

FOUNDATIONAL GRAMMAR

LESSON THREE: ACTION & HELPING VERBS, VERB PHRASES, and VERB TENSE

The verb is the most important word in a sentence. It shows the action of a sentence.

(Sometimes, it shows being, or existence. We will learn about this kind of verb, which is separate from an action verb, next week.)

Action Verbs

Most verbs are action verbs. The action can be physical, as in *hit*, *play*, and *run*, or it may be mental, as in *think*, *imagine*, *believe*.

If you read a sentence and ask yourself the question “What is being done?”, this will help you to find the verb.

Eg: The toddler yelled at his older brother.

What is the main action of that sentence? What is being done?

Yelling is being done. Therefore, your verb is: **yelled**.

What about this sentence?

The dog barked.

Can you tell me what the action verb is?

Look at the sentences below. What is the verb in each sentence?

I sang happy tunes.
George closed his eyes.
The monkey laughed.
John goes to the store.
Mary cried when she hit her toe.
The children played.
Samantha played yesterday.
I imagined a world without pain.
Mark thinks deep thoughts.
I wish for a pony.
The children love me.
Sally likes ice cream.

Give me examples of sentences with action verbs (both physical and mental).

Compound Verbs

Sometimes one person is doing two or more actions in one sentence. For example: “The cook stirred and tasted the chocolate sauce.” The verb is “stirred and tasted”. We call this kind of verb a “compound verb”, which simply means it has more than one part. In sentences like this, even though there is more than one action, the doer of the action is the same - the cook is stirring and the cook is tasting. Because it is the same person, you don’t need to repeat the doer of the action. You can simply put 2 or more verbs together and this makes a compound verb.

Helping Verbs

Sometimes a sentence will need a “helper” for the verb. These words are called Helping Verbs. They are not a third kind of verb, along with Action and Linking. They are simply helpers that can accompany both two main kinds of verbs.

They are: have, has, had, do, does, did, shall, will, should, would, may, might, must, can, could, am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been

Notice that state of being verbs are also helping verbs!

You would not say: “Auntie Jane coming to visit in the summer.”

You do have an action verb (coming), but the verb needs a little help to clarify the meaning.

You could say: Auntie Jane *is coming* to visit in the summer. (“is coming” = the verb phrase; “is” = helping verb)

More examples:

Mary *has eaten* at that restaurant. (“has eaten” = the verb phrase; “has” = the helping verb)

Clara *should go* with you. (“should go” = the verb phrase; “should” is the helping verb)

Verb Phrases - A verb phrase is what we call the main verb, plus the helping verb.

The main verb will be the last verb in the phrase. If the verb phrase ends with an action verb, the whole phrase is called an action verb. If it ends with a state of being verb, the whole phrase is called a state of being verb.

When we make statements that use verb phrases, the helping verbs always appear directly before the main verb. Eg. *If we go camping, we will enjoy the best holiday.*

However, when we are asking questions, rather than making statements, the word order is changed somewhat. "I MUST slice the apples" becomes "MUST I SLICE the apples??" It's harder to notice the "must" when it isn't right next to its main verb, "slice". We can be sure that we are always identifying all parts of the verb even when they are not directly beside each other by thoroughly memorizing the list of helping verbs. That way, whenever we see a helping verb, we'll recognize it, and we can be sure that there is a main verb lurking nearby. Helping verbs are simply helpers, after all--they are nothing without their main verb.

The exceptions to this rule are:

- the forms of "to be", which we learn all about next class
- the words "have, has, had", which are often helping verbs, but also can mean "possess".

When "have, has, had" means "possesses" in the context of the sentence, it can be the main verb of a sentence. It won't mean "possesses" when it is acting as a helping verb.

Example (helping verb): *She had run the race well.*

Example (showing possession): *She had a beautiful horse.*

In Grammar we must always be on the lookout for the same word doing a different job!

PART TWO: Verb Tense

The **verb tense** tells you when the action of the verb takes place. The three main verb tenses are simple present, simple past, and future.

In writing, it is important to keep the verb tense consistent.

Simple Present - The simple present tense describes an action or state of being that is happening now or takes place habitually. Usually, the simple present is only 1 word.

I eat cookies.

I go to the store

He yells for fun.

You are crazy.

The dog needs water.

Simple Past - The simple past tense describes things that have happened in the past. Sometimes the -ed ending can be added to a verb to make it past tense. However, there are many irregular verbs as well (*take* becomes *took*, *has* becomes *had*, *do* becomes *did*, *swim* becomes *swam*, etc.)

He took the bagel.

I created a collage.

I figured out the complicated problem.

Future - The future tense states when something is expected to happen in the future. ***Notice how the addition of a helping verb changes the tense!***

I will eat all the chocolate I want.

She will succeed in amazing ways.

Their family will continue to homeschool.

Consistent Verb Tense in Writing

When we write, we need to make sure we always stay consistent with the verb tense we are writing in (both within the same sentence and within a section of writing (like a paragraph)). It is possible to shift verb tenses correctly if we are referring to two separate time frames, but in our lesson we are going to stick with the foundational rule: when you are writing about a certain thing or event you need to stay in the same verb tense.

Can you spot the problems here?

Michael **was** sad yesterday as he **jumps** up from the table.

The adventure **had** a predictable end which **will work** out well for the reader.

He **took** the bagel and **slathers** it with cream cheese.

She **will go** to the store tomorrow and **is singing** in a loud voice.

What about in this writing excerpts?

The Railway Children **had** many adventures and **met** many interesting people. Their life **is** so different from my own. Their mother never **seemed to worry** about them and sometimes she **seems** distracted by her writing.

Can you spot the problem(s)? How do we fix it/them?