

Grammar Reference

State verbs and action verbs

Form, meaning and use

Action verbs describe things we do or things that happen.

Ted **is playing** football.

The sun **rose** at six this morning.

We use **state verbs** to talk about attitudes, thoughts, senses or belonging. Sometimes, state verbs can also describe actions. Most state verbs are not used in the continuous (-ing) form.

The children **love** ice cream.

I **believe** in angels.

Form

Action verbs can be used in all tenses. **State verbs** can not be used in continuous forms.

The new baby **weighed** 3 kg.

NOT: The new baby was weighing 3 kg.

Maria **has** a piano.

NOT: Maria is having a piano.

My father **likes** cream in his coffee.

NOT: My father is liking cream in his coffee.

Ms. Thomas **owns** three small dogs and a cat.

NOT: Ms. Thomas is owning three small dogs and a cat.

Mr. Thomas **belongs** to a football club.

NOT: Mr. Thomas is belonging to a football club.

Here are some common state verbs:

appear
believe
belong
consider
consist
contain
cost
doubt
exist
fit
hate
hear
have
know
like
love
matter
mean
need
owe
own
prefer
remember
resemble
seem
suppose
think
understand
want
wish

Verbs with two meanings

Some state verbs can be used in the continuous form to talk about a temporary action or an action happening in the present. However, some state verbs can be used as action verbs in the present continuous form with a change of meaning. Here are some examples:

Bernard **looks** healthy. (his appearance now)

I **was looking** out the window at the rain. (watching the rain)

Does Maria **have** a piano? (own)

They **are having** lunch with their mother today. (eating)

I **don't hear** the music playing. (hear with my ears)

Our manager **will be hearing** our presentation today. (will be listening to)

Lola **feels** that we were rude. (thinks)

How **has** your father **been feeling**? (how is his health)

That perfume **smells** good. (has a good scent)

The boy **is smelling** the flowers. (sniffing at)

The new baby **weighs** 3 kg. (her weight is 3 kg)

The woman **is weighing** the apples. (measuring their weight)

They **are** good writers. (it's a fact)

Bob **is being** crazy. (behaving in a crazy way)

What **do** you **see** on the wall? (notice with your eyes)

They **are seeing** their cousins tomorrow. (will visit)

Informal English

In **very informal English**, the continuous form is sometimes used with state verbs. An example is the restaurant advertisement that says, '**I'm loving it!**' You might also hear someone say, '**I'm hating this movie.**' The **-ing** form of the verbs in these examples have a sense of being temporary.

(Right now) I **'m hating** this movie.

(General opinion) I **like** the movie I saw last week.