

Tense use in academic writing ... a beginner's guide

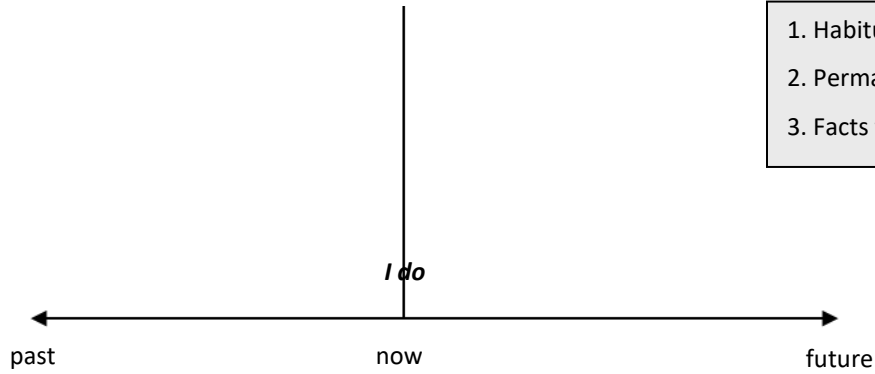
This is a summary of the tenses most commonly used in academic writing.

Purpose	Tense	Example
To report information or concepts that are accepted in your field as a 'fact' or 'true'	Present	In the New Zealand MMP system, the proportion of seats in parliament is based on the proportion of votes each political party receives in the election. Kingfishers are found throughout the mainland of New Zealand and some offshore islands. [ECOL103 assignment] Leisure, recreation, play, tourism and sport are all terms that are familiar to most people. [RECN101 assignment]
To report historical facts	Past	The first referendum on the New Zealand electoral system was held in 1992, and the binding referendum took place the following year.
To make general statements about previous research, or summarise previous research from several sources	Present perfect	Societies' consumeristic desires have been satisfied in the past through the commercial sector (Smith, 1997). [ERST312 assignment] Previous solutions have been based on technological and institutional foundations. [ECOL103 assignment] Recent research has highlighted ...
To report one specific piece of evidence	Past	XXX (2015), in their census of the kingfisher population, surveyed a large area from the Waikato in the North Island to Christchurch in the South Island. [ECOL103 assignment] Moyer et al. (2010) showed that an intolerance of new mycelia to temperatures between 2-8°C that can lead to hyphal death. [BIOS110 assignment]
To use examples of current practice (e.g. from a case study, or from a field trip)	Present	This rest home provides health facilities for frail but mobile elderly people and also provides other benefits. [MKTG201 assignment] XXX is a well established Los Angeles-based manufacturer of fabrics and clothing that is currently experiencing a significant growth phase. [FINC204 assignment]
To state your purpose or thesis	Present or past	The purpose of this report is to discuss the investment relating to two large six-colour presses. [FINC204 assignment] This report was prepared for ...
To make recommendations	Present (+ modal)	JDD should position itself as a high quality retirement complex that offers a total healthcare service. [MKTG201 assignment] The report recommends that Press A is a better investment, because it has higher NPV and is likely to be more profitable. [FINC204 assignment]

Examples from assignments by Lincoln University students, or written for this resource.

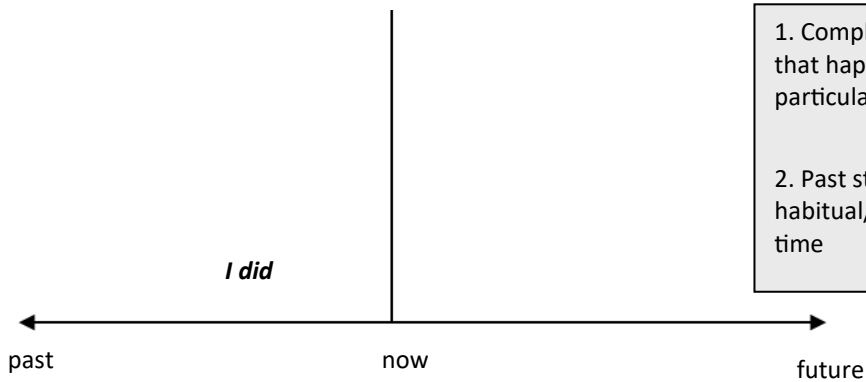
In academic writing most of these examples would include a reference (citation), but these have been omitted here for simplicity.

1. Present simple



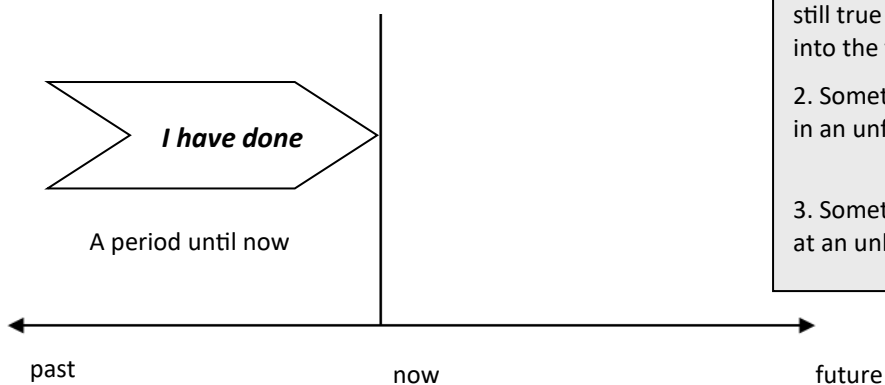
- 1. Habitual actions
- 2. Permanent situations
- 3. Facts that are always true

2. Past simple



- 1. Complete actions/experiences that happened in the past at a particular time
- 2. Past states/actions that were habitual/repeated over period of time

3. Present perfect



Shows connection between a past event/activity and the present

- 1. Something began in the past, is still true now and could continue into the future
- 2. Something happened in the past in an unfinished time period
- 3. Something happened in the past at an unknown or unstated time

If you would like to know more about using different tenses,
talk to one of the Learning Advisors in Academic Success (academicsuccess@lincoln.ac.nz)