

# THE VERB

## Recognize a verb when you find one.

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Verbs are a necessary component of all **sentences**. Without verbs, **subjects** would just sit in a lane of text with nothing to propel them forward.

Consider this subject, for instance:

My grumpy old English teacher

It is a stalled idea until we add a verb:

My grumpy old English teacher **smiled** at the plate of cold meatloaf.

Do you see how the verb **smiled** gets the idea moving toward the destination that the writer has in mind?

Here are more examples:

The daredevil cockroach **splashed** into Sara's soup.

**The daredevil cockroach** = subject; **splashed** = verb.

Theo's overworked computer **exploded** in a spray of sparks.

**Theo's overworked computer** = subject; **exploded** = verb.

The curious toddler **popped** a grasshopper into her mouth.

**The curious toddler** = subject; **popped** = verb.

Francisco's comic book collection **is** worth \$20,000.00.

**Francisco's comic book collection** = 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 searching for the verb.

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Many words in English have more than one function. Sometimes the same word is a **modifier**, a **noun**, and a verb. As a result, you must analyze the job that the word is performing in the sentence.

Read these three examples:

The **crunch** factor of this brand of potato chips is intense.

The **crunch** of the potato chips drew the angry eyes of Professor Orsini to our corner of the room.

Potato chips **crunch** too loudly to eat during an exam.

In the first sentence, **crunch** is a modifier describing **factor**.

**Crunch** can also be a noun. The **crunch** of the potato chips, for example, is a thing, a sound that we hear.

Finally, **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 third sentence, then, **crunch** is what the potato chips *do*, so we call it a *verb*.

You therefore need to analyze the function that a word provides in a sentence before you determine what grammatical name to give that word.

## Recognize an action verb when you find one.

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**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, we call these words **action verbs**.

Here are examples:

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.

**Ringng** 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, consider every individual word in the sentence and ask yourself, "Is this something that a person or thing can *do*?"

Take this sentence, for example:

Every August, my poodle constantly pants and drools.

Can you **every**? Is **everying** something that you can *do*? Can you **August**? Is there someone **Augusting** outside the window right now? Can you **my**? What does a person do when she is **mying**? Can you **poodle**? Show me what **poodling** is. Can you **pant**? Bingo! Sure you can! Run five miles, and we will hear you panting. Can you **and**? Of course not! But can you **drool**? You bet—although we do not need a demonstration at this time!

In the sentence above, therefore, you have two action verbs: **pant** and **drool**.

## Recognize a linking verb when you find one.

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**Linking verbs**, on the other hand, do not express action. Instead, they connect the **subject** of the verb to additional information.

Read the examples below:

Mario **is** a computer hacker.

**Ising** is not something that Mario can *do*. **Is** connects the subject, **Mario**, to additional information about him, that he will soon have the FBI on his tail!

During bad storms, trailer parks **are** often magnets for tornadoes.

**Areing** is not 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 was not 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 exercise is 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 split 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 determines what you should call them.

How do you tell when these words 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 examples:

Chris **tastes** the crunchy, honey-roasted grasshopper.

Chris **is** the grasshopper? No way! In this sentence, **tastes** is an action verb.

The crunchy, honey-roasted grasshopper **tastes** good.

The grasshopper **is** good? You bet. Roast your own!

I **smell** the delicious aroma of grilled octopus.

I **am** the delicious aroma? Not the last time I checked. **Smell**, in this sentence, is an action verb.

The grilled octopus **smells** appetizing.

The octopus **is** appetizing? Definitely! Come take a whiff!

Convinced of their formidable intelligence, the students **will prove** the theorem that Professor Lambeau posted on the whiteboard.

The students **are** the theorem? Of course not! Here, **will prove** is an action verb.

The theorem **proved** too difficult for the students to solve.

The theorem **is** too difficult? Without a doubt! Try the math yourself.

This substitution will not work for **appear**. With this verb, you must analyze its function in the sentence.

Godzilla **appeared** in the doorway, spooking me badly.

Notice that **is** would sound good: Godzilla **is** in the doorway. But here **appear** is what Godzilla is *doing* (whether you want him to or not), making this **appear** an action verb.

Godzilla **appeared** happy to find me.

Here, **appeared** is connecting the subject, **Godzilla**, to his state of mind, happiness.

## Realize that a verb can have more than one part.

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A verb can have as many as *four* parts. A multi-part verb—called a **verb phrase**—has a base or *main* verb together with one or more **auxiliary verbs**.

Consider these examples:

Harvey **spilled** chocolate milkshake on Leslie's new dress.

**Spilled** = 1-part verb.

Because Harvey is a klutz, he **is** always **spilling** something.

**Is spilling** = 2-part verb (*always* is an **adverb** interrupting the two parts).

Harvey **might have spilled** the chocolate milkshake because the short dress distracted him.

**Might have spilled** = 3-part verb.

Harvey **should have been spilling** the chocolate milkshake down his throat.

**Should have been spilling** = 4-part verb.

