

The Verb

Recognize a *verb* when you see one.

Verbs are a necessary component of all sentences. Verbs have two important functions: Some verbs put stalled subjects into motion while other verbs help to clarify the subjects in meaningful ways. Look at the examples below:

My grumpy old English teacher ***smiled*** at the plate of cold meatloaf.

My grumpy old English teacher = stalled subject; ***smiled*** = verb.

The daredevil cockroach ***splashed*** into Sara's soup.

The daredevil cockroach = stalled subject; ***splashed*** = verb.

Theo's overworked computer ***exploded*** in a spray of sparks.

Theo's overworked computer = stalled subject; ***exploded*** = verb.

The curious toddler ***popped*** a grasshopper into her mouth.

The curious toddler = stalled subject; ***popped*** = verb.

Francisco's comic book collection ***is*** worth \$20,000.00.

Francisco's comic book collection = stalled subject; ***is*** = verb.

The important thing to remember is that every subject in a sentence must have a verb. Otherwise, you will have written a fragment, a major writing error.

Consider word function when you are looking for a verb.

Many words in English have more than one function. Sometimes a word is a noun, sometimes a verb, sometimes a modifier. As a result, you must often analyze the job a word is doing in the sentence. Look at these two examples:

Potato chips ***crunch*** too loudly to eat during an exam.

The ***crunch*** of the potato chips drew the angry glance of Professor Orsini to our corner of the room.

Crunch is something that we can *do*. We can ***crunch*** cockroaches under our shoes. We can ***crunch*** popcorn during a movie. We can ***crunch*** numbers for a math class. In the first sentence, then, ***crunch*** is what the potato chips *do*, so we can call it a verb.

Even though ***crunch*** is often a verb, it can also be a noun. The ***crunch*** of the potato chips, for example, is a thing, a sound that we can hear. You therefore need to analyze

the function that a word provides in a sentence before you determine what grammatical name to give that word.

Know an *action* verb when you see one.

Dance! Sing! Paint! Giggle! Chew! What are these words doing? They are expressing action, something that a person, animal, force of nature, or thing can *do*. As a result, words like these are called action verbs. Look at the examples below:

Clyde **sneezes** with the force of a tornado.

Sneezing is something that Clyde can *do*.

Because of the spoiled mayonnaise, Ricky **vomited** potato salad all day.

Vomiting is something that Ricky can *do*—although he might not enjoy it.

Sylvia always **winks** at cute guys driving hot cars.

Winking is something that Sylvia can *do*.

The telephone **rang** with shrill, annoying cries.

Ringing is something that the telephone can *do*.

Thunder **boomed** in the distance, sending my poor dog scrambling under the bed.

Booming is something that thunder can *do*.

If you are unsure whether a sentence contains an action verb or not, look at every word in the sentence and ask yourself, "Is this something that a person or thing can *do*?" Take this sentence, for example:

During the summer, my poodle constantly pants and drools.

Can you **during**? Is **during** something *you* can *do*? Can you **the**? Is there someone **theing** outside the window right now? Can you **summer**? Do your obnoxious neighbors keep you up until 2 a.m. because they are **summering**? Can you **my**? What does a person do when she's **mying**? Can you **poodle**? Show me what **poodling** is. Can you **pant**? Bingo! Sure you can! Run five miles and you'll be panting. Can you **and**? Of course not! But can you **drool**? You bet—although we don't need a demonstration of this ability. In the sentence above, therefore, there are two action verbs: **pant** and **drool**.

Know a *linking* verb when you see one.

Linking verbs, on the other hand, do not express action. Instead, they connect the subject of a verb to additional information about the subject. Look at the examples below:

Mario **is** a computer hacker.

Ising isn't something that Mario can do. **Is** connects the subject, **Mario**, to additional information about him, that he will soon have the FBI on his trail. During bad storms, trailer parks **are** often magnets for tornadoes.

Areing isn't something that trailer parks can do. **Are** is simply connecting the subject, **trailer parks**, to something said about them, that they tend to attract tornadoes.

After receiving another failing grade in algebra, Jose **became** depressed.

Became connects the subject, **Jose**, to something said about him, that he wasn't happy.

A three-mile run **seems** like a marathon during a hot, humid July afternoon.

Seems connects the subject, **a three-mile run**, with additional information, that it's more arduous depending on the day and time.

At restaurants, Rami always **feels** angry after waiting an hour for a poor meal.

Feels connects the subject, **Rami**, to his state of being, anger.

The following verbs are *true* linking verbs: any form of the verb **be** [**am, were, has been, are being, might have been**, etc.], **become**, and **seem**. These true linking verbs are *always* linking verbs.

Then you have a list of verbs with multiple personalities: **appear, feel, grow, look, prove, remain, smell, sound, taste**, and **turn**. Sometimes these verbs are linking verbs; sometimes they are action verbs. Their function in a sentence decides what you should call them.

How do you tell when they are action verbs and when they are linking verbs? If you can substitute **am, is, or are** for the verb and the sentence still sounds logical, you have a linking verb on your hands. But if, after the substitution, the sentence makes no sense, you are dealing with an action verb. Here are some examples:

Chris **tasted** the crunchy, honey-roasted grasshopper.

Chris **is** the grasshopper? I don't think so! In this sentence then, **tasted** is an action verb.

The crunchy, honey-roasted grasshopper **tasted** good.

The grasshopper **is** good? You bet. Roast your own!

I **smell** the delicious aroma of the grilled octopus.

I **am** the delicious aroma? Not the last time I checked. **Smell**, in this sentence, is an action verb.

The aroma of the grilled octopus **smells** appetizing.

The aroma **is** appetizing? Definitely! Come take a whiff!

The students **looked** at the equation until their brains hurt.

The students **are** the equation? Of course not! Here, **looked** is an action verb.

The equation **looked** hopelessly confusing.

The equation **is** confusing? Without a doubt! You try it.

This substitution will not work for **appear**. With **appear**, you have to analyze the function of the verb.

Godzilla **appeared** in the doorway, spooking me badly.

Appear is something Godzilla can *do*—whether you want him to or not.

Godzilla **appeared** happy to see me.

Here, **appeared** is connecting the subject, **Godzilla**, to his state of mind, happiness.

Realize that a verb can have more than one part.

You must remember that verbs can have more than one part. In fact, a verb can have as many as *four* parts. A multi-part verb has a base or *main* part as well as additional helping or auxiliary verbs with it. Check out the examples below:

Harvey **spilled** chocolate milkshake on Leslie's new dress.

Because Harvey is a klutz, he **is** always **spilling** something.

Harvey **might have spilled** the chocolate milkshake because the short dress distracted him.

Harvey **should have been spilling** the chocolate milkshake down his throat.



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