

## Past Tense Writing

*An activity of "Space tourism takes off".*

Did you notice how the tenses changed in "Space tourism takes off" (page 11, *What's Up* July 2023)? Even though this flight took place in the past, the present tense was used to describe some aspects of the experience. Why do you think the author did so?

**A. Test yourself** — Convert the bold words into the past tense. An example has been given.

Almost an hour into the flight, VMS Eve **soars** (soared) at a height of about 13.5 kilometres. A countdown **begins** (1. \_\_\_\_\_). Sunbeams streaming in through the planes' many windows **light** (2. \_\_\_\_\_) up their faces. They **are** (3. \_\_\_\_\_) soon going to experience weightlessness! Time **seems** (4. \_\_\_\_\_) to stop. Everyone **holds** (5. \_\_\_\_\_) their breath. Then **come** (6. \_\_\_\_\_) the much-awaited words, "Release, release, release". With VMS Eve letting go, VSS Unity **falls** (7. \_\_\_\_\_) away. Almost at once, VSS Unity's rocket **ignites** (8. \_\_\_\_\_) with a blaze. It **is** (9. \_\_\_\_\_) almost as if the plane **is** (10. \_\_\_\_\_) riding on fire.

**B. Challenge yourself** — Strike out the present-tense words and write their past-tense forms above them. An example has been given.

Gleefully, seat belts <sup>were</sup> ~~are~~ unlocked. An Italian flag is unfurled to celebrate this historic moment. Meanwhile, VSS Unity adjusts its back wings so that it looks like it is doing a stationary backflip. This allows passengers the best view of Earth curving into space below. The time spent in microgravity is short-lived. It lasts just minutes, and the passengers are strapped back into their seats again, ready to return to Earth. VSS Unity's back wings reposition themselves and transform the plane into a futuristic glider. Before long, with no further use of its rocket, the plane sails back down and glides smoothly onto a runway at Spaceport America.

**C. Ask yourself** — What do you think is the difference between writing about the flight in the past tense and in the present tense? Which tense makes the action more real to you?