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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