

Verbs

Verbs have three main **functions**.

- 1) They indicate the **action** of the sentence.
- 2) They **join or link** the subject of the sentence to the words that describe it.
- 3) They **tell the time of a sentence**, such as when the action happens (i.e., past/present/future).

If a verb consists of **two or more words**, then it is called a **verb phrase**. The **verb phrase** may contain a **helping verb** and a **main verb**.

The **verb** identifies either the **action** of the sentence or the **link** between the subject and its description. The verb also expresses the **moment in time** at which the **action** or **description** takes place.

Verbs have **four main/common forms**:

- 1) the **-s form** (simple present tense; 3rd person singular)
Example: Ahmed **chooses/selects** a topic.
- 2) the **simple form** (simple present tense; no -s for all except 3rd person singular)
Example: Ahmed and Yuki **choose/select** a topic.
- 3) the **simple past form**
Example: Ahmed **chose/selected** a topic.
- 4) the **-ing form**
Example: Ahmed is **choosing/selecting** a topic.

For more complex ideas, there are **3 main groups of verbs** to pick from, each of which has present, past, and future forms:

1. **Simple tenses**, which refer to *one point in time*.
2. **Progressive (or continuous) tenses (ing forms)**, which refer to actions *in progress (unfinished)* or *emphasize duration* (i.e., that something took or is taking a long time).
3. **Perfect tenses**, which *connect (or bridge) 2 time periods*.

(*For more information on the form and function and for examples of conjugated verbs in each of these groups, please consult the 'English Tense Table' handout.)



Action Verbs

Action verbs express **actions directed toward persons or things**. The **action** expressed by the verb **may or may not require an object**.

Examples:

- 1) Alasie **cried**.
This sentence contains the **action verb *cried* without an object**.
- 2) Alasie **cried their name**.
This sentence contains the **same action verb**, but its meaning changes by adding an object for the verb: ***their name***.

The verb ***to cry*** is a **transitive verb** in sentence number 2 above (*note, 'to cry' can also mean to react in sadness, which, in this sense, is **not** a transitive verb, e.g. The movie was so sad that Alasie cried).

A **transitive verb** expresses an action toward something or someone. It is always followed by an **object**.

An **intransitive verb** does not require an object to make the sentence work.

Consider the following sentences, which both contain the subject ***lawyer***:

- 1) The lawyer **coughed**.
The **action verb** is **intransitive** because its meaning is complete **without an object**.
- 2) The lawyer **demanded a mistrial**. (Not The lawyer ***demanded***.)
The **action verb** is **transitive** because it **does require an object**, a noun or pronoun, to complete its action.

Active Voice and Passive Voice

A **verb** is in the **active voice** when the **action of the verb** is directed toward the **object**.

Example: Haruki **tore** the paper.

The verb ***tore*** is in the **active voice**. The **action**, expressed by the **verb *tore*** and performed by the **subject *Haruki***, is directed toward the **object *paper***. Note that the verb is also **transitive** because it is **followed by an object**.

Active voice is a more direct way of saying things.

A **verb** is in the **passive voice** when the **action of the verb** is directed toward the **subject**.



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Example: The paper was torn by her.

The verb **was torn** is in the **passive voice**. The **action**, expressed by the verb **was torn**, is now directed **toward the subject (i.e. paper)**.

The **object** of the verb in the **active voice (paper)** is the **subject** of the verb in the **passive voice**.

- 1) **Haruki** tore the paper. (**active voice**)
- 2) The paper was torn by **Haruki**. (**passive voice**)
- 3) The paper was torn. (**passive voice**)

The **passive verb** does **not require naming the person or thing doing the action** (as shown in example #3 above).

The passive voice may be used for delivering bad news, as it is less direct. It is also used to emphasize the action over the person doing it.

The third sentence contains the same passive verb, but without naming the person or thing doing the action.

*Only **transitive verbs** have a **passive voice** form.

Linking Verbs

A **linking verb** joins the subject with the words that rename or describe it. The words that follow the linking verb complete the meaning of the subject.

The following sentence contains a **linking verb**, but **lacks the words to complete the subject**:

- 1) The crowd **became**.

The reader may ask, "**the crowd became what?**" The sentence is **incomplete** because the linking verb does not join the subject **crowd** to the word or words that describe it.

- 2) The crowd became quiet.

The answer to the above question is now provided. The linking verb **became** joins the subject **crowd** to the word **quiet**. The word **quiet** is a **subject complement** because it completes the meaning of the subject.



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Other linking verbs:

| | | | |
|--------|------|-------|-------|
| appear | look | seem | taste |
| feel | be | sound | touch |

To test whether or not a verb is a linking verb, substitute the verb with **is** or **seems**. If the substitution makes sense, then the verb is most likely a linking verb.

Two sample tests:

- 1) The captain **steers** the ship.
- 2) The captain **is** the ship.

The verb **steers** in the first sentence is substituted with **is** in the second sentence. The second sentence does not make sense after the substitution, so **steers** is not a linking verb.

- 1) The crowd **became** quiet.
- 2) The crowd **is** quiet.

The verb **became** in the first sentence is substituted with **is** in the second sentence. The second sentence makes sense after the substitution, so **became** is a linking verb.

