

THE VERB

Recognize a verb when you find one.

Verbs are a necessary component of all **sentences**. Without verbs, **subjects** would just sit in a lane of text with nothing to propel them forward.

Consider this subject, for instance:

My grumpy old English teacher

It is a stalled idea until we add a verb:

My grumpy old English teacher **smiled** at the plate of cold meatloaf.

Do you see how the verb **smiled** gets the idea moving toward the destination that the writer has in mind?

Here are more examples:

The daredevil cockroach **splashed** into Sara's soup.

The daredevil cockroach = subject; **splashed** = verb.

Theo's overworked computer **exploded** in a spray of sparks.

Theo's overworked computer = subject; **exploded** = verb.

The curious toddler **popped** a grasshopper into her mouth.

The curious toddler = subject; **popped** = verb.

Francisco's comic book collection **is** worth \$20,000.00.

Francisco's comic book collection = subject; **is** = verb.

The important thing to remember is that every **subject** in a sentence must have a verb. Otherwise, you will have written a **fragment**, a major writing error.

Consider word function when you are searching for the verb.

Many words in English have more than one function. Sometimes the same word is a **modifier**, a **noun**, and a verb. As a result, you must analyze the job that the word is performing in the sentence.

Read these three examples:

The **crunch** factor of this brand of potato chips is intense.

The **crunch** of the potato chips drew the angry eyes of Professor Orsini to our corner of the room.

Potato chips **crunch** too loudly to eat during an exam.

In the first sentence, **crunch** is a modifier describing *factor*.

Crunch can also be a noun. The **crunch** of the potato chips, for example, is a thing, a sound that we hear.

Finally, **crunch** is something that we can *do*. We can **crunch** cockroaches under our shoes. We can **crunch** popcorn during a movie. We can **crunch** numbers for a math class. In the third sentence, then, **crunch** is what the potato chips *do*, so we call it a *verb*.

You therefore need to analyze the function that a word provides in a sentence before you determine what grammatical name to give that word.

Recognize an action verb when you find one.

Dance! Sing! Paint! Giggle! Chew! What are these words doing? They are expressing action, something that a person, animal, force of nature, or thing can *do*. As a result, we call these words **action verbs**.

Here are examples:

Clyde **sneezes** with the force of a tornado.

Sneezing is something that Clyde can *do*.

Because of the spoiled mayonnaise, Ricky **vomited** potato salad all day.

Vomiting is something that Ricky can *do*—although he might not enjoy it.

Sylvia always **winks** at cute guys driving hot cars.

Winking is something that Sylvia can *do*.

The telephone **rang** with shrill, annoying cries.

Ringing is something that the telephone can *do*.

Thunder **boomed** in the distance, sending my poor dog scrambling under the bed.

Booming is something that thunder can *do*.

If you are unsure whether a sentence contains an action verb or not, consider every individual word in the sentence and ask yourself, "Is this something that a person or thing can *do*?"

Take this sentence, for example:

Every August, my poodle constantly pants and drools.

Can you **every**? Is **everying** something that you can *do*? Can you **August**? Is there someone **Augusting** outside the window right now? Can you **my**? What does a person do when she is **mying**? Can you **poodle**? Show me what **poodling** is. Can you **pant**? Bingo! Sure you can! Run five miles, and we will hear you panting. Can you **and**? Of course not! But can you **drool**? You bet—although we do not need a demonstration at this time!

In the sentence above, therefore, you have two action verbs: **pant** and **drool**.

Recognize a linking verb when you find one.

Linking verbs, on the other hand, do not express action. Instead, they connect the **subject** of the verb to additional information.

Read the examples below:

Mario **is** a computer hacker.

Ising is not something that Mario can *do*. **Is** connects the subject, **Mario**, to additional information about him, that he will soon have the FBI on his tail!

During bad storms, trailer parks **are** often magnets for tornadoes.

Areing is not something that trailer parks can *do*. **Are** is simply connecting the subject, **trailer parks**, to something said about them, that they tend to attract tornadoes.

After receiving another failing grade in algebra, Jose **became** depressed.

Became connects the subject, **Jose**, to something said about him, that he was not happy.

A three-mile run **seems** like a marathon during a hot, humid July afternoon.

Seems connects the subject, **a three-mile run**, with additional information, that exercise is more arduous depending on the day and time.

At restaurants, Rami always **feels** angry after waiting an hour for a poor meal.

Feels connects the subject, Rami, to his state of being, anger.

The following verbs are true linking verbs: any form of the verb **be** (**am, were, has been, are being, might have been**, etc.), **become**, and **seem**. These true linking verbs are *always* linking verbs.

Then you have a list of verbs with split personalities: **appear, feel, grow, look, prove, remain, smell, sound, taste**, and **turn**. Sometimes these verbs are linking verbs; sometimes they are **action verbs**. Their function in a sentence determines what you should call them.

How do you tell when these words are action verbs and when they are linking verbs? If you can substitute **am, is, or are** for the verb and the sentence still sounds logical, you have a linking verb on your hands. But if, after the substitution, the sentence makes no sense, you are dealing with an action verb.

Here are examples:

Chris **tastes** the crunchy, honey-roasted grasshopper.

Chris **is** the grasshopper? No way! In this sentence, **tastes** is an action verb.

The crunchy, honey-roasted grasshopper **tastes** good.

The grasshopper **is** good? You bet. Roast your own!

I **smell** the delicious aroma of grilled octopus.

I **am** the delicious aroma? Not the last time I checked. **Smell**, in this sentence, is an action verb.

The grilled octopus **smells** appetizing.

The octopus **is** appetizing? Definitely! Come take a whiff!

Convinced of their formidable intelligence, the students **will prove** the theorem that Professor Lambeau posted on the whiteboard.

The students **are** the theorem? Of course not! Here, **will prove** is an action verb.

The theorem **proved** too difficult for the students to solve.

The theorem **is** too difficult? Without a doubt! Try the math yourself.

This substitution will not work for **appear**. With this verb, you must analyze its function in the sentence.

Godzilla **appeared** in the doorway, spooking me badly.

Notice that **is** would sound good: Godzilla **is** in the doorway. But here **appear** is what Godzilla is *doing* (whether you want him to or not), making this **appear** an action verb.

Godzilla **appeared** happy to find me.

Here, **appeared** is connecting the subject, **Godzilla**, to his state of mind, happiness.

Realize that a verb can have more than one part.

A verb can have as many as *four* parts. A multi-part verb—called a **verb phrase**—has a base or *main* verb together with one or more **auxiliary verbs**.

Consider these examples:

Harvey **spilled** chocolate milkshake on Leslie's new dress.

Spilled = 1-part verb.

Because Harvey is a klutz, he **is** always **spilling** something.

Is spilling = 2-part verb (*always* is an **adverb** interrupting the two parts).

Harvey **might have spilled** the chocolate milkshake because the short dress distracted him.

Might have spilled = 3-part verb.

Harvey **should have been spilling** the chocolate milkshake down his throat.

Should have been spilling = 4-part verb.

