Differences between Action and Stative Verbs

All verbs in English are classified as either stative or action verbs (also referred to as 'dynamic verbs'). Action verbs describe actions we take (things we do) or things that happen. Stative verbs refer to the way things 'are' - their appearance, state of being, smell, etc. The most important difference between stative and action verbs is that action verbs can be used in continuous tenses and stative verbs can not be used in continuous tenses.

For example:

Action Verbs

She's studying math with Tom at the moment. AND She studies math with Tom every Friday.

They've been working since seven o'clock this morning. AND They worked for two hours yesterday afternoon.

We'll be having a meeting when you arrive. AND We are going to meet next Friday.

Stative Verbs

The flowers smell lovely. NOT Those flowers are smelling lovely.

She heard him speak in Seattle yesterday afternoon. NOT She was hearing him speak in Seattle yesterday afternoon.

They'll love the concert tomorrow evening. NOT They'll be loving the concert tomorrow evening.

Common Stative Verbs

There are many more action verbs than stative verbs. Here is a list of some the most common stative verbs:

be

hate

like

love

need

belong

believe

cost

get

impress

know

reach

recognize

taste

think

understand

You may notice that some of these verbs can be used as action verbs with different meanings. For example, the verb 'to think' can either express an opinion, or the process of considering. In the first case, when 'think' expresses an opinion it i stative:

I think she should work harder on her math.

She thinks he is a fantastic singer.

'Think', however, can also express the process of considering something. In this case 'think' is an action verb:

They're thinking about buying a new house.

She's thinking of joining a health club.

Generally, stative verbs fall into four groups:

Verbs Showing Thought or Opinions

know

believe

understand

recognize

Verbs Showing Possession

have

own

belong

possess

Verbs Showing Senses hear

smell

see

feel

Verbs Showing Emotion

love

hate

want

need

If you are unsure of whether a verb is an action verb or a stative verb ask yourself the following question:

Does this verb relate some sort of process or a state?

If it relates a process, then the verb is an action verb. If it relates a state, the verb is a stative verb.

Hi all,I got a question from someone about stative verbs. Here is how a Web site I found described them: Stative verbs usually refer to a state or condition which is quite static or unchanging. This site went on to say: Note that we CANNOT use these verbs in the continuous (progressive) forms, or as the person who asked me the question said, the -ing form.Some of the verbs listed as static verbs are: love, hate, like, see, hear, sound, think (meaning "have an opinion")First, I'd like to ask people who actually teach this how you present this to your students. (As I've said before, I'm a writer, not a teacher, so this is new territory for me.)Second, I'd like to give my own opinion. I think part of the problem arises from the assumption that the situation described by this verb is, in fact, unchanging. Someone can love someone today and not next month, someone can believe something with all her heart one day and have it disproven the next. And so when you use the present continuous, you are emphasizing that you think this status is likely to change. I am thinking that I'd like to stay home for dinner... but that may change if you tell me which restaurant you are thinking about going to.Don't talk to me right now! I am hating you right now for what you said last night. Talk to me tomorrow when I have calmed down.[During a sound check] No, I can't hear you... oh yes...yes, now I am hearing you loud and clear. Hi, GG!I actually teach that kind of things to students.First, I try to make them understand how they cannot make some things change by sheer willpower: you love someone, you can't help it. You remember or forget things: you can't help it either. You see, youh hear, it means you're not blind or deaf, etc, etc...Second, I do agree with you they can be used in the progressive form - sometimes.I'd say you use it to express very occasionnal situations, and, as you said, it implies you may change your mind soon. But - that's how I see it - it also implies a very personnal and time-limited "ressenti", as in your example "I'm hating you" (although you're my best friend, and of course I love you, but wait till tomorrow). It can also refer to the building process of, say, memories. "Do you remember our stay in Provence?" - "No, I don't" - "We were in a little villa, there were lots of bees..." - "Bees? Wait! In the lavanders?" - "Yes!" - "Oh yes, I'm remembering ... We had breakfast on the terrasse, and I didn't want to put jam on my bread because of the bees?" - "Yes, that's it!" - "Oh, yes, I remember now!" etc etc...It can also refer to a change in your normal perceptions. "I hear you" = "I'm not deaf". ON SKYPE: "Can you hear me?" - "No, I can't. Move a bit, will you?" - "OK. ... There... Better? " - "Oh yes, I'm hearing you much clearer now!"

Have I helped?

listen: to pay attention to sound

hear: to perceive by the ear