Shifts in Time or Person

Whether you are narrating an event, describing a scene, or explaining a concept, be careful to avoid shifting unnecessarily from one tense to another and from one person to another. “Tense” refers to the time frame: past, present, or future. “Person” refers to the point of view of the pronouns:

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<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st person</td>
<td>I, me, my</td>
<td>We, us, our</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person</td>
<td>You, your</td>
<td>You, your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person</td>
<td>He/She/It, him/her/it, his/her/its</td>
<td>They, them, their</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The tense and the person you use should be consistent. This means if you start in the past tense, you should not switch to present unless absolutely necessary. If you begin with the 3rd person singular “a student” (i.e. him or her), you should not switch to “I” or “you” unless you have good reason. So, you may be asking, what’s a good reason?

**TENSE**

If you switch from talking about events of the past to a present situation, that’s a good reason to switch tense. For instance, “When I was a child, I believed in Santa Claus. Now, as an adult, I believe in what Santa Claus stands for.” Notice how I switch to present tense when my focus shifts from my childhood to today? However, when discussing works of literature, use the present tense consistently: “At the beginning of the novel, the main character is selfish and self-centered, but by the end of the novel, she has learned how to care for others.” Notice how I use the present tense for both the beginning and the end of the novel?

**PERSON**

If you switch from talking about one individual or group to another, or if you begin to address the reader directly, that may require a shift in person. For instance, “When you refer to your family, do you mean your birth parents and siblings? Increasingly today, many people refer instead to their ‘family of friends.’” Notice how I switch from you to they? However, often there is no need to switch! Consider: “When modern-day Americans think of showing hospitality, they often think of having someone over for dinner. People of the ancient world, on the other hand, would have been far more generous in their hospitality.” Notice how I use 3rd person plural for both groups of people?

Continued...
1) Go to "Consistency of Tense and Pronoun Reference" on the Guide to Grammar & Writing: http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/consistency.htm

2) As you read through the examples, record the corrections or "repair work" here. The first one has already been done as an example:

   a. In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the narrator is one of the few truly successful characters in terms of moral development. However, she was also seriously flawed in some ways.

   Now you do the rest!

   b. She intended to play for the team during the upcoming season, but then she blows out her knee.

   c. In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, we find the narrator to be one of the few successful characters in terms of moral development. However, even the narrator, you soon realize, is seriously flawed.

   d. People enjoy themselves immensely at UConn women's basketball games. You don't have to be an expert in basketball to get caught up in the crowd's enthusiasm.

   Continued...
3) Take the “Quiz on Consistency in Tense & Pronouns” at the bottom of the same page. Record your answers here, including which ones you got wrong.

1. When one has been going to college for as long as he has, ______________ to think the college owes ______ a degree.
   o you start; you
   o one starts; one
   o he starts; him

2. Spring begins early in Tennessee. First, the forsythia bursts into blossom; then the dogwood trees ______ to bloom, and the redbud is soon in its glory.
   o begin
   o began

3. The poetry of Robert Frost (1874-1963) often seems to suggest some kind of fate controls our lives. His essays, too, ____________ a similar malignant presence.
   o indicate
   o indicated

4. We have never seen this kind of impatience in the media before. ________ think it has something to do with the weather.
   o You
   o We

5. The climate of New Zealand can be a pleasure for you if ________ don't mind a little rain.
   o we
   o he
   o you

6. Aunt Mina wrote to tell us of her recent trip to California. She said it was a delightful journey on the plane. Seeing her brother again ________ a real treat.
   o is
   o was

7. When NYPD Blue went off the air in May, many viewers felt they had lost a friend in ________ own family.
   o his
   o our
   o their

Continued...
4) Now write down 3 questions about shifts in time & person to ask the WRC instructor or tutor and record the answers to your questions. You ask about questions from the quiz you had difficulty with, situations from your own writing, or terms that are not fully clear.

   o Question 1:

   o Answer 1:

   o Question 2:

   o Answer 2:

   o Question 3:

   o Answer 3:

Attach a confirmation sheet or get a signature below:

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<th>Instructor/Tutor Signature</th>
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