The secret to using tenses in scientific writing

1 Introduction

Use the **simple present tense** for -
- your objectives behind conducting the study
- literature that is already known about the topic
- facts that are generally true and unlikely to change [Ex: The Earth revolves around the sun.]
- results of past research that you believe to be true and relevant to your present research

Use the **simple past tense** for -
- facts that were once believed to be true but have since been revoked [Ex: Bats were thought to be blind.]
- describing the methods of previous studies

2 Literature Review

Use the **simple past tense** to talk about existing research on the topic. But sometimes you may need to use a combination of tenses.
- Use the **past tense** - to focus on the study itself or on the authors of the study
- Use the **present tense** - to share your own views about the study in question
- Use the **present perfect tense** - to cite a previous study that is fairly recent [Ex: Recent studies have shown that...], or to make generalizations about past research in an area [Ex: Several researchers have studied these stimuli...]

3 Materials & Methods

- Use the **simple past tense** - to describe your actions i.e. what you did and how you did it, as these actions have already been completed at the time of writing the research paper.
- Use the **past perfect tense** - only as needed, to describe some earlier stages of the experimental procedure [Ex: Subjects who had been assigned to the control group were given a placebo instead of Drug A.]

4 Results Section

- Use the **past tense** - to describe experiments that have already been completed at the time of writing the paper
- Use the **present tense** - to refer to tables, figures & graphs that you use to present the results [Ex: Fig. 3 shows that...]
- You could also use it to talk about your research paper as a whole [Ex: Section 4.1 discusses...]

5 Discussion Section

- Use the **past tense** - to summarize findings
- Use the **present tense** - to interpret the results, discuss the significance of the findings or present your conclusions
- Use the **future tense** - to make recommendations for further research or to indicate a future course of action based on the results of your paper