

10 Things to Know about Verbs

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1- Verbs are the heart of a sentence. Without them a sentence is incomplete and pointless. You can create a complete imperative sentence (a command) with just a verb.

Examples: "Go!" "Eat." "Look!"

2- There are two types of verbs: verbs that express a physical or mental action (they tell what the subject [who or what the sentence is about] is doing) and verbs that express a state of being (also known as linking verbs).

Action Verbs: Steve ran. Steve wrote. Steve studied.

State-of-Being Verbs: Julie is worried. Julie feels sick.

3- Action verbs can function as transitive or intransitive:

a- Transitive verbs pass the action to an object. In other words, the object is affected by the action.

Example: Susan grabbed the ball. (The ball is the object.)

Tip: If you can answer the question "what?" about the verb, then the verb is transitive.

Example: Anna ate a sandwich. She ate what? A sandwich.

b- Intransitive verbs have no object:

Example: Brian slept on the couch. Brian ate in the cafeteria.

4- Linking verbs express a state of being. They connect the subject of the verb with information about the subject. Many linking verbs take the form of the verb “to be.”

Examples: Bob is happy. Bob feels tired. Bob looked scared.

Tip: If you can replace the verb with a form of the verb “to be,” then the verb is a linking verb.

5- Verbs can show the time (past, present, or future) of an action, event, or condition by changing their form or tense. Helping verbs (such as has, had, have, will, etc.) help the main verb express the different tenses:

Present (happening now or happening continually or regularly): I call.

Past (happened in the past): I called.

Future (will happen): I will call.

Past Participle form with helping verb(s):

I have called. (Present Perfect Tense)

I had called. (Past Perfect Tense)

I will have called. (Future Perfect Tense)

The verb form ending in *ing* in conjunction with a helping verb is used to express a continuous action:

Present: I am calling.

Past: I was calling.

Future: I will be calling.

6- The past and past participle forms of regular verbs are spelled by adding *ed* to the present tense. The past and past participle forms of irregular verbs have different spellings.

Regular Verb: call, called, have called

Irregular Verb: swim, swam, have swum

7- Singular subjects need singular verbs and plural subjects need plural verbs. Third-person singular verb forms usually end in *s*.

Singular: I teach math. You teach math. She teaches math.

Plural: We teach math. They teach math.

8- A verb is said to be in the active voice if the subject is doing the action. A verb is said to be in the passive voice if the subject is not doing the action.

Active Voice: The lion devoured the meat.

Passive Voice: The meat was devoured by the lion.

9- A verbal is a verb that acts as another part of speech:

a- A gerund is a verb ending in *ing* that is used – by itself or as part of a gerund phrase – as a noun.

Examples: Reading is my favorite pastime. You should stop drinking so much coffee.

b- A participle is a verb ending in *ing* or *ed* used – by itself or as part of a participle phrase – as an adjective.

Examples: Trembling with fear, the boy approached the panting tiger. (adjectives describing “boy” and “tiger,” respectively)

c- An infinitive is a verb form introduced by “to” that is used – by itself or as part of an infinitive phrase – as a noun, adjective, or adverb.

Examples: My need to blow my nose is a problem. (adjective describing “need”) I love to swim. (noun) I run to win. (adverb modifying “run”)

10- Good writers use action verbs as much as possible, searching for words that paint a vivid and powerful picture of the action, and considering the connotation (feelings associated with words) of the verbs they choose. They also use the active voice (letting the subject carry out the action) whenever possible.

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Key Terms:

Action Verb

Linking or State-of-Being Verb

Transitive Verb

Intransitive Verb

Verb Tenses

Helping Verbs

Present Tense

Past Tense

Future Tense

Past Participle

Regular Verbs

Irregular Verbs

Singular Verbs

Plural Verbs

Active Voice

Passive Voice

Verbal

Gerund

Participle

Infinitive