

Introduction:

Verbs in English Grammar

In the English language or any language for that matter, verbs happen to be an essential part of speech, without which it would be impossible to indicate what the subject is doing. It refers to all actions, including those related to feelings and emotions. Verbs come in different types and forms so that they can perform differently in order to provide complete meaning. Before we look into the types of verbs and the verb forms, let us look at how various dictionaries define the term 'verb'.

Definition of a Verb

The Oxford Learners' Dictionary defines a 'verb' as "a word or group of words that express an action (such as eat), an event (such as happen) or a state (such as exist)". According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a 'verb' is defined as "a word or phrase that describes an action, condition, or experience". The Collins Dictionary provides a much more elaborate definition of a verb. According to them, "A verb is a word such as 'sing', 'feel', or 'die' which is used with a subject to say what someone or something does or what happens to them, or to give information about them".

General Classification of Verbs according to What They Signify

Before we get into a broad classification, let us first have a look at how verbs can be classified generally according to what kind of action they signify.

Verbs Referring to Actions

Verbs referring to action (action verbs) are those that involve the movement of one's body in one way or the other. Some examples of verbs referring to actions are as follows:

Walk

Run

Talk

Sit

Read

Write

Jog

Cough

Sleep

Jump

Sing

Drink

Teach

Present

Build

Break

Tow

Toss

Hug

Fight

Verbs Referring to Experiences or Feelings

These are verbs that refer to something that you can feel or experience and do not necessarily involve a movement of any kind. Some examples of verbs referring to feelings and experiences are as follows:

Love

Hate

Envy

Believe

Trust

Feel

Entrust

Experience

Care

Cherish

Sense

Know

Recognise

Understand

Comprehend

Like

Need

Adore

Loathe

Appreciate

Verbs Referring to a State or Condition

These verbs are those that refer to situations or the state of being. All forms of 'to be' verbs belong to this category. Some examples of verbs referring to a state or condition are as follows:

Am

Is

Are

Was

Were

Have

Has

Will be

Appear

Seem

Become

Been

Being

The Various Types of Verbs with Examples

Verbs can be classified into numerous types according to their function or role in a sentence or context. Let us look into the various types of verbs and some examples of each type of verb.

Auxiliary Verbs/Helping Verbs

Auxiliary verbs or helping verbs, as the name suggests, is a verb that is used to help another verb sound sensible and meaningful. It is used to change the other verb's tense, mood or voice. So, every time an auxiliary verb is used, you always have one more verb, which acts as the main verb in a sentence.

Examples of auxiliary verbs are as follows:

Am

Is

Are

Was

Were

Have

Has

Do

Will

Can

One point you have to take care of when you use auxiliary verbs is that you should conjugate the auxiliary verb correctly according to the tense form of a sentence. Another specific fact about auxiliary verbs is that they can also be used as a main verb. Also, there are verbs called modal verbs that can be used as a helping verb.

Modal Verbs

Modal verbs are those verbs that are used to denote the possibility, probability, capability or necessity of something happening. Modal verbs, unlike other auxiliary verbs, cannot be used as a main verb in a sentence.

Examples of modal verbs are as follows:

Can

Could

Will

Would

May

Might

Should

Must

Ought to

Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs include phrases that are formed by combining two or more parts of speech that performs the same function as a verb in a sentence. In most cases, a phrasal verb results from a combination of a verb and a preposition.

Some examples of phrasal verbs are as follows:

Go by

Lay off

Log in

Get off

Run out

Go all out

Think through

Fed up

Taken aback

Act on

Back away

Back up

Look up

Mix up

Opt out

Pop in

Linking Verbs

A linking verb, just like the name suggests, is a type of verb that is used to link the subjects in a sentence to the other parts of the sentence so that it is meaningful. It connects the subject to the object, an adjective and even a prepositional phrase. All 'to be' forms of verbs and verbs like 'seem' and 'become' can act as linking verbs.

Have a look at the following examples to understand how verbs perform the role of a linking verb in sentences.

Example 1: Connecting Nouns to Other Nouns in a Sentence

Alpha is my brother.

In the above example, the verb 'is' is used to connect the subject 'Danny' as the 'brother' of the speaker. In this sentence, the words 'Danny' and 'brother' are used to refer to the same person.

Example 2: Connecting a Noun to a Prepositional Phrase in a Sentence

The children were in the park.

In Example 2, the verb 'were' is used to connect the subject 'the

children’ to the prepositional phrase ‘in the park’.

Example 3: Connecting a Noun/Subject to an Adjective

Your presentation of the life cycle of the silkworm was excellent.

In the above example, the verb ‘was’ is used to link the subject ‘Your presentation of the life cycle of a silkworm’ to the adjective ‘excellent’.

Example 4: Connecting the Subject/Noun to the Predicate using Seem/Become

This book on a treasure hunt seems interesting.

In this sentence, the subject ‘This book on a treasure hunt’ is connected to the adjective ‘interesting’ with the linking verb ‘seem’.

The students became bored after two continuous hours of classes and were not ready to take another hour of class without a break in between.

In the above sentence, the subject ‘The students’ has been linked to the rest of the sentence with the linking verb ‘became’.

Different Categories of Verbs

Verbs can be divided into different categories according to their behaviour when used in a context. Let us look at the categories explained below.

Regular Verbs and Irregular Verbs

As you can see, verbs are used to denote actions, and they can be used in different forms to indicate when the subject in a sentence is carrying out an action. A regular verb can be conjugated to show if the action takes place in the past or if the action is taking place continuously.

In most cases, the past form of the verb is formed by adding an 'ed' to the root verb for regular verbs. On the other hand, there are other verbs that do not follow this rule. They are called irregular verbs. These verbs have their own unique forms. If you are wondering how to learn these irregular verbs, read the article on irregular verbs to find out how.

Have a look at the examples given below.

Malik searched for his white shirt in his cupboard, but he did not find it.

(Root verb – search)

Did you find the book you were looking for?

In the above examples, the verb 'searched' is the past form of the regular verb 'search' by adding an 'ed' and the verb form 'looking'

indicates the continuous form of the regular verb 'look' by adding an 'ing' to the end of the root verb.

Selena read the book on the evolution of life on earth.

Musa found the keys that went missing yesterday.

In the above examples, the verb 'read' stays the same in the past form and when used as a past participle. 'Found' is the past form of the root verb 'find'.

Transitive Verbs and Intransitive Verbs

Transitive and intransitive forms of verbs are used to denote how a verb acts when used with a direct object and an indirect object. Let us look at a few examples.

Vincent gave a box of chocolates to his brother. (Indirect object – his brother, Direct object – a box of chocolates)

Fanta passed the water bottle to Hamidou, who was sitting in the first row. (Indirect object – Fanta, Direct object – the water bottle)

The little girl ran around the park for two hours.

Amadou walked to school every day.

My mom cleaned the house today. (Direct object – the house)

Saran did not like the movie. (Direct object – the movie)

In the above examples, the verbs 'gave' and 'passed' in the first two sentences are seen to take a direct object and an indirect object,

whereas the verbs 'ran' and 'walked' take no object at all. In the last two sentences, the verbs 'cleaned' and 'did not like' take a direct object and no indirect object.

Verbs that take a direct object alone are called transitive verbs, and those verbs that do not take either a direct object or an indirect object are called intransitive verbs. There is yet another category of verbs that take both the direct object and the indirect object, and they are called ditransitive verbs.

Verb Forms

A verb is used in different ways to indicate the time in which the subject is performing an action. There are various verb forms that are used to do the same. Let us look at the different verb forms explained below.

Root Verb

The original form of the verb, how it originally exists in the English language, without any inflexions or conjugations, is called the root verb.

Some examples of root verbs are as follows:

Eat

Sit

Stir

Type

Read

Fry

Tick

Shift

Trick

Sing

Simple Present – Third Person Singular

The third person singular form of the verb in the present tense is mostly the verb in the singular form. When using the third person singular pronouns such as he, she and it, and the nouns that can be substituted by the third person singular pronouns, the verb is singular (mostly done just by adding an 's' to the root verb) so that it agrees with the subject in the sentence.

For example:

Assia likes to have mangoes after every meal. (The noun 'Assia' can be substituted with the third person singular pronoun 'he')

The cat chases every rat it catches sight of. (The noun 'The cat' can be substituted with the third person singular pronoun 'it')

She hates going to work on Saturdays and Mondays.

Present Participle

The present participle is used in the continuous form of tenses to indicate an action that is continuing or in progress at that particular moment or sometime in the past or in the future. These words are formed just by adding an 'ing' to the root verb. For verbs ending with an 'e', in most cases, the present participle is formed by removing the 'e' and then adding 'ing' to the remaining portion of the verb.

For example:

Barry is watching a movie along with her cousin. (Present Continuous Tense)

My mother is baking cakes (Present Continuous Tense)

All my brothers were playing football in the evening. (Past Continuous Tense)

Simple Past

There is a change in the spelling of the root verb when it is used to indicate the simple past tense form of the verb. There is no one rule to write a verb in the simple past tense; it changes for each verb – some verbs like 'give' and 'bring' take a different spelling, and some verbs like

'cut' and 'put' remain the same when used in the past tense. However, most verbs can be made into the past tense by adding an 'ed' at the end of the root verb.

For example:

The doctor asked me to take tablets for ten days. (The root verb here is 'ask')

Nelson bought the car he checked out last week. (The root verbs here are 'buy' and 'check')

The baby drank the milk completely. (The root verb here is 'drink')

Past participle

The past participle form of the verb is used to denote the perfect tense forms in a sentence. In some cases, the past tense and the past participle remain the same, but there are a number of verbs that have different spellings when used as a simple past tense verb and a past participle.

For example:

I have searched the entire loft for that box, but I did not find it. (The root verb here is 'search', 'have searched' is the verb in the sentence that indicates the perfect tense and 'searched' is the past participle)

Dylan had read the book already.

In the above example, the root verb here is 'read', 'have read' is the verb in the sentence that indicates the perfect tense and 'read' is the past participle. In this case, all forms of the verb take the same spelling but have a different pronunciation.

Gerunds

Any verb can be transformed into a gerund by adding 'ing' to the root verb. Gerunds, when it stands by themselves, can be used as nouns. A gerund can be used as a verb when used with an auxiliary verb to indicate an action that is continuing at a particular period of time.

For example:

He is eating an apple.

Joy will be coming home next week.

Walking every day is good exercise.

Drinking and driving is dangerous.

Infinitives

Infinitives, like gerunds, can be used to turn verbs into nouns by adding a preposition 'to' in front of the root verb.

For example:

Would you like to have something?

I like to dance in my free time.

I am going to talk to my friend.