

L.O. Control the use of verb tenses as I move my story
backwards through time.

Let's retell The Piano text, once again.

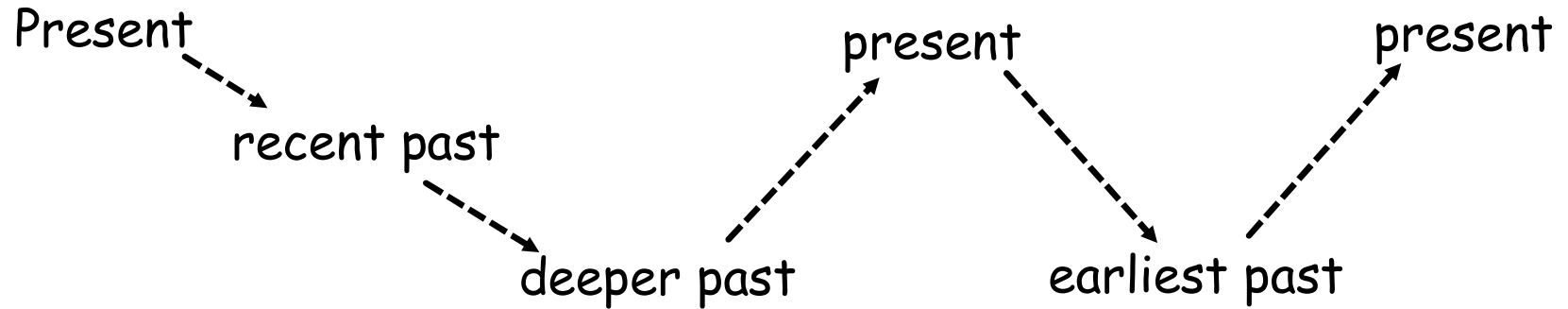


Think about the structure of the text, in terms of 'present' and 'past'.

What pattern emerges?

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What about this example of flashback, based on the Three Pigs story? What 'time' structure has been used?

Even though thunder rattles the windows, the rasping breathing is loud through the open letterbox.

"I can smell you, little pigs," he snarls. The white fangs glint momentarily in a jagged flash of lightning, and his claws curl around the woodwork of the front door, like a set of lethal daggers. "Face it – there's nowhere else left to run. You might as well give yourselves up now. The longer you delay, the hungrier I become, and the hungrier I get, the angrier I feel."

My brothers cower behind me in the dimly-lit entrance hall, quivering and whimpering. Things look bad. Really bad.

It has only been a month since the three of us had said goodbye to our dear mother, happily waving her off as we went our separate ways. Each of us was keen to prove that we had what it takes to be successful in life. The first thing that we needed to address was the matter of accommodation, and we all had our own ideas about that.

James, my youngest brother was always one for getting things done as quickly as possible; when he happened to bump into a local farmer selling a large load of straw, the decision was made. I warned him of the unsuitably flimsy qualities of straw as a building material, but he built his house anyway. Sure, it was comfortable and warm, but even as he boasted about being the first to finish, I had a bad feeling about it.

That same feeling rises in my throat now. The enraged wolf pulls his claws from the letterbox and starts hammering on my front door. I can hear him above the driving storm, blowing and wheezing like a steam train. It's the same sound that Arthur heard just last week, before his world came crashing down.

Arthur, our mother's middle son, had decided to head for the woods and build his house from anything he could find lying around. Granted, sticks are stronger than straw, but they were no match for the wolf when he came calling. It only took a couple of puffs from that monster to bring the roof down, and send Arthur, together with James (who had fled the scene of devastation when the wolf flattened his straw house), running from the woods over to my place.

I was always the thinker, the methodical one. That hairy wolf has been terrorising the land for quite some time now, so I wasn't going to build a house until I had figured out a way of dealing with any threats. It took a while, but once I'd taken a course on house-building, it was obvious that bricks were the best option. It certainly was a good job that I had decided to build a house with two spare bedrooms, for it was less than two weeks after I had finished building, that both James and Arthur turned up at my front door, a little worse for wear, but thankfully still alive.

It is a good, strong door. The wolf has given up trying to get in the front entrance, and I can hear him climbing up the drainpipe.

"Arthur – you take the front of the house, and James, you take the back: get all the windows locked. Don't just stand there – MOVE!" I yell, and head straight for the living room. I know what I have to do. I always keep a set of logs in the fireplace, ready for those cold evenings, so it is a simple matter of striking a match and keeping my hands from shaking too much. Within seconds, the hungry flames are leaping up the chimney, and the heat builds quickly.

My brothers join my side, breathing heavily, as suddenly we hear a bloodcurdling scream. There is a dreadful smell of burning hair and flesh. Then silence.

It will take a while to clean up my fireplace, but that's a small price to pay.

Work with your partner on your copy of the text to underline all the verbs that show the present tense in one colour, and those that show the past tense in another colour.

How many of these different verb tenses can you identify?

simple present

simple past

past perfect

present perfect



Now it's your turn to carry on your own story and begin your flashback sequence.