

## Parts of Speech: Verbs

Description of the lecture This lecture is about verbs as the third part of speech. The unit explores key concepts of verbs such as definitions, classes, basic forms, subject and predicate agreement. Throughout the unit students will become familiar with the meanings and uses of verbs in tenses and sentences. The unit counts on theory, tables, examples and exercises. Objectives of the lecture When students have completed this unit, they should be able, among other things, to;

1. Introduce a general overview about verbs.
2. List the classes and kinds of verbs.
3. Enable learners to reflect on the specific basic forms and changes of verbs.
4. Compose correct, meaningful and functional sentences through verbs.

## Introduction

The third part of speech known "verb" is one of the main element of every sentence. The verb is king in English sentence. The importance of the verb in a sentence is the same as the vowel sound in the syllable formation. The shortest sentence contains a verb. You can make a one-word sentence with a verb, for example: "Stop!" You cannot make a one-word sentence with any other type of word except with the verb. The verb can be said to be the most important element of a sentence because the structure of a sentence depends largely on the verb. The difference between the sentences: ☐ Leave. ☐ He laughed ☐ He built a house. The difference is mainly that the first sentence is an order while the second sentence has the verb laugh, which needs nothing to complete its meaning, but the third sentence he built, which requires an object to complete its meaning: what did he build?- A house. The difference between leave, laugh and built is lexical which means that the two verbs represent different meanings or activities

### 1. Definition of a Verb

A verb is a word or a phrase with which we can make an assertion. What is asserted is an action, condition or state. Every sentence must have a verb. A verb is the central unit of any sentence or clause, and all the other words in a sentence take grammatical form based on how they relate to it. Verbs change form to indicate five main roles which are person, number, tense, voice, and mood. The main verb of a sentence is often preceded by one or more helping verbs, which together form a complete verb. There is no sentence is generally complete without the use of verb. Without a verb, we cannot have a complete sentence. So the study of verbs is important because the verb is the most important part of a sentence "speech". It is obligatory even in the shortest of sentences to include a verb. Here are some hints that may help you locate verbs: ☐ A sentence "clause" is not a sentence "clause" without at least one verb. Some compound and complex sentences may include more than one verb because they include more than one clause. ☐ A verb is the central unit of any sentence or clause, and all the other words in a sentence take grammatical form based on how they relate to the verb.

☐ Verbs are words that tell us what a subject does or is: verbs usually tell about an action. Verbs may tell also about states. ☐ Verbs are often found in the middle of sentences. While imperative sentences start with a verb. ☐ A verb can sometimes be made up of more than one word, called a verb phrase. Oppositely, some verbs may consist of one word. ☐ Verb phrases may have up to five

words. ☐ Some verb phrases have more than one word and are sometimes interrupted or separated from the auxiliary verb or verbs by small words that are not part of the verb like not, never, always, seldom, already, sometimes, usually, rarely ..... such as they have just tasted the food. Here the word just is neither a non-verb word nor an auxiliary. Tasted is the main verb while have is the auxiliary. ☐ Verbs change their form to tell about actions taking place at different times. For example, we moved to a new house last week can be changed to show the action happening in the future. We will move to a new house next week. The word moved became will move; therefore, they are still verbs the first one is a one verb word while the second is a verb phrase. Here are some sentences that show verbs at work. Notice that some verbs have more than one word and are sometimes interrupted by small words that are not part of the verb. ☐ I hit the ball. (It refers to an action.) ☐ Shut up. Order (There is only one word in this sentence which is a verb.) ☐ She is asleep. (It refers to a state.) ☐ I watch my favorite TV show every day. Action ☐ She is in a good health. State ☐ Have you sent that letter? ☐ They are travelling to America. Verb phrase ☐ Change has come to Algeria. Verb phrase ☐ Stop! (Short sentence of one word which is the verb stop.) ☐ They left. Intransitive verb ☐ My father thinks that he can rebuild his old house. ☐ They might have been being chased before her car smashed into the bridge. Five words verb ☐ Most excellent students are usually sitting on the steps when the teacher arrives. Words of the verb are interrupted by usually.

## 2. Particle “Verb Phrase”

A particle is the combination of a standard verb such as make or put with one or two particles. In some cases the particle is an adverb such as ‘up’, ‘together’; in

others it is a preposition such as ‘through’, ‘in’. A phrasal verb often has a meaning which is different from the original verb. Thus turn down means something like ‘reject’, rule out means ‘eliminate’, find out is ‘discover’, and go on is ‘continue’; these are not meanings that could have been predicted from the meanings of the verb and the particle independently. Here are some examples of phrasal verbs: ☐ So she went on for some weeks cutting and hewing timber trees. ☐ Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep. . . Alternative terms for phrasal verb are ‘compound verb’, ‘verb – adverb combination’, ‘verb – particle construction’.

### 3. Kinds of Verbs

We understand from the previous definition and examples that there are two kinds of verbs; action verbs and state verbs.

#### 3. 1. Action Verbs

They are also called “Dynamic Verbs” or “Doing Verbs”. Most verbs are action verbs. They show that something is being done or that something is happening. They refer to actions that can be observed with the five senses. Most action verbs refer to physical actions and describe events which happen in limited period of time, and have a definite beginning and end. Action verbs have both simple and progressive forms. Examples;

☐ My pupils participate in the lesson. Action ☐ The children ran after the cat. ☐ My father is visiting the place of my work.

#### 3. 2. Stative Verbs

They are also called “Non-conclusive Verbs”. A very small number of verbs express a state of being. These non-action verbs are sometimes called linking verbs or copula verbs. They refer to states that cannot be observed with the five senses. They show that something or somebody exists. Most state verbs describe states which continue over a period of time and need not to have well defined beginning and end. State verbs cannot usually have a progressive form and they express

meanings such as being through a form of be (am, are, is, was, were, been) or cases of having, opinions, thinking, perception, wants, preference, and feelings through the five senses verbs such as (smell, taste, look, sound, feel, seem, appear, become, grow, remain, prove). Examples; ☐ I listen to that music. (It refers to the use of senses.)

☐ They envy to have that small animal in their house. (It expresses a want and preference.) ☐ I guess it is a difficult question. (opinion) ☐ They perceive well the case. (perception)

Action Verbs State Verbs

☐ Dynamic ☐ Physical ☐ Period of time with clear limits ☐ Describe progressive and simple cases  
☐ Non-conclusive and static ☐ Mental ☐ Period of time with unclear limits ☐ Describe only simple cases

### 3. 3. Linking Verbs

Some verbs are called non-action, state of being, or linking verbs. They are the verbs that do not show action – those verbs that are either a form of be (am, are, is, was, were, been) or that are associated with the five senses (smell, taste, look, sound, feel, seem, appear, become, grow, remain, prove). So when some verbs are used to express a state of being, or the fact that something has certain qualities, they are considered as linking verbs. They are called like this because they link the subject to an adjective (the subject and the subject complement). A linking verb does not have much meaning in itself. It "links" the subject to what is said about the subject. Usually, a linking verb shows equality (=) or a change to a different state or place (>). Linking verbs are always intransitive (but not all intransitive verbs are linking verbs). Notice that you can replace each of these linking verbs with the verb seem or is or become. Examples; ☐ The dog is black. ☐ Ann is a teacher. (Ann = teacher) ☐ The food tastes delicious. Here food does not have taste buds or a mouth and, therefore, cannot perform the physical action of tasting. The smoke smelled stronger now. ☐ The weather becomes cold. The weather >cold) ☐ The sculpture felt smooth. Or the sculpture became/seemed smooth. ☐ The presentation music sounds interesting in the class. Or the presentation music seemed interesting in the class. (music = interesting) ☐ The justification looks interesting to this question. ☐ The sky grew dark before the storm.

### 3. 4. Notes about Action Verbs versus State Verbs

☐ A few verbs can be used as either action verbs or linking verbs. Here are the most common ones; look, smell, grow, taste, sound, feel, look ...Notice that some verbs such as looked can be either action or non-action, depending on how they are used in a sentence. Examples: 1. Ann looked nice. 2. Ann looked out the door. You must ask yourself in the first sentence whether Ann is actively using her eyes or not. She is not; therefore, looked in the first sentence is a linking verb. In the second sentence, Ann is actually using her eyes to look out the door. Thus, this time looked is an action verb. ☐ If these verbs are used to describe a physical action, something that can really happen or that is observable, they are considered to be action verbs. Examples; ☐ Ann tasted the food. ☐ John smelled the smoke from the near forest fire. ☐ She felt the water cold before she swam. ☐ Stephan grew 5 centimeters last year. ☐ The investigator looked carefully at the evidence. ☐ If some of these verbs are used to express a state of being, or the fact that something has certain qualities, they are considered to be linking verbs.

#### 4. Transitive versus Intransitive Verbs

A transitive verb takes “requires” a direct object to complete its meaning: A terrorist kills the President (the President is the direct object of the verb kills). So a transitive verb always has a noun that receives the action of the verb, called the direct object. Examples: ☐ Ann raises her hand. The verb is raises. Her hand is the object receiving the verb’s action. Therefore, “raises” is a transitive verb. ☐ I saw a car. ☐ He brushes his teeth three times a day. ☐ They are playing electronic games. ☐ He speaks English. Transitive verbs sometimes have indirect objects, which name the object to whom or for whom the action was done. Example: ☐ John gave Stephan the book. The verb is gave. The direct object is the book. (What did he give? The book.) The indirect object is Stephan. (To whom did he give it? To Stephan.) An intransitive verb has its complete meaning by itself and does not have a direct object or indirect object to complete its meaning: She died. Many verbs, like speak, can be transitive or intransitive. Although an intransitive verb may be followed by an

adverb or adverbial phrase, there is no object to receive its action. Look at these examples of intransitive verbs: ☐ Ann rises slowly from her seat. The verb is rises. The phrase, slowly from her seat, modifies the verb, but no object receives the action. ☐ She has arrived. ☐ Ann laughs. ☐ They speak fast.

#### 5. Classes of Verbs

Verbs are classified into two categories; Main verbs and Auxiliary Verbs. Main verbs occur independently in a sentence and convey the complete meaning of the action. But there are some verbs which occur along with the main verbs and indicate tense, aspect voice, mood / intention of the speaker. They are called auxiliary verbs.

##### 5. 1. Lexical/Ordinary/Main Verbs

Main (lexical) verbs occur independently in a sentence and convey the complete meaning of the action. Sometimes they are helped by auxiliary verbs. All verbs other than auxiliaries are called main verbs such as read, write, eat, drink, etc. A Main Verb is any verb in a sentence that expresses action or the state of being of the subject in that sentence and it always carries a real meaning. The lexical verb is the head element and comes at last in complex verb phrase; the elements preceding the head are auxiliaries. So when a verb phrase contains more than one verb, the last verb in the phrase is the main verb. All other verbs are auxiliaries. Examples;  
☐ Stephan finds the right solution. “main verb” ☐ John might deliver the mail. “modal verb + main verb” ☐ She is doing her best to get the level. “auxiliary verb + main verb”

##### 5. 1. 1. Regular Verbs

Within formal classification, we should start with regular verbs, which are easy to remember. These are obtained by adding an -ed (play, played, played) at the end of the first form, or in case the verb end in e, only a -d (hire, hired, hired). To the great relief on non-native speakers, all English verbs are regular ones, except for a few hundred irregular verbs discussed in the next section. Most verbs of English are regular. Regular verbs can be conjugated into four forms. These forms are important, since they are the basis for all conjugations. All verbs have an infinitive form or a base form before conjugation. Regular verbs follow a standard set of rules for forming their present participle and past forms. The present

participle is formed by adding -ing. If the verb ends with the letter e, drop the e before adding -ing. The past is formed by adding -ed. If the verb ends with the letter e, just add d.

### 5. 1. 2. Irregular Verbs

Unfortunately, many other verbs are irregular, and, equally unfortunately, they tend to be the ones most commonly used. Some verbs form their principal parts by changing their spelling. These verbs are called irregular verbs. Irregular verbs make extensive use of the memory of non-native speakers, as their second and third form cannot be deduced or predicted from the first one. Sadly, they need a lot of time to be learnt, which cannot be avoided as many of them belong to the core English vocabulary. So they are different in their simple past and past participle in the sense that they form their simple past and past participle. The optimistic approach to irregular verbs is to remember that out of many thousands of English verbs only a few hundred ones are irregular, which can be further reduced based on their frequency. Still more than a hundred of them (with three distinctive forms completed with their meaning) remain, with different procedures to memorize them. The most common is to further categorize them by establishing patterns in the table below:

N Category Examples  
1 Vowel change irregular verbs buy, make, see  
2 Compounds of irregular verbs have the same form befall, understand  
3 A few irregular verbs have two forms burn, learn  
4 A few irregular verbs with all the three forms identical cut, put, quit  
5 Most of the irregular verbs have different forms be, begin, bear

### 5. 2. Auxiliary Verbs

They are also called “Helping Verbs”. Auxiliary verbs are words that make certain semantic features of a main verb; they have no meaning on their own. They are necessary for the grammatical structure of the main verb and henceforth of a sentence, but they do not tell us very much alone. In other words, they are dependent because they are only added to another verb “main verb” to make the meaning and the form clear, full and complete. Helping Verbs are called Auxiliaries. They are twelve in number: be, do, have, can, may, shall, will, must, ought, used (to), need, dare. Generally, auxiliaries are used primarily to show the following meanings.

☐ Serve as support to the main verb. ☐ Whether the action takes place in the present, past or future “tense”, ☐ Whether the voice is active or passive, ☐ Whether an action is complete, habitual or continuous. ☐ In negation, interrogatives and emphatic statements. ☐ Whether an action is necessary, possible “mood”. ☐ In short answers to avoid the tedious repetition of words. Examples; ☐ She will travel to Paris on the plane. Here will is an auxiliary while travel is a main verb. It is worth to mention that sometimes, will can be a main verb, as in I willed all my property to my children. When will is before a main verb, however, it is a helping or auxiliary verb. The same case with have, do and be ☐ Stephan can find the right solution. Can versus find ☐ John might deliver the mail. Might versus deliver ☐ Did you write your lesson? did versus write ☐ Students must learn English well. ☐ Do you like fish? Yes, I do. Or No, I don't.

Auxiliary verbs are also divided into two sub-groups which are ordinary auxiliary “primary helping verbs” and modal auxiliary verbs “modal helping verbs” as it is indicated in this table.

Primary Auxiliary Verbs Modal Auxiliary Verb ☐ Be: Am, is, are, was, were, ☐ Have: have, has, had ☐ Do: do, did, does ☐ Shall, should, ☐ Will, would, ☐ May, might ☐ Can, could ☐ Must, ought to, need, dare, used to,

### 5. 2. 1. Primary / Ordinary Auxiliary Verbs

There are three ordinary auxiliary verbs; “be”, “have”, and “do”. They change their forms according to the Person or Number of the Subject. The primary auxiliaries are fully productive verbs of English which can (with different senses) all be used as full lexical verbs. Students must note that these three verbs can be used as helping verbs or as main verbs. On this section we talk about them as helping verbs. The table below summarizes the auxiliary verbs in terms of forms and uses:

| Number | Primary auxiliaries | Various forms                       |
|--------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1      | be                  | is, am, are, was, were, been, being |