# Tense use in academic writing … a beginner’s guide

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

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| Information or concepts that are accepted in your field as a “fact” or “true” | Present   | The behavioural science approach uses scientific research to develop theories about human behaviour in organisations (Bartol, Martin, Tein & Mathews, 2006).<br>Kingfishers are found throughout the mainland of New Zealand and some offshore islands.  
   [ECOL103 assignment]<br>Leisure, recreation, play, tourism and sport are all terms that are familiar to most people. |
| “Historical” facts                                                      | Past      | The quantitative management viewpoint emerged during World War Two (Bartol et al., 2006).                                                                                                                                                      |
| To make general statements about previous research, or summarise previous research from several sources | Present perfect | It is through the commercial sector that societies’ consumeristic desires have been satisfied in the past (Smith, 1997). [ERST312 assignment]<br>The rising affluence of consumers has led to increasing national and international markets for goods and services (Stock & Lambert, 2001).<br>Previous solutions have been based on technological and institutional foundations.  
   [ECOL103 assignment] |
| Report one specific piece of evidence                                 | Past      | Ralph and Ralph (1977), 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]<br>Psychologist John Neulinger suggested that when an activity is freely chosen and pursued for its own sake, then it should be considered leisure (Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991).  
   [RECN 101 assignment] |
| To use examples of current practice (e.g. from a case study, or observations from a field trip) | Present   | This rest home provides health facilities for frail but mobile elderly people and also provides other benefits. [MKTG201 assignment]<br>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. The specific objective is to offer a recommendation on the choice of two investments to the general manager of the XXX company.  
   [FINC204 assignment]<br>This report was prepared for ....... |
| Recommendations                                                         | Present (+ modal) | JDD should position itself as a high quality retirement complex that offers a total healthcare service. [MKTG201 assignment]<br>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, and from the following sources:**


1. Present simple
   - Habitual actions
   - Permanent situations
   - Facts that are always true

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

3. Present perfect
   - Shows connection between a past event/activity and the present
   - Something began in the past, is still true now and could continue into the future
   - Something happened in the past in an unfinished time period
   - Something happened in the past at an unknown or unstated time

Useful Resources
If you would like to know more about using different tenses, visit our website at: http://ltl.lincoln.ac.nz/ or ask at the Service Point about the workshops, drop-in sessions, and individual appointments we offer. There are also many useful sources in the LU library and on the WWW. You could start with:


Workshops  Drop-in  Appointments