There are three basic tenses in the English language: **past**, **present**, and **future**. Rules dictate usage in each tense, but many key verbs in English are irregular. The rules in this handout will serve as a guide as you write technical documents, but keep in mind that you may need to modify your verb constructions as you become more familiar with Standard English.

### Past Tense

Verbs in the past tense describe things that are done and over with.

Examples:

He analyzed the data.

They analyzed the data.

I analyzed the data.

Notice how verbs in the past tense add an -ed regardless of the agent (subject).

### Present Tense

Verbs in the present tense describe things that are always true or ongoing.

Examples:

He analyzes.

They analyze.

I analyze.

Notice the difference between the way the verb conjugates when 'he,' 'they,' and 'I' are in the agent slot.

### Future Tense

Verbs in the future tense describe things that will happen (or are likely) to happen.

He will analyze the data.

They will analyze the data.

I will analyze the data.

Notice that the future tense uses 'will', a helping verb. This helping verb never changes form.

### Helping Verbs

The "will" from the previous example is a helping verb. Helping verbs modify a verb in mood or tense. Helping verbs include: *can, could, may, might, must, shall, will, would, ought, had better, ought to, would rather, have to, have got to, be supposed to, be able to, used to*.

### **Helping Verb Rules**

Helping verbs follow three basic rules:

Xiao takes a vacation once a year.

Xiao **will** take a vacation.

*Rule One:*  
Helping verbs  
always go *before*  
the verb!

*Rule Two:* The  
primary verb  
always looks like  
it is in the present  
tense.

*Rule Three:*  
Neither verb ever  
conjugates.  
“Will” stays the  
same no matter  
what the subject is.

### **Examples for Practice**

**Convert the following into the future tense:**

- 1) Our results indicate that the modified drying procedure will produce the best results.
- 2) Without the spare time to complete the models, the work is worthless.
- 3) The paperwork places excess demand on the participants' time.
- 4) The result never come back this quickly.

**Convert the following into the present tense:**

- 5) All but one of the ternary mixtures obtained a durability factor (DF) higher than the minimum 60% value used in ASTM C 666 to terminate the freeze-thaw test.
- 6) Similar to flexural strength data, the paste and fly ash content were found to be statistically significant variables affecting freezing and thawing of the ternary mixtures.

**Convert the following into the future tense:**

- 7) The magnitude of free drying shrinkage (monitored up to 224 days) was also found to be primarily the function of paste content.
- 8) However, the shrinkage of ternary mixtures was significantly lower than that of control mixtures, which clearly demonstrates the benefit of using supplementary cementitious materials.

**Consider whether the present or future tense is more logical in these revisions.**