

Verb Review: Definition, Tense, Aspect, and Mood

Defining a Verb

Verbs

In grammar, a *verb* is the word in a sentence that represents an action or a state of being. Let's break that down.

Think of *actions* as what the subject of a sentence does.

Remember that a **subject** is the person, place, thing, or idea that is performing the verb of a sentence. Examples:

- **Christi** ran this morning.
- **John** is at school.
- **Bobbi** hates salads.

For example, here are some *action verbs*:

- Run
- Swim
- Write
- Study
- Act
- Dive
- Respond
- Smile
- Break
- Roll

These are all actions that the subject of a sentence can perform.

Now, think of *state of being* as how the subject *feels*. Here are some examples of *state-of-being verbs*:

- Enjoys
- Hates
- Desires
- Wants
- Loves

The word *is* can also be a state-of-being verb. It expresses the subject's current state. For example, in the statement "She is better," the verb is the word *is* because the sentence is expressing that person's current state of being.

Infinitives

How do you tell if a word is a verb? You can turn it into an *infinitive* and see if it still makes sense as an action or a state of being. An *infinitive* is the basic form of a verb.

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An infinitive contains the word *to* and the verb. So, here are some examples of infinitives of verbs we have already seen:

- To run
- To swim
- To write
- To act
- To enjoy
- To desire
- To want
- To love

These all make sense as phrases. But what about this next list?

- To next
- To later
- To can
- To if
- To boy
- To paper
- To girl
- To already

Notice how they just do not sound right? This is a great way to figure out the verb in a sentence.

But what about *is*? Its infinitive is *to be*. The tense of this verb (*tense* being a concept explored later in the lesson) changes the form of this verb quite drastically. Here are some examples of *to be* in different forms:

- *We **are** delighted!*
- *Sophie **is** doing much better.*
- *They **were** confused by the statement.*

Linking Verbs

The verb *to be* is also called a *linking verb*, which means that it is mainly used to connect the subject with an adjective. Other linking verbs include *appear*, *seem*, and *remain*.

An **adjective** is a word that modifies a noun and gives it an attribute.

Examples:

- *The **long, winding** road*
- *My **brown leather** bag*
- *Brad's **fancy new** car*

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Examples of Linking Verbs

- They **seemed** delighted.
- Sophie **appears** to be doing much better.
- They **remain** confused by the statement.

Linking verbs can also indicate senses, such as the following:

- The sandwich **smelled** delicious.
- The artist's new song **sounds** horrible.
- He **looks** sick.

Transitive Versus Intransitive Verbs

Verbs will always have a subject performing the action or state. But many verbs will have objects that are affected by that action.

Transitive verbs indicate an action that is done to **another person, object, or idea**. In such a statement, that person, object, or idea being impacted is called the **direct object** of the phrase, because it is being directly affected. Look at the following examples that show the **subject**, **transitive verb**, and **direct object**.

- **Maria** **scolded** **her son**.
- **Jonathan** **got** **a haircut**.
- **The instructor** **assigned** **a new assignment that frustrated the students**.

Intransitive verbs indicate that the action or state is complete on its own and do not require any object. Intransitive verbs typically express something that the subject completed. The verbs are often followed by adverbs.

An **adverb** modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. It tells us how, when, where, why, etc.

Examples:

- He drank his water **slowly**.
- The deer ran **fast**.
- He **always** drives **carefully**.

Look at the following examples that show the **subject** and the **intransitive verb**:

- **Cameron** **lost!**
- **The gazelle** **ran** incredibly fast.
- **The student** **acted** quickly.

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Let's pause for a moment. There is a lot of information to unpack here with tense and aspect. With many of these different forms, much of the meaning is *implied* and not so obvious. Do not be discouraged if you are struggling to remember all of these different rules and forms! The most important lesson here is that, by understanding how these rules can work, you can use them to your advantage as a writer!

Verb Tense

Verb tense tells the reader when the action or state expressed by the verb is taking place. There are three simple tenses:

- Past
- Present
- Future

Changing verb tense will change how the verb is spelled. In each of the tenses, you will see how *regular verbs* are changed compared to *irregular verbs*.

Regular verbs will be changed by adding on the same kind of suffix based on the tense.

A suffix is a part added on to the end of a word to change its meaning.

Examples:

- *Walk, walks, walked*
- *Car, cars*
- *Mobile, mobility*
- *Train, training*

For example, look at how the regular verb *create* changes with different tenses:

- He **creates** portraits for his friends. (present)
- She **created** many different portfolios. (past)

Irregular verbs are called irregular because their spelling changes; they do not work when adding the typical suffix:

- He **broke** his arm. (past tense form of *break*)
- She **had eaten** all of her meal. (past tense form of *eat*)

It's important to note here that these simple tenses can be made more complex in meaning by adding *aspect*, which refers to the timing of the verb. *Aspect* is explored later in this lesson.

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Past Tense

Past tense verbs indicate that an action or state took place in the past. As a simple tense, this means that the action has been completed and is no longer taking place.

- I **completed** the assignment on time.
- Sherry **e-mailed** her team with information about the latest board meeting.
- My partner **ran** this morning.

Present Tense

Present tense verbs indicate an action or state that is ongoing, unchanging, or something that is recurring. As a simple tense, this means the action has been completed and is no longer taking place.

- He **works** at the local supermarket on the weekends.
- Sherry **is preparing** the presentation.
- My partner **hates** working on the weekend.

Did you notice anything different in those examples? Look at the second example. Notice how the word *is* was added? This has to do with *aspect*! Again, this is explored further in the lesson.

Future Tense

Future tense verbs indicate an action or state that will take place at some time in the future. However, what makes future tense different from past and present tense is that the verb itself is not changed. Future tense is created by adding *auxiliary verbs* or *helping verbs*. These “help” the audience understand that the action or state is going to take place.

In the following examples, look for **auxiliary verbs** and the **action/state verbs**:

- Students **will be responding** to each other in their Discussion Boards.
- I **will not arrive** on time.
- You **will understand** what I mean when you read the e-mail.

Verb Aspect

A verb’s *aspect* is much more complex than its tense. Remember that *tense* indicates whether the action or state is taking place in the past, present, or future. *Aspect* adds additional meaning by telling us how that action or state is happening through time.

One great way to visualize this is with the verb *run*. Imagine that you send a text message to your friend, Daryl. You ask Daryl what his sister, Lisa, is doing. Below are different messages that Daryl may send back to you:

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- She ran this morning.
- She runs every morning.
- She is running.
- She will be running.
- She was running.
- She has been running.

Notice how the timing of those all differ? What do they each imply?

Statement	Meaning
She ran this morning.	She completed her run this morning. This took place in the past.
She runs every morning.	Running is an action she does every single morning, and this will continue in the future.
She is running.	She is currently running right now, as we speak.
She will be running.	At some point in the future, she will be running for some period of time.
She was running.	She was running for some time, but has stopped. She is currently not running any more.
She has been running.	She is currently running right now, as we speak, and she has been doing this for quite some time.

Isn't it incredible how much meaning is implied by small changes in words and spelling?

Each of these statements has a different *aspect*. While they are taking place in the past, present, or future, the different *aspects* tell us more about the duration, whether the action is still ongoing, or even whether the action will be repeated in the future.

Let's review the different kinds of aspect.

A verb's aspect can be:

- Simple
- Progressive
- Perfect
- Perfect progressive

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Simple Aspect

Simple aspect indicates that an action or state is completed or permanent. This action or state could also be repeated, as long as it is completed. Simple aspect is really just the verb expressed in past or present tense.

- He **finished** his presentation without breaking a sweat. (Indicates action is completed.)
- Roger **lives** across the street from Mary-Anne. (Indicates a permanent [unchanging] state.)
- I make sure that my son **brushes** his teeth every night before bed. (Indicates that this action is completed every night.)

Progressive Aspect

Progressive aspect indicates that an action or state is or was ongoing. In other words, the action or state was *progressing* at the time of its occurrence. Verbs with the progressive aspect will have an *auxiliary verb*. Regular verbs will have the suffix *-ing* added to the end.

- He **is finishing** the presentation. (Indicates action is currently ongoing and has not yet been completed.)
- Roger **was living** across the street from Mary-Anne. (Indicates the state was ongoing in the past until some point in time.)
- I make sure that my son **is brushing** his teeth every night before bed. (Indicates that this action is ongoing at the time.)

Perfect Aspect

Perfect aspect indicates that an action or state has been completed at a set point in time. For many people, this can be difficult to distinguish from *simple aspect*. The key difference is that *perfect aspect* implies two things about an action or state:

- It began in the past and it continues into the present, or it has been completed in the present.
- It occurred before another event in the past.

Let's see some examples of this using the verb *to live*:

Simple present: I live with my sister. (This action is repeated or is currently happening).

Present Perfect: I have lived with my sister. (This action happened in the past.)

Simple past: I lived with my sister. (This action happened in the past and is completed.)

Past perfect: I had lived with my sister. (This action has been completed in the past but implies that another event has followed. [Hint: this sentence makes more sense if it is followed by a phrase starting with *until*, as in "I had lived with my sister *until*..."])

More Examples

- He **has finished** the presentation. (Indicates action had been ongoing but was just recently completed.)

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- Roger **had lived** across the street from Mary-Anne until last spring. (Indicates the state was ongoing in the past until some point in time.)
- I make sure that my son **has brushed** his teeth every night before bed. (Indicates that this action has been ongoing and will also end.)

Perfect Progressive Aspect

Perfect progressive aspect indicates that an action or state is or was ongoing, but with further nuance. This can be present or past.

Present perfect progressive aspect means that the ongoing action or state began in the past and continues into the present, but it may be incomplete or may not continue.

Past perfect progressive aspect means that the action or state had been ongoing in the past and would continue until a specific time or event caused it to cease.

With *perfect progressive aspect*, you will always combine the auxiliary verb *has/have/had* with a past participle (been) and a present participle (verb + *-ing* suffix). Here's a simple way to look at this:

Noun + aux verb + past participle + present participle

Sherry + had + been + studying

Cliff + has + been + studying

Here are some more examples with the verb *to live*:

Present perfect progressive: I have been living with my sister. (This action has been ongoing and is still going on now).

Past perfect progressive: I had been living with my sister. (This action had been ongoing, until some point in time. [Hint: this also will likely end with an event or indicated time, such as “until May” or “when my brother returned from his vacation.”])

Let's pause for a moment. Remember that there is a lot of information to unpack here with tense and aspect. With many of these different forms, much of the meaning is *implied* and not so obvious. Do not be discouraged if you are struggling to remember all of these different rules and forms! The most important lesson here is that, by understanding how these rules work, you can use them to your advantage as a writer!

Verb Mood

You may be thinking, “How many more kinds of verb forms can there be?!” Fortunately, verb *mood* is the simplest to understand. However, if you try reading about different moods in the English language, you might find that there is much disagreement over what these are called and what they refer to. The

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important lesson here is that verbs can take on different moods, which affects how the speaker or writer wants to convey this message to his or her audience.

Verb mood refers to the attitude implied by the verb. There are four verb moods:

- Indicative
- Imperative
- Conditional
- Interrogative

Indicative Mood

Indicative mood refers to factual statements. In other words, it *indicates* a fact.

Examples

- I **argued** with my boss.
- I **am arguing** with my boss.
- I **will argue** with my boss.

Imperative Mood

Imperative mood takes the form of a command. This is often expressed toward someone, and the speaker or writer can exclude the subject from the sentence. For this mood, imagine that the writer is commanding *you* to complete this action.

Examples

- **Do** your homework.
- **Share** with the class.
- **Send** the e-mail to the entire team.

Conditional Mood

Conditional mood means that the action or state is hypothetical, not factual, or would only happen under certain conditions.

These will often be expressed with the past tense form of the verb *to be* – *were*. It could also include words such as *could*, *would*, or *might*, which imply that this verb is a possibility.

Examples

- If only I **were** a manager...
- The baby **might cry** if you pick him up.
- The store **could close** early for the holidays.

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Interrogative Mood

Interrogative mood means the statement is formed as a question. In questions, there is typically an auxiliary (helping) verb in the beginning.

Examples

- **Will** you **argue** with your boss? (Different from “You **will argue** with your boss.”)
- **Are** you **going** to the movies? (Different from “You **are going** to the movies.”)
- **Has** he **been enjoying** the class so far? (Different from “He **has been enjoying** the class so far.”)

But what about the subjunctive mood?

If you research English verb moods, you will see much disagreement on how many different moods there are and what they are called. For example, the *subjunctive mood* used to be prominent in English, but has been disappearing and changing for quite some time.