

FOUNDATIONAL GRAMMAR

LESSON FOUR: LINKING VERBS or STATE OF BEING VERBS

A few verbs do not show action, but simply say something about the subject of the sentence. These are called state of being verbs. They express a state or condition. These verbs link to the subject a word that describes or identifies the subject. Because of this, they are also called *linking* verbs. The word that is linked to the subject is called a *subject complement*.

Eg:

This **is** *she*. [*She* refers to the subject *this*.]

She **looks** *serious* [*Serious* refers to the subject *she*.]

The boys **were** *jealous* [*Jealous* refers to the subject *boys*.]

It is important for you to memorize what *state of being verbs* are, because when you are looking for the verb of the sentence, these verbs do not necessarily answer the question “What is being done?” The most common linking verb is the verb *be*. Its forms should be memorized.

The various forms of the verb **be**:

am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been.

Notice that these words *are sometimes helping verbs, when they are in a verb phrase*. Examples: “**is** swimming” “will **be** looking” “might have **been** wrestling”. These words, *is am are was were be being been*, can do the job of helper-to-a-verb, as well as a linking verb in its own right.

Some examples of the forms of **be**, used as *state of being* or *linking* verbs:

I *am* a good girl.

The car *is* dad’s.

They *are* my friends.

Rather than telling of action, the verbs in these sentences act as a kind of equals sign, equating the subject (I) and the subject complement (girl) to each other.

Other common linking verbs are:

appear

grow

seem

stay

become

sound

look smell taste feel remain

Many of the verbs in the list above can be used both as linking verbs, but also used as action verbs – **without a subject complement**.

Eg: The singer **appeared** nervous. [linking, links *nervous* to subject *singer* to tell us something about him/her]

The singer **appeared** on television. [action]

HELPFUL HINT 1:

In general, a verb is a linking verb if you can substitute some form of the verb *seem* for it.

Eg: The audience **looked** [seemed] sympathetic.

The singer gradually **grew** [seemed] more relaxed.

HELPFUL HINT 2:

Another clue is if you can consider the subject complement next to the subject, it gets at what the sentence is trying to tell you. If it is NOT a subject complement, it doesn't make sense.

In the linking verb examples above, we could do the following and they sound right:

She's a nervous singer; they are a sympathetic audience; he is a relaxed singer.

For the verb that is an action verb (The singer appeared on television) it doesn't sound right:

She is a television singer? No. The verb is not trying to simply link those together. It's trying to tell us about an action that happened: the singer appeared!

Examples

Is the verb in the following sentence an action verb or a linking verb? If it's a linking verb, what is the subject complement?

The child **grew** taller. [linking]

The bell **sounded** loud. [linking]

The student **stayed** inside the school. [action]

The apple **tasted** good. [linking]

The little mouse **tasted** the cheese which was sitting unattended on the counter. [action]

For each of the verbs below, can you come up with a sentence that uses it as a linking verb, and one that uses it as an action verb?

appear

grow

stay

remain

look

smell

taste

feel

remain