

## Sequence of tenses

The verb in the subordinate clause changes its tense in accordance with the tense of the verb in the main clause. This principle chiefly applies to adverb clauses of purpose and noun clauses.

Here are the basic rules

1. A past tense in the principal clause is usually followed by a past tense in the subordinate clause.

- She **said** that she **would come**.
- I **realized** that I **had made** a mistake.
- I **worked** hard that I **might succeed**.
- I **found** out that he **was** guilty.

There are a few exceptions to this rule.

A past tense in the principal clause may be followed by a present tense in the subordinate clause when the subordinate clause expresses a universal truth.

- The teacher **said** that honesty **is** the best policy. (NOT The teacher said that honesty was the best policy.)
- Galileo **maintained** that the earth **moves** around the sun.

When the subordinate clause is introduced by **than**, it may be in any tense even if the verb in the main clause is in the past tense.

- He **loved** me more than he **loves** his own children.
- He **loved** me more than he **loved** his own children.
- He **loved** me more than he **will love** his own children.

A present or future tense in the principal clause may be followed by any tense in the subordinate clause.

- He **says** that she **was** at the club.
- He **says** that she **is** at the club.
- He **says** that she **will be** at the club.
- He **will say** that she **was** at the club.
- He **will say** that she **is** at the club.
- He **will say** that she **will be** at the club.

### Notes

When the verb in the main clause is in the future tense, we often use a present tense in the subordinate clause to refer to future time.

- I **will call** you when he **comes**. (NOT I will call you when he will come.)