

FINDING REAL VERBS 2: The Imposters

Many words are mistaken for verbs and can create confusion when we are searching for the real verbs in our sentences. The most common verb impostors end in ING (eating, writing, flying, ringing), end in ED/IRREGULAR FORMS (abandoned, awarded, eaten, rung, drunk), or follow the word TO (to go, to walk, to forget, to be).

Part 1: ING Impostors

ING words can never be verbs by themselves, but they can sometimes be **part** of a verb. When ING words come after a form of be (am, is, are, was, were, be, been), they form part of a verb. In the sentence below, the verb is formed by combining the helping verb **WAS** and the word **RINGING**.

*The telephone **was ringing** constantly.*

Here are some more examples of ING words forming a part of a verb (the full verb is in bold and the ING word is underlined):

*The young frogs **were jumping** from rock to rock.*

*Chao Li **is auditioning** for a role in a science-fiction movie.*

Non-Verb ING Words

When ING words do not come after a form of be, they are not verbs. In those cases, they act as **adjectives** or **nouns**.

ING Words as Adjectives

ING words can be adjectives; in other words, these words can describe nouns.

Example: *The **ringing** telephone drove everyone crazy.*

In the above sentence, “The **ringing** telephone drove everyone crazy,” the word “ringing” is an adjective describing the noun “telephone.” Therefore, in that sentence, the word “ringing” is **not** a verb. The actual verb in that sentence is “drove.”

ING Words as Nouns

ING words can be nouns. Just like other nouns, ING words are often subject or object.

Example: ***Participating** in a team sport can help employees develop office skills.*



In the above sentence, the verb is “can help” while the word “participating” is a noun.

Here are a few more examples of ING words acting as either adjectives or nouns. The verb in each sentence is underlined.

1. **Skyrocketing** prices have discouraged new buyers.
2. The **winding** road led us to a prickly bush.
3. **Walking** home from the college, I saw a moose crossing the railway track.
4. **Sleeping** on the job has become one of the major causes of workplace accidents.
5. Hans developed a taste for **living** on the road.
6. The **aging** spider enjoyed nothing more than **sleeping** in an old shoe and **dreaming** of flies.

Exercise 1:

Write ten sentences that include ING words. Then carefully identify the actual verbs in those sentences. Remember, if the ING word does not follow a form of the verb “be” (am, is, are, was, were, be, or been), the ING word is not a verb.

Part 2: ED/IRREGULAR FORM IMPOSTORS

Words that end in ED (walked, discarded, etc.) can sometimes be verbs by themselves. In those cases, they usually express events that take place in the past. Here are some examples of ED words that act as verbs:

*Marika **walked** to school.*
*Omar **discarded** the old shoes.*
*Yuri **communicated** with unusual grace.*

Words that end in ED can also be part of a verb. In these cases, the ED word would be preceded by HAS, HAVE or HAD. Here are some examples of ED words that are *part* of a verb:

*The orchestra members **have rejected** the latest offer from the board.*
*Archimedes **has discovered** a cure for boredom.*
*Hanmei **has developed** a fast and reliable method for checking balance sheets.*

Words that end in IRREGULAR FORMS (forgotten, drunk, swum, etc.) can be part of a verb, as in the following examples:

*The nimble but not so dynamic duo **had forgotten** to pay for their pizza.*
*Guillermo’s thirsty cat **has drunk** all the goat’s milk.*
*Kulveer’s three children **have swum** twelve laps in the community pool.*

Non-Verb ED/IRREGULAR FORM Words

Words that end in ED or IRREGULAR forms are often adjectives; that is, they are used to describe nouns. Here are some examples of such adjectives:



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The **forgotten** kittens shivered in the early morning rain.
The **unidentified** flying object turned out to be a meteor fragment.
The **broken** violin came to life in the magical hands of the **seasoned** musician.

In the above sentences words in bold type (forgotten, unidentified, broken and seasoned) look like verbs, but they are in fact adjectives. The real verbs in those sentences are underlined (shivered, turned and came).

Exercise 2:

Write ten sentences that include ED/IRREGULAR FORM words. Then carefully identify the actual verbs in those sentences.

Part 3: TO DO words

Many people think of expressions such as TO DO as verbs, but in fact they are not. Often these expressions are nouns, and just like nouns, they can be the subject or the object in a sentence.

One way to see the role of these TO expressions as nouns is to consider first the following sentence:

Tzvia likes tea.

In the above sentence, the subject is TZVIA, the verb is LIKES and the object is TEA (the word “tea” is a noun).

Ask yourself, “What does Tzvia like?” The answer is *tea*.

Now consider the following sentence:

Tzvia likes to dance.

In this sentence, as in the previous one, the verb is LIKES. In this case, the object is TO DANCE (the expression TO DANCE performs the same function here as the word TEA did in the previous sentence. In other words, TO DANCE is a noun.

Ask yourself, “What does Tzvia like?” The answer is TO DANCE.

In sentences that include TO and the verb-like word in its simple form (to be, to go, to eat, to walk, to terminate, to graduate, etc.) the resulting expression will often be a noun - never a verb.

Here are some more sentences that include these verb impostors.



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Zihong wants **to write** a poem about the life of a college student.
Mohamed forgot **to put** a stamp on the envelope.
Keiko decided **to wear** her new Gucci shoes to the prom.
Zachariah tried very hard **to quit** biting his nails.

In the above sentences the actual verbs are *wants*, *forgot*, *decided* and *tried*. The expressions *to write*, *to put*, *to wear* and *to quit* are nouns and **not** verbs.

Exercise 3:

Write ten sentences that include TO expressions (e.g. to go, to see, to boogie). Then carefully identify the actual verbs in those sentences.

Exercise 4:

Choose an article from today's newspaper. Starting from the first paragraph, lightly cross out all the verb impostors in each sentence. Then identify the actual verbs in those sentences.



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