

WHAT IS A VERB?

Definition of a verb:

Verbs are the engines of sentences. That is, verbs tell us what subjects DO or what subjects ARE or what HAPPENS to subjects. In the sentences below, all the capitalized words are verbs:

John WALKS for exercise.	(What did John <u>do</u> ?)
John SEEMS healthy.	(What <u>is</u> John?)
John SEEMS healthy because he EXERCISES.	(He <u>is</u> what? Because he <u>does</u> what?)
John GOT MARRIED when he WAS a young man.	(What happened to John?)
John IS the father of two children.	(What is John?)
John VOTED in every school board election.	(What did John do?)
John WORKS at the post office.	(What does John do?)
John HAD a bad car accident last year.	(What happened to John?)

EXERCISE: Underline the verb(s) in each sentence TWICE.

Example: John voted in every school board election.

1. John got married before he got hired at the post office.
2. His wife, Sarah, works at the library.
3. Sarah lived in Santa Barbara her whole life.
4. She met John at her cousin's house.
5. Her cousin, Eli, lived in Santa Maria.
6. Her cousin was a good friend of John's.
7. When they got married, Eli was John's best man.
8. Eli was also a postal worker.
9. He helped John to apply for a job with the post office.
10. Now they both work at the Santa Maria Post Office.

Two Kinds of Verbs: LINKING VERBS AND ACTION VERBS

Sometimes verbs are described as the ACTION WORDS in the sentence: verbs tell us what a subject is doing. For example, in the sentences above, the subject "John" is definitely "doing" -- he VOTES, WALKS, and WORKS. In other sentences above, SEEMS and IS are also verbs. But are they actions? Not exactly. These verbs are called LINKING VERBS. Linking verbs link the subject of the sentence to words that describe or identify it.

Some Linking Verbs

John SEEMS healthy.
John IS a postal worker.
John APPEARS happy.
John LOOKS mad!
John FEELS hungry.
(Linking verbs link a subject to an adjective or noun in the predication: "healthy John," "postal worker John," etc.)

Some Action Verbs

John VOTES in the election.
John SINGS in the choir.
John WASHES his car.
John EATS lunch before he WALKS.
John EATS the soup for lunch.
(Action verbs tell us what the subject does: John votes, John walks, etc.)

A LIST OF COMMON LINKING VERBS:

appear	feel	become
look	seem	
be (am, is , are, was, were, has been, have been, had been)		

(The last verb on the list, “to be” is a special verb in English. First, it is a verb that writers use a lot! It is called an “irregular” verb: a verb that has many different proper spellings, depending on what subject and tense the writer is using.)

Exercise: For each sentence, underline the verb twice. Then, write “LV” if it is a linking verb and “V” if it is an action verb.

1. _____ Alicia is my daughter.
2. _____ She attends Joaquin Miller Middle School.
3. _____ She plays soccer on the weekends with her team.
4. _____ Alicia likes school, but she also likes soccer.
5. _____ She wrote a book report about soccer in Brazil for her social studies teacher.

Exercise:

1. In the space below, write five sentences using LINKING VERBS.

2. Underline the linking verb twice.

3. Draw a line between the subject and the verb in the predicate it “links” up with, like this:

John seems happy.

John is a postal worker.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Tenses of verbs and verbs of more than one word: HELPING VERBS

Small changes in the spelling or structure of verbs can tell us important information about the timing of actions they describe.

John walks for exercise.

John walked yesterday after lunch.

John will walk tomorrow.

John should be walking past the park by now.

Notice that some of the verbs below have more than one part (“**will walk**,” “**should be walking**,” etc.) That’s because the timing of some actions require HELPING VERBS to complete the main verb’s work. A lot of verbs in English consist of only one word: is, was, ran, steal, plays, etc. Sometimes though, verb phrases in English consist of more than one word: is playing, was finished, has been stealing, should have played, etc.

“Helping Verbs” help to create special tenses in English sentences:

Maria and Hector cleaned the house.

(Main verb: “cleaned”)

Maria and Hector had been cleaning the house when I arrived.

(Helping verbs: “had been”)

John takes his lunch to work.

(Main verb: “takes”)

John should have taken his lunch to work, but he forgot.

(Helping verbs: “should have”)

Alicia and Sally play soccer.

(Main verb: “play”)

Will Alicia and Sally play soccer this weekend?

(Helping verb: “will”)