



Dirty Dozen Workshop 7

Inappropriate Shifts in Person & Tense

PRESENTED BY THE WRITING CENTER

Which sentence is correct?

If one wants to be frugal, you must clip coupons, buy store brands, and watch for sales.

~ OR ~

If one wants to be frugal, one must clip coupons, buy store brands, and watch for sales.

If one wants to be frugal, you must clip coupons, buy store brands, and watch for sales.

INCORRECT



If one wants to be frugal, one must clip coupons, buy store brands, and watch for sales.

Why?

Answer A is incorrect because there is a shift from third person (*one*) to second person (*you*).

Inappropriate Shifts in Person (shift)

Shifting person means changing from first person pronouns to third person nouns or pronouns, or from second person pronouns to third person nouns or pronouns, without a logical reason.

Inappropriate Shifts in Person (shift)



Rule of thumb: In grammar, *person* refers to the distinction among

- the person *talking* (first person),
- the person *spoken to* (second person)
- the person, object, or concept *being talked about* (third person).

Psst! All nouns are 3rd person. *Chef, student, lifeguard*, etc. are all 3rd person words.

Inappropriate Shifts in Person (shift)

	Singular	Plural
1 st person	I, me, my	we, us, our
2 nd person	you, your, your	you, your, your
3 rd person	he, him, his, she, her, hers, it, it, its	they, them, their



Psst! In academic writing, stay below the black line.

Correct Examples

People should use the natural talents **they** have been given.

(Both people and they are third person plural.)

A person should use the natural talents **he or she** has been given.

(Both one and he or she are third person singular.)

You should use the natural talents **you** have been given.

(Both yous are second person.)

A very common mistake
is to shift from third to
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If a **person** has self-confidence,
you will succeed in life and love.

A very common mistake is to shift from third to second person, like this:

If a **person** has self-confidence, **you** will succeed in life and love.

- » “*person*” is third person
- » “*you*” is second person

If a **person** has self confidence, **you** will succeed in life and love.

Correct: If **you** have self confidence, **you** will succeed in life and love.



If a **person** has self confidence, **he** or **she** will succeed in life and love.

If **people** have self confidence, **they** will succeed in life and love.

Inappropriate Shifts in Tense (shift)

Which sentence is correct?

Henry has a crush on Emily but didn't dare to talk to her.

~ OR ~

Henry has a crush on Emily but doesn't dare to talk to her.

Henry has a crush on his pretty classmate, but ~~didn't~~ dare to talk to her.

INCORRECT

Henry has a crush on his pretty classmate but doesn't dare to talk to her.



Why?

Answer A is incorrect. There is a shift in verb tense from present tense (has) to past tense (didn't).

Inappropriate Shifts in Tense

An **inappropriate shift in tense occurs** when writers switch (shift) from one verb tense to another *without a valid reason*.

Tense shows the time of the verb's action (i.e. when it happened). There are several verb tenses:

- present (*sits*)
- past (*sat*)
- future (*will sit*)
- past perfect (*had sat*)
- present perfect (*has sat*)
- future perfect (*will have sat*).

It is important to make certain your verb tenses match the meaning of your sentence. Sometimes it is perfectly logical to change verb tenses within a sentence:

Last week my daughter's favorite animal was a dolphin, but today her favorite animal is a unicorn.

(shift) Example

The waitress took our order, and then she disappears.

(shift) Example

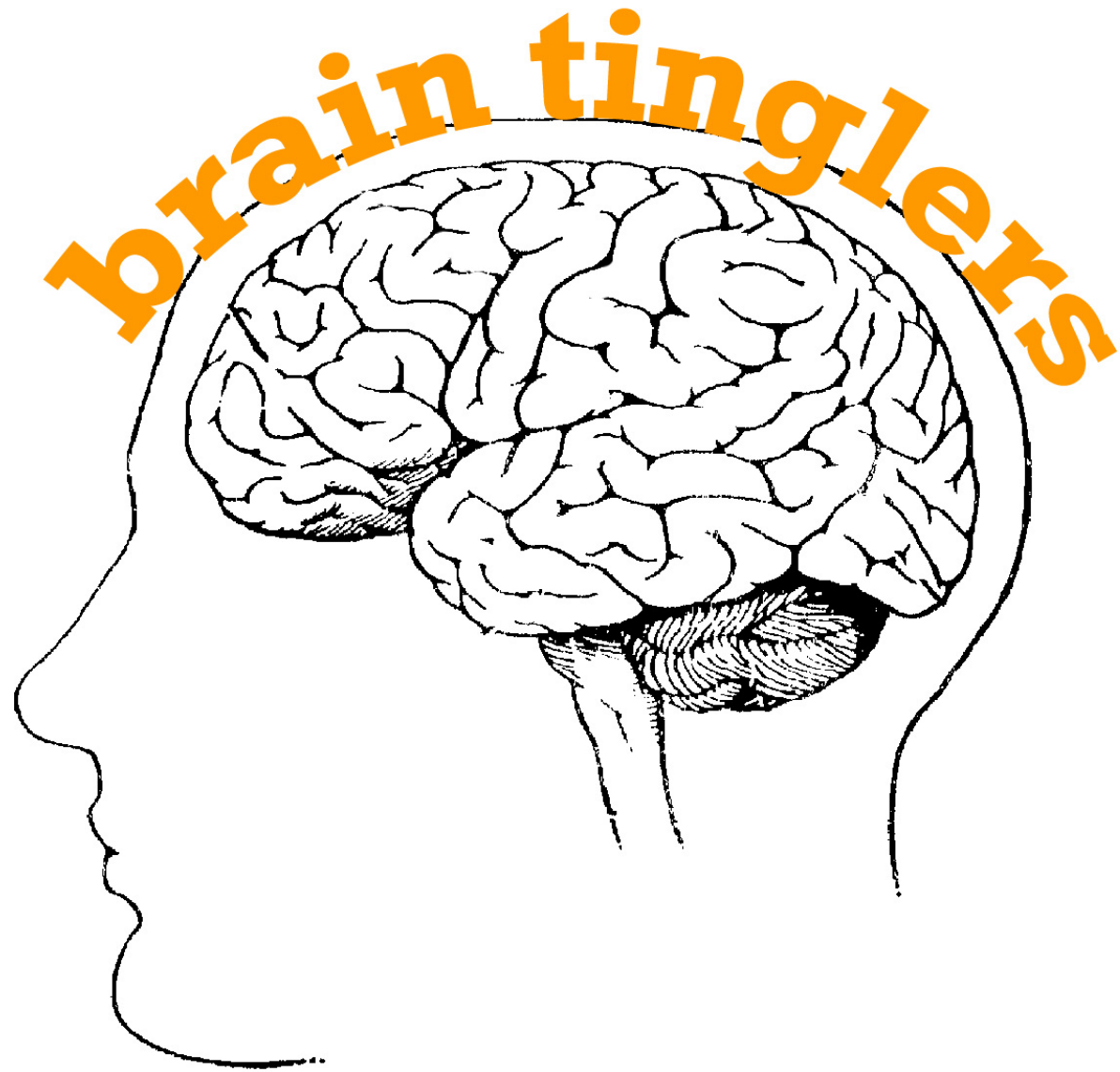
The waitress took our order, and then she disappears.

Better:

The waitress took our order, and then she disappeared. *(Both past tense)*

The waitress takes our order, and then she disappears. *(Both present tense)*







In the following pairs, one sentence is correct, and the other sentence has an inappropriate shift in person or tense.

A) I didn't understand part of the class lecture, so I asked my professor for clarification, and she gave me an example.

B) I didn't understand part of the class lecture, so I asked my professor for clarification, and she gives me an example.



A) I didn't understand part of the class lecture, so I asked my professor for clarification, and she gave me an example.

B) I didn't understand part of the class lecture, so I asked my professor for clarification, and she gives me an example.

INCORRECT

Answer B is incorrect because there is a shift from past tense (*didn't, asked*) to present tense (*gives*).



In the following pairs, one sentence is correct, and the other sentence has an inappropriate shift in person or tense.

A) Children have to be cautious when crossing the street because they can get badly injured if they run into traffic.

B) Children have to be cautious when crossing the street because you can get badly injured if you run into traffic.



A) Children have to be cautious when crossing the street because they can get badly injured if they run into traffic.

B) Children have to be cautious when crossing the street. You can get badly injured if you run into traffic.

INCORRECT

Answer B is incorrect because there is a shift from third person (*children*) to second person (*you*).



In the following pairs, one sentence is correct, and the other sentence has an inappropriate shift in person or tense.

A) The cheetah ran so fast that even the agile gazelle is easy prey.

B) The cheetah runs so fast that even the agile gazelle is easy prey.

A) The cheetah **ran** so fast that even the agile gazelle **is** easy prey.

INCORRECT



B) The cheetah runs so fast that even the agile gazelle is easy prey.

Answer A is incorrect because there is a shift from past tense (*ran*) to present tense (*is*).



In the following pairs, one sentence is correct, and the other sentence has an inappropriate shift in person or tense.

A) Before going on the horseback ride, I learned that I should keep my heels down and not yank the reins.

B) Before going on the horseback ride, I learned that you should keep your heels down and not yank the reins.



A) Before going on the horseback ride, I learned that I should keep my heels down and not yank the reins.

B) Before going on the horseback ride, I learned that you should keep your heels down and not yank the reins.

INCORRECT

Answer B is incorrect because there is a shift from first person (*I*) to second person (*you*).

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A woman with dark hair, wearing a blue dress and a pearl necklace, is smiling and gesturing with her hands towards a vintage car. The car is yellow and has a silver grille with a circular emblem and the word "Fulley" written on it.

Join us next time...

Apostrophes & Faulty Predication