**Purdue OWL**

**Answer : Tense Consistency Exercise 4**

In this first paragraph, the two verbs in present tense--both appropriate for the situation--are indicated in **bold**.

The Iroquois Indians of the Northeast regularly burned land to increase open space for agriculture. In fact, the early settlers of Boston found so few trees that they had to row out to the islands in the harbor to obtain fuel. Just how far north this practice extended **is** uncertain, but the Saco River in southern Maine **appears** to have been the original northern boundary of the agricultural clearings. Then, pressured by European settlement, the Iroquois extended their systematic burning far northward, even into the Maritime Provinces of Canada.*(*abridged from Hay and Farb*, The Atlantic Shore)*

The main tense in this next paragraph is present. Incorrect shifts to past tense are indicated in **bold**.

For the past seven years, I have called myself a swimmer. Swimming, my one sport, provides a necessary outlet for my abundant energy. I have always drawn satisfaction from exertion, straining my muscles to their limits. I don't know why pushing forward in the water, as my muscles **cried out** in pain, sets off a booming cheer in my head. Many times when I **rounded** the turn for the last lap of a race, my complaining muscles want to downshift and idle to the finish. My mind, however, presses the pedal to the floor and yells, "FASTER!" The moment that I **touched** the wall my muscles relax; the pain subsides. I am pleased to have passed the point of conflict. *(*adapted from Brendon MacLean,*"Harder!")*

Since the following paragraph describes action in a fictional narrative, the main tense should be present. The six incorrect shifts to past tense are underlined.

In "The Use of Force" William Carlos Williams describes a struggle involving a doctor, two parents, and their young daughter. The doctor must obtain a throat culture from the girl, who **was** suspected of having diphtheria. This ordinarily simple task is hindered by the frightened and uncooperative patient, Mathilda Olson. Adding to the doctor's difficulties **were** the parents, who **had** to struggle with their own conflicting emotions. They want their daughter helped, but they **did** not trust the doctor to do the right thing. Sensitive to the parents' uncertainty, the doctor **became** more and more frustrated by Mathilda's resistance. Williams gives considerable attention to how each of the Olsons react, but it is clear that his main interest **was** in the doctor and his responses.(adapted from a student essay)