

Action Verb

Definition of Action Verb

An action verb, or “active verb,” shows an action, feeling, or process. An action verb is also known as a “dynamic verb,” and it is opposite to a “static verb,” in that it is mostly used with an active voice. An action verb expresses an action that an animal, [object](#), or person can do.

For instance, consider the following [sentence](#):

“Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store? / Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find” (*Ode to Autumn*, by John Keats).

Here the verbs “seen” and “seeks” are both action verbs. They are both demonstrating actions the subjects have done and can do.

Characteristics of an Action Verb

An action verb may be used to refer to a thought: “Dolly thought about project. She wanted a good reward.”

An action verb can be used in the present, past, or future tense: “The tiger runs very fast.” “The tiger ran through our courtyard.” “The tiger will run through the forest.”

An action verb can be used with helping verbs: “Will you ride with me to football practice?”

Common Uses of Action Verbs

“Jennifer talks too much.”

“Talks” refers to an action that Jennifer does often.

“It started to rain, so Maria reached for an umbrella.”

“Reached” refers to an action that Maria has done.

“Sara is watching the bird hop around on the fence.”

“Watching” refers to an action that Sara is doing.

“The gun fired the bullet into the sky.”

“Fired” refers to the action performed by the gun.

“The water is boiling over on the stove.”

“Boiling” refers to the work the water is doing.

Examples of Action Verb in Literature

Example #1: *Supporting Children’s Learning* (by Lyn Overall)

“I often sing, hum, and whistle, but I would not *do* any of those things in the company of other people.”

The above sentence shows three action verbs: “sing,” “hum,” and “whistle.”

Example #2: *The Catcher in the Rye* (by J. D. Salinger)

“They advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hotshot guy on a horse jumping over a fence. Like as if all you ever did at Pencey was play polo all the time. I never even once saw a horse anywhere near the place. They kicked me out. I wasn’t supposed to come back after Christmas vacation on account of I was flunking four subjects and not applying myself and all. They gave me frequent warning to start applying myself—but I didn’t do it.”

Here, several characters are doing several different things, as shown through the use of the underlined action verbs: “advertise,” “showing,” “jumping,” “did,” “kicked,” “come,” “flunking,” “gave,” and “did.”

Example #3: *Soul to Soul: Communications from the Heart* (by Gark Zukav)

“Fighters using Kung Fu twirled, kicked, jumped, and punched with grace and skill through every life-threatening challenge, including dragons, sorcerers, assassins, and armies.”

In this sentence, the underlined words “twirled,” “kicked,” “jumped,” and “punched” are actions that the subjects (the fighters) are performing.

Example #4: *Ode to Nightingale* (by John Keats)

“My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk ...
Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan ...”

Keats has used an action verb in every line of this poem. These verbs include: “aches,” “pains,” “drunk,” “emptied,” “sunk,” “fade,” “dissolve,” “forget,” “sit,” and “hear.” These verbs are able to clearly convey pain and sadness.

Example #5: *The Rime of Ancient Mariner* (by S.T. Coleridge)

“As who pursued with yell and blow”

“And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast...

“Listen, stranger! Mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold ...”

These lines are good examples of how action verbs can be used. All of these verbs convey information that extends beyond the literal meaning of their lines.

Function

The basic function of an action verb is to express the action that a subject performs. An action verb specifically states or demonstrates the subject’s action in a sentence. An action verb conveys information, emotion, and a sense of purpose that extends beyond the literal meaning of a sentence.

