

VERB TYPES AND USES

A verb is the part of speech that gives the action or state of being in a sentence, and every complete sentence has at least one verb. This resource will cover five types of verbs and how to use them well. Check out the [Basic Sentence Structure](#) resource for more information on subjects, verbs, and objects in sentences.

Academic Coaching offers resources on other parts of speech too! Go to the "Resources" page on the Academic Coaching website to access other handouts.

VERB TYPES

1. **Transitive verbs** require one or more objects to complete the meaning of the sentence. These verbs require an answer to the question, "Who or what was the verb acted on?"

Ex. Penelope *wanted* a pastrami sandwich.

Ex. She *gave* her dog a bite.

Here, *wanted* and *gave* are transitive verbs that would be incorrect without the underlined objects that follow.

2. **Intransitive verbs** cannot have an object directly following the verb. They can be followed by adverbs, infinitives, and prepositions but never objects.

Ex. Jason studied how the Earth *spins*.

Ex. From here, the planets *appear* to rotate around the Earth.

Note: Some verbs can be transitive or intransitive, depending on what the subject of the sentence is:

Transitive: Cindy *grew* an aloe plant for the summer.

Intransitive: The aloe plant *grew* quickly.

3. **Linking verbs** connect the subject to an adjective, noun, or pronoun, and usually describe what the subject *is*, *seems to be*, or *is like*.

Ex. Wendell *is* an Olympic figure skater but *seems* humble about his talent.

Ex. The orange *became* moldy on the counter and *smelled* horrible.

Note: Some verbs, like *smelled*, are active or linking verbs depending on how a writer uses them.

4. **Helping verbs**, or auxiliary verbs, are used with other verbs to create a verb phrase.

Ex. I *can* reach for the stars.

Ex. She *must have* seen something frightening.

Helping verbs also help develop past, present, and future tense.

Ex. I *was* crocheting a scarf last week. I *am* crocheting another scarf today. I *will be* crocheting this scarf for a few more days. I *will have* crocheted two scarves by then.

5. **Infinitives** consist of the word “to” preceding an unconjugated verb, and they’re used as subjects and objects.

Infinitive object: They wanted *to end* the boring presentation as soon as it started.

Infinitive subject: *To stop* now would be foolish; we’ve almost reached the peak!

USING VERBS

1. **Prefer verbs to nouns** – Verbs give your sentence action while nouns can make it feel bogged down. Writing with more verbs is easier to read! You should likewise avoid using too many verbs that act as nouns like gerunds and nominalizations. See [this resource](#) for tips on how to reduce nominalizations in your writing.
2. **Use active voice** – Be careful to not rely on passive voice in your academic writing. See the [Active Voice](#) resource for more information.
3. **Avoid split infinitives** – When you write an infinitive, make sure that no word comes between “to” and the verb.

Split infinitive: She failed *to fully understand* calculus.

Corrected sentence: She failed *to understand* calculus fully.

AN EXAMPLE OF VERBS USED WELL

Consider the following sentence from C. S. Lewis that uses different types of verbs correctly:

If I had broken my leg I should say ‘But it **is** impossible *to go* up to the top floor’--meaning, however, that it **is** impossible unless some friends *turn* up who will carry me. (Emphasis added; Lewis, 1940, p. 17)

This sentence from C. S. Lewis includes 3 helping verb phrases, 2 **linking verbs**, 1 *infinitive*, and 1 **active verb**. Lewis includes 10 total verbs, and only 3 nouns and 5 pronouns—this drives the sentence with action instead of stagnating it with description.

PRACTICE NOW

References

Lewis, C. S. (1940). *The problem of pain*. Harper One Publishers.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Helping verb. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved May 18, 2023 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/helping%20verb#:~:text=An%20auxiliary%20verb%2C%20also%20called,tense%20or%20form%20a%20question>.