

Verbs

Verbs are awfully important. As a matter of fact, a verb is an absolutely essential part of a sentence. Without a verb (and a subject) you have no sentence. Well-chosen verbs can add power to your sentences, and punch to your paragraphs. They can make your ideas dance, razzle and dazzle. Basically, verbs fall into two categories: action and linking.

Action Verbs

Action verbs, you guessed it, show action: *waddle, burp, chortle, slither, snort* . . .

Sometimes you can't actually see the action of action verbs. For example, *think, know, love, desire, and understand* are all action verbs, even though the action isn't usually visible. Maybe I should say these are non-action, action verbs.

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Action verbs can be divided into two types: transitive and intransitive. A verb is **transitive** if something in the sentence, either a noun or a pronoun, receives the action of the verb. That something is called *the object*. An easy way to figure out if a verb is transitive is to ask *whom?* or *what?* directly after the verb. If you can answer one of these questions, the verb has an object, and therefore . . . tadaaahhh . . . it's transitive.

Mindy juggles small mammals for her friends.



In this sentence, *juggles* is a **transitive** verb because it's followed by an object, *mammals*, that receives the action of the verb. *Mammals* answers the question *what?* after the verb. (Mindy juggles *what?* *mammals*)

A verb is intransitive if it doesn't have an object. The verb expresses action, but nothing in the sentence receives the action.

Mindy juggles for her friends.

In this sentence, *juggles* is **intransitive** because you can't answer the question *whom?* or *what?* directly after it. Therefore, it has no object that receives its action. Instead, the verb is followed by a prepositional phrase (*for her friends*).

Can you tell which of the following sentences contains a transitive verb and which contains an intransitive verb?

Zuni sings like a dying baboon.
Zuni sings zippy show tunes.

You (probably) guessed it. In the first sentence, *sings* is intransitive. No noun or pronoun directly after the verb answers *whom?* or *what?* In other words, the verb has no object that receives its action. Instead, *like a dying baboon* is a prepositional phrase that tells *how* Zuni sings. In the second sentence, however, *sings* is transitive. It's followed by an object, *tunes*, that answers the question *what?* after the verb. Zuni sings *what?* *Tunes*. *Tunes* receives the action of the verb.

Linking Verbs

Linking verbs are, well . . . let's just say . . . a little boring because they show no action. The most commonly used linking verbs are forms of *to be*:

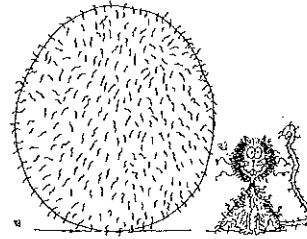
<i>be</i>	<i>shall be</i>	<i>should be</i>
<i>being</i>	<i>will be</i>	<i>would be</i>
<i>am</i>	<i>has been</i>	<i>can be</i>
<i>is/are</i>	<i>have been</i>	<i>could be</i>
<i>was</i>	<i>shall have been</i>	<i>would have been</i>
<i>were</i>	<i>will have been</i>	<i>could have been</i>

A linking verb connects (or links) the subject of a sentence to a word that follows it and refers back to the subject. This other word will either be a noun or pronoun that renames the subject, or an adjective that describes the subject. A few examples might help:

People with stubby toes are actually space aliens.

In this case the linking verb, *are*, connects the subject, *people*, to the noun that renames it, *aliens*. The linking verb here acts like a kind of equals sign (*people = aliens*). Here's another example:

Fluffy's hair ball is hefty.



In this sentence, the linking verb, *is*, connects the subject, *hair ball*, to the adjective, *hefty*. *Hefty* describes *hair ball* (*hefty hair ball*). Remember, a linking verb is followed by a word that refers back to the subject. This word will be either a noun or pronoun renaming the subject, or an adjective describing the subject. Look at the difference in this sentence:

Fluffy gagged on a hair ball.

Notice that the verb, *gagged*, is not followed by a word that describes or renames the subject, *Fluffy*. Instead, the verb is followed by a prepositional phrase, *on a hairball*. As you have probably guessed, *gagged* is an action verb, not a linking. It's intransitive because it has no object that receives the action of the verb.

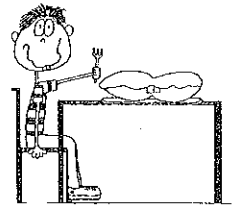
FVI Not all *to be* verbs are linking verbs. A waiter at a fancy-schmancy restaurant might tell you this:

Your fried cow's lips are here.

In this sentence, the verb, *are*, is a form of *to be*. However, *are* is not followed by a word that renames or describes the subject, *lips*. Instead, *are* is followed by an adverb, *here*. Therefore, in this case, *are* shows state of being, but it isn't technically a linking verb. I know, it's a picky point. Suppose, however, your waiter says this:

Your fried cow's lips are crispy.

Now *are* acts as a linking verb because it connects the subject, *lips*, with an adjective *crispy*, that describes the subject (*crispy lips*).



Beware Some verbs might look like they convey action, but in some instances, they actually function as linking verbs. Here's a list of tricky verbs that are *action* in some cases and *linking* in others:

<i>appear</i>	<i>grow</i>	<i>seem</i>	<i>stay</i>
<i>become</i>	<i>look</i>	<i>smell</i>	<i>taste</i>
<i>feel</i>	<i>remain</i>	<i>sound</i>	<i>turn</i>

Opal grows jumbo okra.

In this case, *grows* is an action verb. It's transitive because you can answer the question *what?* immediately after the verb. *Okra* is the object that receives the action of the verb (*Opal grows what?* *Okra*).

Rumford's gerbil grows plump.

Here the verb, *grows*, links the subject, *gerbil*, to a main word, *plump*, after the verb. Because *plump* is an adjective that refers back to and describes the subject (*plump gerbil*), *grows* is, by gosh, a linking verb.

Arnie's armpits look hairy.

Look, in this example, is a linking verb because it connects the subject, *armpits*, with the adjective, *hairy*, that describes the armpits (*hairy armpits*).

Arnie looks at his (hairy) armpits.

Looks, in this case, is an action verb. It tells what Arnie, the subject, does. *Looks* is intransitive because it's not followed by a noun or pronoun that receives the action of the verb. In other words, you can't answer the question *whom?* or *what?* after the verb. Instead it's followed by a prepositional phrase (*at his hairy armpits*).



Verb Phrases

A *phrase* is merely a group of related words without a subject and verb. A verb phrase consists of one or more helping verbs followed by a main verb. The verb phrase acts as one verb. (Yes, I'm happy to say that the helping verb and main verb bond.) *To be* verbs are often used as helping verbs.

Here's a list of common helping verbs:

<i>has</i>	<i>can</i>	<i>might</i>
<i>have</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>must</i>
<i>had</i>	<i>should</i>	<i>do</i>
<i>shall</i>	<i>would</i>	<i>did</i>
<i>will</i>	<i>could</i>	<i>does</i>

Let's look at some sentences that contain verb phrases:



Bozo **is making** balloon marsupials for the children. *is* functions as a helping verb (not a linking verb), and *making* is the main verb. The whole verb phrase, *is making*, is an action verb.

Mallory **was yodeling** in the shower.

was functions as a helping verb (not a linking verb), and *yodeling* is the main verb. The whole phrase, *was yodeling*, is an action verb.

Mickey **will perform** the part of a tap dancing tick in his school play.

will is a helping verb, *perform* is the main verb, and the entire verb phrase *will perform* is an action verb.

Mimi's macaroni **is growing** mossy.

This one is a little tricky. *is growing* is the verb phrase, and although it sounds like an action verb, here it's actually linking. It connects the subject, *macaroni*, with an adjective that describes it, *mossy*.

FVI Sometimes an adverb might interrupt a verb phrase. Don't let this situation throw you:

For a dazzling aquatic display, Jerome **is cleverly plopping** Alka Seltzer into his fish tank.

The adverb *cleverly* interrupts the verb phrase *is plopping*.

Grandpa Clodhopper **has always been** a nonstop knuckle popper.

The adverb *always* interrupts the verb *has been*.

Beware In questions, parts of the verb phrase are sometimes separated:

Does your parrot **speak** Swahili?

Rewording the question into a statement makes finding the complete verb phrase easier.

Your parrot **does speak** Swahili.

The entire verb phrase *is does speak*. *Does* is the helping verb and *speak* is the main verb.

Can Fulbright really **converse** with spider mites?

Once again, if you reword this question into a statement, you can more easily recognize the entire verb phrase.

Fulbright really **can converse** with spider mites.

The entire verb phrase *is can converse*. *Can* is the helping verb and *converse* is the main verb. Simple!



Adverbs

You already know that adjectives modify nouns and pronouns. Well, an adverb is a single word that modifies verbs, adjectives and other adverbs.

Adverbs modify verbs by answering these questions:

Where: Don't put your retainer **there**.

I have a little bump **here** on my lip.

When: **Tomorrow** Marvin will complete his brain surgery correspondence course.

Aliens visit Earth **daily** to procure foot powder and clam chowder.

In his garage, Ashlinn **is still** building the world's largest fiberglass bass.

How: Norman **is certain** that little men are **secretly** hiding in his microwave.

Samantha **proudly** displays her collection of ceramic slugs to friends and relatives.

To What Extent: Studies **convincingly** demonstrate that electric rollers **greatly** stimulate brain cells and **dramatically** increase IQ's.



Doing **extremely** high kicks in her geriatric aerobics class, Mrs. Whipple lost her **very** expensive diamond ring and a glass eye.

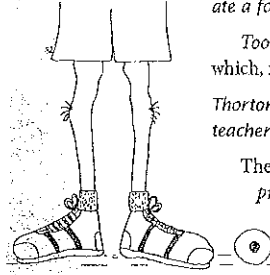
The adverb *extremely* modifies the adjective *high* by telling how *high*. The adverb *very* modifies the adjective *expensive* by telling how *expensive*.

Cubby's parents agree that at age three he is **too** young to operate a forklift.

Too is a very common adverb. It modifies the adjective *young*, which, in turn, describes the pronoun *he*.

Thorton received an F on his **very** creative art project because the teacher didn't understand that he had drawn a blank.

The adverb *very* modifies *creative*, an adjective that describes project.



FVI Like *too* and *very*, the following adverbs frequently modify adjectives:

<i>extremely</i>	<i>entirely</i>	<i>unusually</i>
<i>dangerously</i>	<i>especially</i>	<i>rather</i>
<i>definitely</i>	<i>quite</i>	<i>completely</i>
<i>surprisingly</i>	<i>terribly</i>	<i>dreadfully</i>

Just to make things a little more confusing, besides modifying verbs and adjective adverbs also modify other adverbs:

Kippy the chiropractor works **extremely hard** at his backbreaking job.

Extremely is an adverb that modifies another adverb, *hard*, and *hard* modifies (by answering to what extent?) the verb, *works*.

Only yesterday, Horatio **very proudly** graduated as valedictorian of his muffler and brake repair class.

Only is an adverb that modifies the adverb *yesterday*, and *very* is an adverb modifying the adverb *proudly*.

Instead of paying for a personalized license plate, recently Mrs. CBJ456 **quite cleverly** changed her name.

Quite is an adverb that modifies the adverb *cleverly*. *Cleverly* answers *how?* about the verb, *changed*. *Recently* is also an adverb. It answers *when?* about the verb.