



# WRITING CENTER

## Verbs

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### VERBS

A **verb** is a word used to indicate an action or state of being. The **verb** of a sentence indicates an action of body or mind, a state of being, or an occurrence. The verb can change form to show time (tense), person, and number. Each verb needs to agree in number and person with its subject.

**Examples:** *Action:* David **spoke** quickly.

*State of being:* David **seems** angry.

A sentence must contain a subject and a verb to be complete. The **subject** is the topic of the sentence; it names **who** or **what** the sentence is about. The subject is always a noun or pronoun (sometimes with modifiers), and relates directly to the verb.

**Examples:** The math **student studies** diligently.

*subject verb*

**JCCC promotes** a positive learning environment.

*subject verb*

Sometimes the subject and verb are reversed.

**Examples:** **Is** the 300-level **course** difficult?

*verb subject*

At the front of the classroom **sit** the serious **students**.

*verb subject*

## Verbs

### SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Every verb must agree in number with its subject.

A singular subject requires a singular verb.

**Examples:** *Incorrect:* I runs.      You juggles.      He are angry.  
*Correct:* I run.      You juggle.      He is angry.

A plural subject requires a plural verb.

**Examples:** *Incorrect:* We laughs.      You jumps.      The cats meows.  
*Correct:* We laugh.      You jump.      The cats meow.

If there are words (such as a prepositional phrase) between the noun and the verb, the subject-verb agreement may be confusing.

**Examples:** *Incorrect:* Each year, the size of the bears amaze me  
*Correct:* Each year, the size of the bears amazes me. (*The **bears** do not amaze me; their **size** amazes me.*)  
*Incorrect:* The services of a doctor was needed.  
*Correct:* The services of a doctor were needed. (*A **doctor** was not needed; the **services** of a doctor were needed.*)

### TYPES OF VERBS

1. **Intransitive verbs**—These verbs do not have direct objects; the action of the verb is not directed towards an objective.

**Examples:** The baby **cried** loudly.  
Lightning **strikes** quickly.

2. **Transitive verbs**—These verbs have direct objects; the action of the verb is directed toward some objective.

**Examples:** She **gave** ten dollars to charity. (*She gave what? **Ten dollars.***)  
Last year, they **grew** wheat to sell to China. (*They grew what? **Wheat.***)

Transitive verbs can be used in the active or passive voice:

- In the active voice, the subject does something to something else.

**Example:** Paul **ate** steak for dinner. (*Paul did something to the steak—**ate** it.*)

- In the passive voice, the subject is acted upon by something.

**Example:** The steak **was eaten** by Paul. (*The steak was acted upon—**was eaten**—by Paul.*)

3. **Linking verbs**—These verbs serve as a connection between a subject and its noun or adjective complement.

Forms of the verb **to be** (**am, is, are**, etc.) are the most common linking verbs, but there are others, such as the sense verbs:

appear	feel	prove	smell
become	grow	remain	sound
continue	look	seem	taste

**Examples:** He **looked** hopeful.

The President **is** a citizen like the rest of us.

Although the report **appears** factual, it **is** actually inaccurate

4. **Helping verbs.** These verbs combine with other verbs to show tense, aspect, mood, voice, degree, or manner of action.

There are two important verbs that help form certain verb tenses:

- The verb **to be** (**is, are, were, am**, etc.). **To be** is a linking verb; however, it can also function as a helping verb.

**Example:** I **am going** to the concert whether you like it or not. (***am** is a helping verb, part of the verb **am going**.*)

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- The verb **to have** (**has, had, have**, etc.). **To have** can function as a transitive verb (i.e., I **have** the book you ordered), but it can also function as a helping verb.  
**Example:** The office **has called** you time and time again. (***has** is part of the verb **has called**, and is being used as a helping verb.*)

Certain helping verbs are used to express possibility, such as:

be	could	might
can	may	would

**Examples:** I **may take** statistics next semester.  
It **might be** fun to attend that dance.

Other helping verbs are used to express emphasis, such as:

be	did	need
dared	do	will

**Examples:** I **do need** to go. I'm already twenty minutes late!  
I **will be** there; I promise.

### 5. Irregular verbs

Verbs that form their past tense in other ways than adding a **-d** or **-ed** at the end are called **irregular** verbs.

**Examples:** I **see** the birds.  
I **saw** the birds.  
I have **seen** the birds.

I will **begin** tomorrow.  
I **began** yesterday.  
I will have **begun** by next week.

### PRIMARY VERB FORMS

All English verbs, except for **be**, have five primary forms:

Base Form	Present Tense	Present Participle	Past Tense	Past Participle
look	looks	looking	looked	looked
walk	walks	walking	walked	walked
watch	watches	watching	watched	watched

1. The **base form** is used for the present tense when the subject of the verb is **I, you, we, they**, or a plural noun.

**Example:** I **talk** and you **listen**.

2. The **present tense** indicates action in the present when the subject is third-person singular (**he, she, it** or a **singular noun**).

**Example:** He **walks** while she **talks**.

3. The **present participle** indicates continuing action, created by adding **-ing** to the base form of the verb. In order to function as the main verb in a sentence, a participle must be accompanied by a form of the verb **be**.

**Example:** Mary **is looking** for a large apartment.

A **gerund** is a present participle functioning as the subject or object in a sentence.

**Examples:** **Swimming** is good exercise. (***Swimming** is the subject.*)  
Jonathan liked **fishing**. (***fishing** is the direct object of **liked**.*)

A present participle can also be an adjective.

**Example:** He gave **supporting** evidence. (***supporting** modifies **evidence**.*)

4. The **past tense** indicates action that occurred in the past. A verb's past tense can often be recognized by its **-d** or **-ed** ending. The past tense does not change form to show person or number.

**Examples:** His parents [or] Richard **agreed** with her.  
His parents [or] Richard **traveled** to Paris and **saw** the Eiffel Tower.

## Verbs

5. The **past participle** is identical to the past tense form of the verb (other than in some irregular verbs), except that it must be accompanied by a form of the verb **be** to function as the main verb in the sentence.

**Examples:** He **was finished** with the project.

The cookies **were baked** fresh this morning.

The past participle can also function as an adjective.

**Examples:** *Passive voice verb:* Nearly everyone **was helped** at the scene.

*Adjective:* I never eat an **overcooked** steak.

## VERBALS

A **verbal** is a word that looks like a verb and is created from a verb, but does not act as a verb in the sentence. When attempting to identify the verb(s) in a sentence, be careful not to mistake verbals (as gerunds, participles, or infinitives) for verbs.

- Verbals can be used by themselves as either nouns or modifiers, or, like prepositional phrases, they can be part of a phrase.

**Examples:** *Gerund acting as a noun:* **Counting** money daily is a tedious job for bank tellers.

*Participle: adjective phrase modifying disappearance.* **Viewed** in the light of day, the woman's disappearance didn't seem so sinister.

*Infinitive: adjective modifying plan.* They agreed on a plan **to win** the race.

- A **gerund** is a verbal (**reading, swimming, playing tennis**, etc.) that is used as a noun. A gerund can be the subject of a sentence.

**Example:** **Reading** is my favorite pastime.

- A **present** or **action participle** is a verbal that is used to modify a noun. It can be part of a participle phrase.

**Example:** Sitting and **reading** in my favorite chair, I enjoy my favorite pastime.

## Verbs

- A present or action participle can also be a single-word adjective.

**Example:** The **reading** habit is a necessity for students.

**Note:** Both gerunds and present participles are formed from the **-ing** form of a verb. However, gerunds are always nouns, while participles are always modifiers of nouns.

- An **infinitive** is identified by the word **to**, which precedes it (**to read**). Infinitives and infinitive phrases are verbals that are used not only as nouns and adjectives, but also as adverbs.

**Examples:** I plan **to read** it this afternoon.

The book was too boring **to read on**. (***to read on**, an infinitive phrase, functions here as an adverb that modifies the adjective **boring***)

- **Past participles** (*-d, -ed, -en*) are also used as adjectives.

**Example:** My teacher wanted the book **read** by Monday.

The past participle is sometimes called the **passive participle** because it is derived from the past participle form of a verb, which is often used in the passive voice.

**Note:** In each of the examples below, the word **finished**, which is a past, or passive, participle modifies the noun **homework**.

**Examples:** I had my homework **finished** by 7 p.m.

The **finished** homework lay on my desk.

My homework, **finished** by 7 p.m., was in my room.