



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.***)

Verbs

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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Verbs

- 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.