Definition of a verb

A verb is a word we use to describe an action, state or occurrence. Every subject in a sentence must have a verb:

> **Jenny is a teacher. She lives in London with her husband, Bill, and their two children. Bill is a musician. He plays the guitar in a band. Their daughter goes to school and their son is studying medicine at King's College.**

	Examples
Auxiliary verbs	**be, have, do**
Stative verbs	**think, believe, need, want, like, hate, consider**
Active verbs	**run, sit, drink, play, go, make, grow, cook, fall**
Transitive verbs	**buy, eat, find, raise, give, send, see, like, want, have**
Intransitive verbs	**wait, rise, sit, happen, occur, complain, lie**
Phrasal verbs	**carry on, get by, take off, get away with, look forward to**

When we put all these together, we can get verbs of many parts:

> **Jenny should have been picking up the children from school but she was in the kitchen drinking tea. Bill ought to have realised that Jenny was forgetful and got them himself but he was too distracted and felt quite tired. He sat in the garden for a few hours before he became aware of a lack of cooking going on in the kitchen and a lack of homework being done in the study.**

Bare infinitives

A bare infinitive is the infinitive of a verb without 'to'.

The bare infinitive is used:

1. after the object following feel, have, hear, let, listen to, make, see and watch. [You might see this referred to as the 'causative'.]

> **Jenny hears the children laugh as they play.**
> **I saw him leave five minutes ago.**
> **My boss lets me finish early on Fridays.**
> **You can't make him do it if he doesn't want to.**

However, not in the passive voice where the infinitive is used.

> **He's seen to leave at 5.00 every day.**
> **He can't be made to do it.**

2. **after modal auxiliary verbs:**

We must go to the airport now or we'll be late.
Jeremy can take the minutes of the meeting; he is good at shorthand.
I can't come to the cinema; I have to baby sit.
You should stay at home and rest when you are sick.

3. **after 'needn't' but not 'need':**

You needn't go to Paris after all; Mary is going instead.
You need to go to Paris; Mary can't go in your place.

4. **after expressions such as 'would rather' and 'had better':**

I'd rather have coffee than tea, thank you.
You'd better come in and sit down; I have some bad news.

Sometimes we can choose between the infinitive and the bare infinitive.

After 'help' + object — **Can you help me (to) find my glasses?**

After 'do' — **I don't know why he is angry. All I did was (to) borrow the car.**

With two infinitives connected by 'and', 'or', 'except', 'but', 'than' or 'as', it is common to omit the second 'to'.

I'd prefer to stay than (to) go. **Would you like to eat now or (to) wait until after the meeting?**

Auxiliary verbs

The verbs 'to be', 'to have', and 'to do' can be used as main verbs with specific meanings:

I do my e-learning when I'm at work and I have some free time.

We can also use them as auxiliaries with a second, main verb:

Uses	Examples
Negative sentences	**I didn't do my e-learning yesterday because I didn't have enough time.**
Questions	**Do you do a lot of research?** **Don't you like coffee?**

Continuous tenses	**I'm working from home this week.** **He wasn't concentrating.**
Perfect tenses	**I haven't had any free time today - I've been so busy.** **I had had so many meetings by Wednesday that I hadn't done any other work!**
Passives	**It's made of wood.** **She was employed by a big, international company.**
Emphatic 'do'	**We did enjoy the seminar!**

Note that

1. **Sometimes the auxiliary verb happens to be the same as the main verb.**
2. **Unlike modal auxiliary verbs, these do not have a specific meaning but are necessary to form these structures.**

Here are some more examples:



He didn't go to work yesterday.



He'd eaten a biscuit.



"Have you met the new boss yet?"
"No, I'm meeting him tomorrow."



How do you like your steak?



The cargo is loaded onto the ships.



He was listening to classical music. He does love weekends!

Stative and active verbs

Stative verbs are different from active verbs because they describe a state, feelings or emotions. They are also used to refer to the senses, counting or measuring.

Most of the time, we avoid using continuous tenses with stative verbs:

I know a lot of Japanese people. [not 'I'm knowing']

He believes in God. [not 'He's believing']

I'm a teacher. [not 'I'm being']

It tastes lovely. [not 'It's tasting']

It weighs 3kg. [not 'It's weighing']

although there are some exceptions which are discussed below.

Note that

1. **Some verbs have a stative meaning and an active meaning. When we use the active meaning, we can use a continuous tense.**

Stative meaning	Active meaning
I have two dogs and a cat. [possession]	We're having lunch at the moment. [eating]
I'm having two dogs and a cat. [possession]	I'm having problems with my car. [experiencing]
I think it's a good idea. [opinion]	I'm thinking about what to have for dinner tonight. [an active process]
I'm thinking it's a good idea. [opinion]	He's considering asking her to marry him. [an active process]
He considers it unnecessary to have another meeting this week. [opinion]	
He's considering it unnecessary to have another meeting this week. [opinion]	

2. **We can use the stative verb 'to be' in the present continuous if we're talking about unusual or temporary behaviour:**

She's usually difficult to work with but, today, she's being really kind and considerate - I don't know why!

We can only do this if we are talking about behaviour or pretence:

He's being polite. ✔ **He's being hungry.** ✖

3. **Verbs like taste, see, hear, smell, sound etc. are more commonly used with simple tenses:**

It tastes delicious.
It smells good.
It sounds lovely.
It feels soft.
It looks wonderful.

However we can also use the continuous when talking about current situations:

You look nice today. = You're looking nice today

Are you feeling better today?
The garden is looking lovely now that spring is here.
It's feeling much softer now that I've washed it with Lenor.

4. **Verbs related to counting and measuring such as 'contain', 'cost', 'hold', 'measure' and 'weigh' are usually used with simple tenses but some of these can also have an active meaning.**

Compare the following:

I weigh 65kg.	**I'm weighing 65kg.** ✖
I weigh the sugar.	**I'm weighing* the sugar.**
The box measures 12cm x 8cm x 6cm.	**The box is measuring 12cm x 8cm x 6cm.** ✖
He measures the area of the room.	**He's measuring* the area of the room.**
The report includes an introduction.	**The report is including an introduction.** ✖
He includes examples in his report.	**He's including* examples in his report.**
The box contains chocolates.	**The box is containing chocolates.** ✖
The police contain the crowd.	**The police are containing* the crowd.**
This car costs Â€12,000.	**This car is costing Â€12,000.** ✖
His lifestyle costs him a lot of money.	**His lifestyle is costing* him a lot of money.**

In the above examples where both the present simple and present continuous are correct, the difference is just the usual one for these tenses - facts and routines or something happening at the moment.

*** These verbs have a transitive meaning but some similar verbs don't have an alternative transitive meaning. For example:**

The height of the building equals the length. [not 'is equalling']
London consists of 25 boroughs. [not 'is consisting']

See also transitive and intransitive verbs below.

5. In informal English, we sometimes break the rules of stative verbs:
She's in Italy at the moment and she's loving it. ✓

And sometimes, native English speakers break the rule in songs, poetry etc. or because they enjoy playing with the language:

"I'm lovin' it." [McDonald's slogan]
"I'm needing a cup of tea." [used especially by some Irish speakers of English]

6. The rules above all use the present simple and present continuous in the examples but the same rules apply when we choose between the past, perfect and future tenses. Here are some examples:

I was considering his behaviour very rude. ✗
I considered his behaviour very rude. [opinion] ✓

She's starting a new job next week; I'm sure she'll be loving it. ✗
I'm sure she'll love her new job. [feelings and emotions] ✓

We've measured the desks and found that some are wider than others. [transitive] ✓
We've been measuring the desks and cabinets all morning - let's take a break. [transitive] ✓

Here are some more examples:

	
It's costing the company too much money to rent offices here - we need to find somewhere cheaper.	**I always include charts and graphs in my reports.**
	
"These smell delicious. Can I have the recipe?" **"Ok, although I never weigh the ingredients - I just estimate."**	**My son's being a cowboy in the school play.**

Transitive and intransitive verbs

English verbs are either transitive or intransitive. In dictionaries, they are often marked with 'i' or 't' to indicate this.

Intransitive verbs	Examples
Subject + verb	I waited.
They cannot take an object.	The bus is departing.
They often involve movement or physical action and additional information using a prepositional or adverbial phrase.	I waited ten minutes for a bus this morning. The sun rises in the east. They'll arrive at about 8 o'clock. She loves sitting in the garden. It happened twice before she complained.

Transitive verbs		Examples
Subject + verb + object		
Some transitive verbs require an object.	I want. ✖ They are raising. ✖ Can you repeat? ✖ Yes, I like. ✖	I want some chocolate. They are raising taxes. Can you repeat that, please? Yes, I like it.
Some can have two objects - a direct and indirect.		She lent him some money. He's sending an email to his boss.
Some can be used with or without an object.	She teaches. They're eating. I'm going to read. The cup broke. Trees grow.	She teaches maths. They're eating cake. I'm going to read a book about Spain. I broke the cup. We grow apple trees.
Others can be used transitively or intransitively depending on the context.		

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