

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 <u>didn't</u> <u>do</u> my e-learning yesterday because I <u>didn't</u> <u>have</u> enough time.
Questions	<u>Do</u> you <u>do</u> a lot of research? <u>Don't</u> you <u>like</u> coffee?

Continuous tenses	I <u>m</u> <u>working</u> from home this week. He <u>wasn't</u> <u>concentrating</u> .
Perfect tenses	I <u>haven't</u> <u>had</u> any free time today - I <u>ve</u> <u>been</u> so busy. I <u>had</u> <u>had</u> so many meetings by Wednesday that I <u>hadn't</u> <u>done</u> any other work!
Passives	It's <u>made</u> of wood. She <u>was</u> <u>employed</u> by a big, international company.
Emphatic 'do'	We <u>did</u> <u>enjoy</u> 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 €12,000.	This car is costing €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 **needin'** 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 <u>that</u> , please? Yes, I like <u>it</u> .
Some can have two objects - a direct and indirect.		She lent him some money. He's sending <u>an email</u> to <u>his boss</u> .
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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