Verbs describe what we’re doing, feeling, or thinking, or the state or condition of a thing, person, or animal. Verbs form or lead into the predicate (see section 5.1, Subjects and Predicates), the part of a sentence that tells us what the subject is doing.

6.1 Person

Person tells us about the relationship between the subject of the verb—the individual who is doing the verb—and the person who is being spoken to. The person of a verb is signaled by pronoun choice and verb endings.

First person means the speaker is also the subject. It’s often used in novels, especially for narration. The pronouns I, me, mine, my, we, our, ours, and us are common in the first person.

- I plan to break in my new boots before the hiking trip.
- We are ready for our close-ups, Mr. DeMille.

Second person means the speaker is talking directly to someone who is probably present. Sometimes, this is a narrator speaking to the reader, but it’s far more common in instructions, how-to guides, recipes, and advice. The pronouns you and yours are common in the second person.

- You should wear your hat.
- Why won’t you listen to me?
- When you get to the end of the chapter, write the answers to the questions in your notebook.
**6.2 Verbs**

**Third person** means the subject is not present and the speaker is not speaking directly to them. It's often used for relating stories about someone else. The pronouns *he, her, hers, him, his, it, its, she, them,* and *they* are common in the third person.

- She says she plans to donate her old car to charity.
- They won't know what the problem is until their computer technician takes a look.
- The rains in Spain fall mainly on the plain.

**6.2 Number**

**Number** tells us how many people make up the subject of the verb. We have either a singular subject (just one) or a plural subject (two or more).

- **Mass nouns**, which act as a singular subject even though they refer to lots of things, take the singular conjugation.
  - A flock of geese soars into the sky.
  - The crowd wonders when the theater will open.

**6.3 Aspect**

**Aspect** tells you how long a verb's action happened. **Simple actions** are completed at an unknown time. **Progressive actions continue**. **Perfect actions** were known to be completed in the past. **Perfect progressive actions** were known to be continuous in the past.

**6.4 Tense**

**Tense** tells us when the verb of the sentence is taking place, from the point of view of the subject of the sentence.

To illustrate, let's use examples from the verbs *eat, call,* and *read.*

**6.4.1 Past Tense**

**Simple past tense** is for actions that happened at a specific time.

- I ate.
- I called.
- I read.

**Past progressive** is for actions that happened continuously but were interrupted.

- I was eating.
- I was calling.
- I was reading.

**Past perfect** is for actions that happened but were finished before a specific time. This was traditionally called the *pluperfect.*

- I had eaten.
- I had called.
- I had read.
**Past perfect progressive** is for actions that happened continuously but then stopped happening continuously at a specific time.

- I had been eating.
- I had been calling.
- I had been reading.

**8.4.2 PRESENT TENSE**

**Simple present tense** happens now and is repeated. It's about habits or regular events.

- I eat.
- I call.
- I read.

**Present progressive** actions are continuously happening now.

- I am eating.
- I am calling.
- I am reading.

**Present perfect** actions started and finished in the past at an unspecified time but are relevant to the present.

- I have eaten.
- I have called.
- I have read.

**Present perfect progressive** is for actions that were continuously happening in the past and are still happening now.

- I have been eating.
- I have been calling.
- I have been reading.

**6.4.3 FUTURE TENSE**

There are two forms that talk about the future. **Will** forms tend to be about a promise, intention, or voluntary action. **Going to** forms tend to be about plans or a certain future.

**Simple future** says that a specific event will happen at a specific time.

- I will eat. I am going to eat.
- I will call. I am going to call.
- I will read. I am going to read.

**Future progressive** says what will be happening continuously.

- I will be eating. I am going to be eating.
- I will be calling. I am going to be calling.
- I will be reading. I am going to be reading.

**Future perfect** says that at a certain future time, a specific event will have happened.

- I will have eaten. I am going to have eaten.
- I will have called. I am going to have called.
- I will have read. I am going to have read.
6.5 Verbs

Future perfect progressive says that at a certain future time, a continuous event will have been happening.

- I will have been eating. I will have been going to eat.
- I will have been calling. I will have been going to call.
- I will have been reading. I will have been going to read.

6.5 Mood

Don't be misled into thinking mood is about emotions. Instead, it refers to whether or not something is a fact.

Indicative mood tells us things that are true. It is by far the most common.

Subjunctive mood suggests possibility, wishes, or hypotheticals, especially in contradiction to what is true.

The subjunctive has been on a long, slow decline in English. Where the subjunctive has traditionally been used, it is now often replaced by what appears to be the simple present or simple past. I say appears, because what we may be seeing is not the vanishing of the subjunctive, but instead a simplification of its forms. In other words, it still functions as the subjunctive, but it takes the same form as other tenses. For example, both of these sentences suggest a hypothetical situation, even though their verb forms are different.

- If you were to come with me, we could have lunch.
- If you came with me, we could have lunch.

Imperative mood makes a verb into a command. It uses the second person, even when, for example, the subject is speaking to herself or himself.

- Go get me a pair of pliers.
- "Get up and ride that horse again," I told myself. "Do it now."

6.6 Voice

The voice of a verb has nothing do with the sounds made by the mouth. Instead, it has to do with who or what is performing or doing the verb.

Active voice is used when the subject performs the verb and appears in front of the verb.

- She saved my life.
- Our team won the game.

Passive voice uses a different word order to put the direct object before the verb, and the subject after the verb.

- My life was saved by her.
- The game was won by us.

The words passive and active here are different from their non-linguistic meanings. Don't make the mistake of assuming that active is for bold, clear-thinking achievers, and passive is for wimpy, vague do-nothings. It isn't true.
Both active and passive voices are essential to everyday writing and speaking. Broadside suggestions that you should avoid the passive voice are misguided and should be ignored.

What you should try to avoid is using passive voice to deflect responsibility, unless that’s what you’re aiming for. “Mistakes were made by us,” sounds much less like an admission of guilt than, “We made mistakes.” The first one is passive; the latter is active. The first one deflects the blame a little bit (and, if it’s in apology, may signal to others that you’re not sincere), whereas the second one plainly claims the blame (and may signal sincerity).

Passive voice is rightly used when you can’t or don’t need to explicitly identify the subject. Perhaps the subject—the main actor—is unknown, or doesn’t matter, or is understood from the context.

- An umbrella was left behind after the concert.
- The man was indicted on two counts of armed robbery.

The only other valid complaint about passive voice is that it makes readers and listeners work a little bit harder to understand what is being said. We can understand it, but the active voice may be a better way to write it. When you’re revising your writing, try to write sentences in different ways to see which works best.

Some people have mistakenly been taught that forms of the verbs to be or to have usually indicate the passive voice. This is sometimes the case but is not a valid indicator of what is truly passive voice.

6.7 Conjugating Verbs

We change verbs to indicate who is talking and to whom (the person; see section 6.1) and to show when the verb happened (the tense; see section 6.4). This change is conjugation, which we do by adding inflections. What form the conjugation takes depends upon the person and tense of the verb.

There are three main regular ways to conjugate verbs: now, in the past, and as continuous action.

6.7.1 Now

In this conjugation, primarily used for the present and future tenses, the ending is the same for the first-person, second-person, and third-person plural, but in the third-person singular, an -s is added. The infinitive form in English is this conjugation with to before it: to eat, to swim, to live, and so on.

This conjugation can also indicate the historical simple tense, which you may encounter in academic writing. In the present tense, a thing is happening while the words are being said, whereas in the historical simple tense, important past events are described as if they are happening right now, although it is usually clear from the context that there’s no way they could be.

Present

- I eat vegetables. You grow vegetables. She prefers vegetables.
6.7 VERBS

Historical Simple
- Columbus sails to the New World and hunts for gold.
- Einstein takes a job as an assistant professor in Zurich.

6.7.2 IN THE PAST

In this conjugation, we indicate that something happened in the past by adding -ed to most verbs. This creates the past participle, which is used in the past and perfect tenses.

- He wondered who would win. The ball stayed in bounds.
- She helped the coach.

Words formed with this inflection often behave like adjectives and can modify other words.
- The finished sculpture is beautiful.
- A newly cleaned house looks nice.

6.7.3 CONTINUOUS ACTION

In this conjugation, we indicate that something is happening, or has happened, over a period of time. It is used in the present progressive tense and similar forms and is called the present participle.

- We are selling the house. He is trying to find a seat.
- She is standing in the hall.

Words formed with this inflection sometime behave like an adjective.

6.8 Action Verbs

Action verbs indicate what the subject of a sentence is doing.

- In good writing, action verbs can make the reader feel emotions, see scenes more vividly, and accurately know what is happening.

Action verbs can be transitive or intransitive.

Transitive verbs have a direct object, which is the thing or person being acted upon by the verb.

- Paint the car.—Car is the direct object.
- She folded the newspaper.—Newspaper is the direct object.
- Did you get a good grade?—Good grade is the direct object.
- We greeted him at the airport.—Him is the direct object.

Falling water makes a pleasant sound.
- You have to feed growing children at least three times a day.
- A bleating calf finds its mother.

This conjugation also creates the gerund (section 5.6.1, Noun Phrases), a form of the verb that behaves like a noun.

- Knowing her has been a pleasure.
- Your smoking is bothering the other customers.
- Their laughing has nothing to do with you.

Note that if the gerund is preceded by a pronoun, the possessive form is the best choice.

- Bad: Him quitting left us without a center fielder.
- Good: His quitting left us without a center fielder.
**6.9 Verbs**

Intransitive verbs do not act upon anything. They may be followed by an adjective, adverb, preposition, or another part of speech.

- She smiled, then left the party.
- Great crowds of people milled about the town square.
- I awaken every day in the same way.

**6.9 Linking Verbs**

Linking verbs add details about the subject of a sentence. In their simplest form, they connect the subject and the sentence complement—that is, the adjective, noun, or pronoun that follows the linking verb. They link them together instead of showing action. The linguistic term for this connection is copula.

Often, what is on each side of a linking verb is equivalent; the complement redefines or restates the subject.

- My car is a Renault.
- Our favorite food is kale.

Some verbs in the following list often act as linking verbs but can also be action verbs. To figure out if they are acting as linking verbs, try replacing them with forms of to be. If the changed sentence makes sense, you have replaced a linking verb. Here are some common linking verbs:

- act
- appear
- be
- become
- feel
- grow
- look
- prove
- remain
- seem
- smell
- sound
- stay
- taste
- turn

- She appears ready for the election. She is ready for the election.
- The food seemed spoiled. The food was spoiled.
- He acted surprised about the gift. He was surprised about the gift.
- You look exhausted. You are exhausted.

**6.10 Auxiliary Verbs**

Also called helping verbs, auxiliary verbs extend the main verb by helping to show time, tense, and possibility. The auxiliary verbs are be, have, and do. They are used in the continuous (progressive) and perfect tenses.

In the progressive tenses, the auxiliary verb be and its conjugated forms are part of the construction that shows that the action is or was happening continuously.

- We are getting ready to go.
- We were swimming for an hour when it started to rain.
- I am feeling kind of ill.
- She was flipping the pancakes high into the air.

In the perfect tenses, the auxiliary verb have and its conjugated forms are used to indicate a continuous action that is finished and
to indicate actions that are continuously happening but have not finished yet.

- She had rebuilt the engine before race day.
- I had been thinking about doing that before you suggested it.
- Have you been dating him long?

_Do_ is an especially common auxiliary verb that is used to ask questions, to express negation, to provide emphasis, and more. _Do_ is used for questions in the simple present and simple past.

- Do you have homework to finish?
- Did you finish your homework?
- Doesn’t she have a cute baby?
- Didn’t you see her cute baby?

_Do_ is used for negations in the simple present and simple past tenses.

- We don’t have football practice on Sundays.
- She didn’t finish her broccoli.

_Do_ is used in the negative imperative, which is when you tell someone not to do something.

- Don’t get mud on the carpet.
- Don’t leave the door open.

_Do_ is used for emphasis, usually in a situation where there has been some doubt about the truth. If you were reading these sentences aloud, you would put a lot of emphasis on the form of _do_.

- She does run the company! She’s the CEO.
- We did go to rehearsal, but the building was locked.

### 6.11 Modal Verbs

**Modal verbs**, also known as conditionals, are a kind of auxiliary verb. They assist the main verb in suggesting ability, possibility, potential, expectation, permission, and obligation. When used with the main verb, modal verbs do not end with _-s_ for the third-person singular.

- can
  - could
  - may
  - might
  - must
  - ought to
  - shall
  - should
  - will
  - would

- I may not want to see you again later.
- They must give their time to a worthy cause.
- She should tell him exactly how she feels.
- Would you open the door for me?

A characteristic of modals is that they are used in inverted forms when a statement becomes a question.

- We can come to the party. → Can we come to the party?
- He will go to the party. → Will he go to the party?

There are three verbs that behave like modals some of the time, but like main verbs the rest of the time: _dare, need to, and used to_.

98