



Activity: A Tense Discovery

Materials needed: A selection of three or four written articles and/or professional essays that provide a variety of verb tense usage -- enough photocopies of each for the class. (To help gather the articles, ask students to bring in a “serious” news or magazine story a few days before. Longer magazine articles work better than many news stories. If fifteen students bring in articles, you’ll have a nice collection from which to find the best ones to use. Additionally, if the students choose the writings, they will have more interest in the content and the level will be right for them.)

Description: Prepare the articles for the students by underlining the verb structures or bracketing the paragraphs you want the students to pay attention to. This saves time because students don’t have to read the entire article, which may be multi-paged. Use a numbering system so that you and the students can easily refer to a particular sentence or passage. Do this with 2-4 articles, depending on the variety of verb tenses you find in each article, and then photocopy enough for the class.



Divide the students into groups of 4-5 and pass out the first article. Instruct the students to pay attention to the verb forms and to identify which verb tense is being used in each situation. More advanced students can discuss why a specific tense is needed. Encourage students to discuss the time/meaning relationship in the targeted areas and to draw from their knowledge of verb tense rules, referring to their textbook charts as needed.

To have a whole-class conclusion to this exercise, each group should appoint a scribe. Using the numbering system on the article, the groups can record their answers to report to the class.

Students enjoy seeing the connection between the grammar learned in class and its authentic application. You can see the great “a-ha!” moment on their faces when they make that connection on their own.

Note: Students will mistakenly select a few present and past participial modifiers, gerunds, infinitives, etc., thinking they are verbs. Plan how you will handle that. One way is to remind students by writing on the board before they begin: “An *-ing* word is NOT a verb if there is no helping verb with it. *To* + an action word is not a verb.”

Also, to save class time, assign the article for homework. Students can read the article and consider the underlined verb tenses, preparing themselves for group discussion in the next class.