ENGLISH GRAMMAR BOOK

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What are Verbs?

What are verbs?

Verbs are doing words. A verb can express a physical action, a mental action, or a state of being.

What Are Verbs?

A verb is a "doing" word. A verb can express:

- A physical action (e.g., to swim, to write, to climb).
- A mental action (e.g., to think, to guess, to consider).
- A state of being (e.g., to be, to exist, to appear).

Verbs Can Express Physical Actions

Here are some sentences with verbs that express physical actions. (In each example, the verb is highlighted.)

- She sells pegs and lucky heather.
 (In this example, the word sells is a verb. It expresses the physical activity to sell.)
- The doctor wrote the prescription.
 (In this example, the word wrote is a verb. It expresses the physical activity to write.)
- Alison bought a ticket.
 (The word bought is a verb. It expresses the physical activity to buy.)

Verbs Can Express Mental Actions

While many verbs express physical actions (e.g., to jump, to dance, to sing), verbs can also express mental actions. For example:

- She considers the job done.
 (The word considers is a verb. It expresses the mental activity to consider.)
- Peter guessed the right number.
 (The word guessed is a verb. It expresses the mental activity to guess.)
- I **thought** the same thing.

 (The word *thought* is a verb. It expresses the mental activity *to think*.)



Verbs Can Express a State of Being

A small but extremely important group of verbs do not express any activity at all. The most important verb in this group (arguably of all) is the verb to be.

Here is the verb to be in the different tenses:

		Verb to be	
Subject	past tense	present tense	future tense
I	was	am	will be
You	were	are	will be
He / She / It	was	is	will be
We	were	are	will be
You	were	are	will be
They	were	are	will be

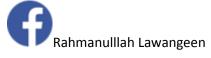
Here are some real examples with the verb *to be*:

- Edwina **is** the largest elephant in this area. (The word *is* is a verb from the verb *to be*.)
- It was a joke.
 (The word was is a verb from the verb to be.)
- I am.

(The word *am* is a verb from the verb *to be*.) (Point of interest: *I am* is the shortest sentence in English.)

The Types of Verbs

As we've covered, a verb can be categorized as a physical verb (e.g., to run), a mental verb (e.g., to think), or a state-of-being verb (e.g., to be). However, a verb will often be further categorized as one of the following:



Action Verb

An action verb expresses an activity that a person or thing can do. For example:

Lee eats cake.

(Eating is something Lee can do.)

• The bear **chased** the salmon in the shallow rapids. (*Chasing* is something the bear can do.)

Compare those verbs with these:

• Lee likes cake.

(To like is not an activity. It's a state.)

The bear is hungry.
 (To be is not an activity. It's a state.)

Stative Verb

A stative verb expresses a state rather than an action. A stative verb typically relates to a state of being, a thought, or an emotion. For example:

- I am at home.
- She **believes** in fairies.
- He **feels** elated.

Transitive Verb

A transitive verb is one that acts on something (i.e., it has a direct object). For example:

- I saw the dog. (Here, the direct object is the dog.)
- Lee ate the pie.
 (Here, the direct object is the pie.)
- The postman will give Sarah the letter. (Here, the direct object is the letter.)

Note: The direct object of a transitive verb can be found by finding the verb and asking "what?" For example, "saw what?" (answer: the dog); "ate what?" (answer: the pie); "will give what?" (answer: the letter).

Intransitive Verb

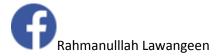
An intransitive verb is one that does not act on something (i.e., there is no direct object). For example:

- The rain **fell**.
- My throat hurts.



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• The cat **sneezed**.



Auxiliary Verb

An auxiliary verb (or helping verb) accompanies a main verb to help express tense, voice or mood. The most common auxiliary verbs are *be*, *do*, and *have* (in their various forms). Here are some examples of auxiliary verbs:

- Lee has eaten all the pies.
 (Here, the auxiliary verb has helps to express tense.)
- The table has been prepared.
 (Here, the auxiliary verbs has beenhelp to express voice (in this case, the passive voice).)
- If he were to arrive in the next 10 minutes, we would be on schedule.
 (Here, the auxiliary verbs were and would help to express mood(in this case, the subjunctive mood).)

Modal Verb

A modal verb is a type of auxiliary verb used to express ideas such as ability, possibility, permission, and obligation. The modal auxiliary verbs are *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *ought to*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, and *would*. For example:

- Lee can eat a lot of pies.
 (Here, the modal verb can helps to express the idea of ability.)
- Lee might eat that pie before he gets home.
 (Here, the modal verb might helps to express the idea of possibility.)
- Lee may eat as many pies as he likes.
 (Here, the modal verb may helps to express the idea of permission.)
- Lee **should** give you some of that pie given you bought it.
 (Here, the modal verb *should* helps to express the idea of obligation.)

Phrasal Verb

A phrasal verb is a verb made up of more than one word (usually two words). A phrasal verb has a main verb and another word (either a preposition or a particle). The phrasal verb usually has a meaning different to the main verb. For example:

- A burglar will often break a window to break in.
 (Here, the phrasal verb break inmeans to enter illegally, which is different to break.)
- If you drop the baton the team will **drop back** to last place. (Here, the phrasal verb *drop back*means *to fall behind*, which is different to *drop*.)

Regular and Irregular Verbs

A regular verb is one that forms its simple past tense and its past participle by adding -ed or -d to the base form of the verb. (Note: There are spelling rules to consider too.) For example:



Regular Verb	Simple Past Tense	Past Participle
love	loved	has loved
hate	hated	has hated
move	moved	has moved

An irregular verb is one that does not conform to this ruling. For example:

Irregular Verb	Simple Past Tense	Past Participle
tell	told	has told
bleed	bled	has bled

Verb Terminology

There is a lot of grammatical terminology associated with verbs. Below are explanations of the most common terms. (There is a more comprehensive list in our Glossary of Terms.)

The Infinitive Form

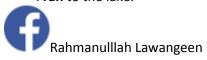
When a verb is preceded by the word to, it is said to be in its infinitive form (i.e., its most basic form).

• I have to smoke that! (*To smoke* is the infinitive form of the verb.)

Past Tense

Verbs that express actions in the past are said to be in the past tense.

- He **talked** with more claret than clarity. (Susan Ertz) (*Talked* is the past tense of the verb *to talk*.)
- I ran to the lake.



(Ran is the past tense of the verb to run.)

They were all there.
 (Were is the past tense of the verb to be.)

Present Tense

Verbs that express actions occurring now are said to be in the present tense.

- John jumps out the window.
 (Jumps is the present tense of the verb to jump.)
- Who is ill?
 (Is is the present tense of the verb to be.)
- He is the kind of a guy who lights up a room just by flicking a switch.
 (Is is the present tense of the verb to be, and lights up is the present tense of the verb to light up.)

Future Tense

Verbs that express actions in the future are said to be in the future tense. These are usually formed by preceding the verb with the word will.

- I will take the blame.
 (Will take is the future tense of the verb to take.)
- They will surrender.
 (Will surrender is the future tense of the verb to surrender.)
- Give me where to stand, and I **will move** the earth. (Archimedes, 287-212 BC) (*Will move* is the future tense of the verb *to move*.)



Subject of a Verb

The person or thing performing the action of the verb is said to be the subject of the verb or the subject of the sentence.

- Tony stole the boat.
 (Tony is the subject of the verb to steal.)
- The dog is guilty.

 (The dog is the subject of the verb to be.)
- Who was that? (Who is the subject of the verb to be.)

Direct Object of a Verb

Many verbs perform an action on something. This is called the direct object of the verb.

- Terry kissed her hand.
 (Her hand is the direct object of the verb to kiss.)
- Beverly can eat a whole chicken.
 (A whole chicken is the direct object of the verb to eat.)

Intransitive Verbs

Some verbs cannot have a direct object. These verbs are called intransitive verbs.

- The rain **fell** heavily. (The rain fell, but it did not perform an action on anything. In this example, the verb *to fall* is an intransitive verb.)
- Jack protested in the street.
 (Jack protested, but he did not perform an action on anything. In this example, the verb to protest is an intransitive verb.)

Transitive Verbs

Verbs that can have a direct object (most of them) are called transitive verbs.

Barney copied the answer.



(The verb copied is a transitive verb. The direct object of the verb is the answer.)

• Terry **saw** a black fin cutting through the water. (The verb *saw* is a transitive verb. The direct object of the verb is *a black fin*.)

Indirect Object of a Verb

Some verbs have two objects, a direct object and an indirect object. The indirect object is the person or thing for whom the action was performed.

- Jamie read the children a story.
 (Here, a story is the direct object, and the children is the indirect object.)
- I will bake him a cake.
 (Here, a cake is the direct object, and him is the indirect object.)
- The postman gives **Anne** a letter every day.
 (Here, a letter is the direct object, and Anne is the indirect object.)

Passive Sentence

The subject of a sentence does not always do the action of the verb. Sometimes, the action is done to the subject. Such sentences are called passive sentences because the subjects are being passive, i.e., not doing anything.

Carl was arrested.
 (Carl is not doing anything, but he is the subject of the sentence.)
 (Note: Carl is the subject of the verb to be.)

Passive verbs always comprise two parts (was arrested in this example). The person doing the action of the verb in a passive sentence is usually shown with the word by.

• Carl was arrested by PC Adams.

Passive verbs are said to be in the passive voice. Passive sentences can be quite useful:

- The carpet was damaged.

 (This is a passive sentence. No one is blamed for damaging the carpet.)
- Mark damaged the carpet.
 (A passive sentence contrasts with an active sentence (where the subject performs the verb).
 This is an example of an active sentence. It tells us that Mark damaged the carpet.)



Active Sentence

Active sentences contrast with passive sentences. In an active sentence, the subject of the verb performs the action.

- We damaged the carpet.
 (This is an active sentence. We is the subject. We damaged the carpet.)
- Jamie read a story.

 (This is an active sentence. *Jamie* is the subject. *Jamie read* a story.)

Conjugation of Verbs

A verb will change its form a little depending on the subject. For example:

- I write.
- He writes.
- The jackal laughs.
- The jackals laugh.

When verbs change in this way, it is known as *conjugation*. A verb conjugates according to the subject. The subject of a verb can be in one of six forms:

- •
- You
- He / She / It
- We
- You
- They

The first three are the singular forms (known as first person singular, second person singular, and third person singular). The second three are the plural forms (known as first person plural, second person plural and third person plural).

All subjects fit into one of these categories. For example, *jackal* is like *he* (i.e., third person singular) and *jackals* is like *they* (i.e., third person plural). (This subject rarely causes problems for native English speakers, who conjugate verbs correctly without much thought.)

Interestingly, this is the origin of the insurance term *third party* (i.e., it's insurance covering actions by "them").



Participles

Participles are formed from verbs. There are two types: present participles and past participles. Present participles end -ing. Past participles have various endings (e.g., -ed, -en). Below is a table showing some participles:

Verb	Present Participle	Past Participle
to sing	singing	sung
to drive	driving	driven
to go	going	gone
to rise	rising	risen
to watch	watching	watched
to be	being	been

Participles are classified as adjectives. (Note: When a verb form (like a participle) functions as an adjective or a noun, it is known as a verbal.) Below are some examples of participles being used as adjectives:

- Our business is badly affected by the soaring price of wool.
 (The word soaring is a present participle. Here, it is being used as an adjective to describe price.)
- He is a forgotten hero.
 (The word forgotten is a past participle. Here, it is being used as an adjective to describe hero.)





Auxiliary Verbs

An auxiliary verb (or a <u>helping verb</u> as it's also called) is used with a main verb to help express the main verb's <u>tense</u>, <u>mood</u>, or <u>voice</u>.

The main auxiliary verbs are to be, to have, and to do. They appear in the following forms:

- To Be: am, is, are, was, were, being, been, will be
- To Have: has, have, had, having, will have
- To Do: does, do, did, will do

There is another kind of auxiliary verb called a modal auxiliary verb (or modal verb). The modal auxiliary verbs are can, could, may, might, must, ought to, shall, should, will and would. The modal auxiliary verbs never change their forms.

Examples of Auxiliary Verbs Expressing Tense

Here are some examples of auxiliary verbs expressing tense. In these examples, the main verbs are in bold and the auxiliary verbs are highlighted.

- She was waiting for an hour.
- She is waiting in the hall.
- She will be waiting outside.
 (In each of these examples, the auxiliary verb to be helps to form the progressive tense, which is the tense used for ongoing actions.)
- She had **drunk** it before we arrived.
- She has **drunk** it already.
- She will have drunk it by then.
 (In each of these examples, the auxiliary verb to have helps to form the perfect tense, which is the tense used for expressing an action's completion.)
- She had been studying before the incident.
- She has been studying.
- She will have been studying for a month at that point.
 (In each of these examples, the auxiliary verbs have and been help to form the perfect progressive tense, which is the tense used for expressing an ongoing action's completion.)

Examples of Auxiliary Verbs Expressing Voice

Here are some examples of auxiliary verbs expressing voice.

- Our dessert was eaten by the dog.
- The geese are **driven** through the snicket.



The phone will be disconnected tomorrow.
 (In these examples, the auxiliary verb to be helps to form the passive voice. A verb is said to be in the passive voice when its subject does not perform the action of the verb but has the action done to it.)

Examples of Auxiliary Verbs Expressing Mood

Here are some examples of auxiliary verbs being used to express mood.

- Did you win? (Here, the auxiliary verb to do is used to form the interrogative mood, i.e., to ask a question.)
- Don't forget your wallet.
 (Here, the auxiliary verb to do (in its negative form) is used to form the imperative mood, i.e., to give an order.)

Examples of Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Let's now look at the modal auxiliary verbs. Modal auxiliary verbs combine with other verbs to express ideas such as necessity, possibility, intention, and ability. In each example below, the verb phrase is in bold and the modal auxiliary verb is highlighted.

Modal auxiliary verbs expressing necessity:

- It is during our darkest moments that we **must focus** to see the light. (Greek philosopher Aristotle)
- I don't say we all **ought tomisbehave**, but we **ought to look**as if we could. (Actor Orson Welles)
- A baby is God's opinion that life **should go on**. (American Poet Carl Sandburg) Modal auxiliary verbs expressing possibility:
- It is never too late to be what you **might have been**. (George Eliot)
- If there were no bad people, there **would be** no good lawyers. (Author Charles Dickens) Modal auxiliary verbs expressing necessity intention:
- We **shall** heal our wounds, collect our dead and continue fighting. (Founding father of the People's Republic of China Mao Zedong)

Modal auxiliary verbs expressing necessity ability:

- No one can feel as helpless as the owner of a sick goldfish. (Cartoonist Kin Hubbard)
- Well, either side could win it, or it could be a draw. (Football manager Ron Atkinson)
 (Sometimes, more than one sense is expressed. Here, could expresses both ability and
 possibility.)

Be, have and do are not always auxiliary verbs. Here they are as the main verbs (in bold) being supported by auxiliary modal verbs (highlighted).



- I have inspiration. If I was educated, I would **be** a damn fool. (Musician Bob Marley) (That should be were educated, Bob. Just sayin'.)
- I really like vampire books. I mighthave a problem. (Irish writer Sarah Rees Brennan)
- If you can **dream** it, you can **do** it. (Enzo Ferrari)

There's another related term we should cover: verb phrase. A verb phrase is made up of the main verb and any auxiliary verbs. Any adverbs that appear alongside or inside a verb phrase are not part of the verb phrase. In each example below, the verb phrase is in bold with auxiliary verbs highlighted.

- Rose has been drinking heavily since breakfast.
 (The adverb heavily is not part of the verb phrase.)
- Peter is definitely taking you to the airport.
 (The adverb definitely is not part of the verb phrase.)

Why Should I Care about Auxiliary Verbs?

I'd wager you use auxiliary verbs and modal auxiliary verbs without giving them a second thought, so I'm mindful that this page has covered a lot of gumpf that you don't really need. Well, that's true provided we're talking about working in English. If you start learning a foreign language, it won't be too long before you'll be unpicking how they express tense, voice and mood. And, do you know what's a good starting point for that? Understanding how we do it.

That said, there are three noteworthy points related to auxiliary verbs.

(Point 1) Don't write could of, should of, or would of.

If you ever write could of, should of, or would of, you're toast. It's a writing howler. It's could've (a contraction of could have), should've (should have), or would've (would have).

(Point 2) Use *can* for ability and *may* for permission.

Can is a modal auxiliary verb meaning to be able to. May is a modal auxiliary verb meaning to be permitted to.

- I can whistle. (I have the ability to whistle.)
- May I have a biscuit? (Am I permitted to have a biscuit?)
- "Can I go outside, grandma?"
- "You can, dear. You're just not allowed."

Nowadays, can is often used for permission, especially in an informal setting.

- Can I have a biscuit, grandma?
- "You can, dear. You're just not allowed one."
 (Can is fine here, but, hey, it's still a grandma's job issue a "correction.")



(Point 3) Expand can't to cannot not can not.

Cannot (one word) is the most common expansion of the contraction can't.

- You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today. (US President Abraham Lincoln)
- There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full. (US statesman Henry Kissinger)

Can't can also be expanded to can not (i.e., two words), but this is less common and usually reserved for emphasis.

- I cannot do it! (Can't is usually expanded to cannot.)
- I can not do it! (This is considered more emphatic.)

Of course, the words *can* and *not* sometimes appear alongside each other when the *not* forms part of another construction (such as *not only*).

Kevin can not only rap but dance too.
 (Here, can not must be written as two words. It's not an expansion of can't.)

Key Points

- Don't write could of, should of, or would of. Just don't.
- To keep your grandchildren grammatically pure, correct their use of "Can I" to "May I" when they're seeking permission.
- Expand *can't* to *cannot* not *can not* unless you're trying to be really emphatic. (Bear in mind that your readers will probably just think you've misspelt *cannot*.)





Grammar Book

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Can and May

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Remember, can is used for capability, and may is used for permission.

Younger sister: Can I listen to your CDs when you're out this evening?

Older sister: You can, but don't step foot in my bedroom.

Younger sister: May I listen to your CDs when you're out this evening?

Older sister: No.

Nowadays, *can* and *may* are used interchangably. This ruling is only for the grammatically pure!





Verb Tense (with Examples)

The tense of a <u>verb</u> is determined by when the action took place. The three main tenses are as follows:

- The Past Tense (e.g., I walked.)
- The Present Tense (e.g., I walk.)
- The Future Tense (e.g., I will walk.)

The tense of a verb can also tell us things like whether the action is habitual, ongoing, or completed. This is called the <u>aspect</u> of the verb, which is part of tense.

Examples of Tenses

Here are some examples of verbs in different tenses:

- I walked to work.
 (The verb walked is in the past tense.)
- I walk to work.
 (The verb walk is in the present tense.)
- I will walk to work.
 (The verb will walk is in the future tense.)

Remember that verbs do not just express actions. They can also express a state of being. For example:

- I was happy.
 (The verb was is in the past tense.)
- I am happy.
 (The verb am is in the present tense.)
- I will be happy.
 (The verb will be is in the future tense.)

Examples of Verbs in Different Tenses

Here are some more examples of verbs in the past, present, and future tenses:



- The hardest that I have laughed at a movie was probably Team America. I laughed 'til I thought I was going to throw up. (Ron White) (The shaded verbs are in the past tense.)
- You laugh at me because I'm different. I laugh at you because you are all the same. (Jonathan Davis)
 (The shaded verbs are in the present tense.)
- Nobody will laugh long who deals much with opium; even its pleasures are of a grave and solemn complexion. (Thomas de Quincey)

(The shaded verbs are in the **future tense**.)

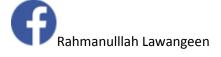
You will notice that some of the verbs in the past tense example about Team America are made up of more than one word (have laughed, was going). We need these different versions of the tenses because they help us to state whether the action (or state of being) is in progress or completed. For example, the different versions of the verb to laugh are as follows:

- Past Tense: laughed, was/were laughing, had laughed, had been laughing
- Present Tense: laugh, am/is/are laughing, has/have laughed, has/have been laughing
- Future Tense: will laugh, will be laughing, will have laughed, will have been laughing

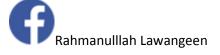
The Full List of Tenses

The table below shows the full list of the tenses:

The 4 Past Tenses	Example 1	Example 2
simple past tense	I went	I laughed
past progressive tense	I was going	I was laughing
past perfect tense	I had gone	I had laughed



past perfect progressive tense	I had been going	I had been laughing
The 4 <u>Present Tenses</u>	Example 1	Example 2
simple present tense	I go	I laugh
present progressive tense	I am going	I am laughing
present perfect tense	I have gone	I have laughed
present perfect progressive tense	I have been	I have been
	going	laughing
The 4 <u>Future Tenses</u>	going Example 1	Example 2
The 4 Future Tenses simple future tense		Example
	Example 1	Example 2
simple future tense	Example 1 I will go	Example 2 I will laugh I will be



|--|

An Quick Explanation of the Tenses with an Example

The Past Tenses

Simple Past Tense. The <u>simple past tense</u> is used to describe a completed activity that happened in the past.

I ran to the shops.

Past Progressive Tense. The past progressive tense is used to describe an ongoing activity in the past. Often, it is used to set the scene for another action.

I was running to the shops when I saw Bruno.

Past Perfect Tense. The <u>past perfect tense</u> is used to emphasize that an action was completed before another took place.

I had run to the shops, but they were closed.

Past Perfect Progressive Tense. The <u>past perfect progressive tense</u> is used to show that an ongoing action in the past has ended.

I had been running to the shops, but I have now started walking.

The Present Tenses

Simple Present Tense. The <u>simple present tense</u> is mostly used to describe facts and habits.

I run daily.

Present Progressive Tense. The <u>present progressive tense</u> is used for an ongoing action in the present.

- I am running to your house at the moment.

 Present Perfect Tense. The present perfect tense is used for actions began in the past. (Often, the actions continue into the present.)
- I have run for 5 miles so far.

Present Perfect Progressive Tense. The <u>present perfect progressive tense</u> is used for a continuous activity that began in the past and continues into the present, or a



continuous activity that began in past but has now finished (usually very recently).

• I have been running for hours.

The Future Tenses

Simple Future Tense. The <u>simple future tense</u> is used for an action that will occur in the future.

I will run to the shops tomorrow.

Future Progressive Tense. The <u>future progressive tense</u> is used for an ongoing action that will occur in the future.

- I will be running to the shops every day after today.

 Future Perfect Tense. The <u>future perfect tense</u> is used to describe an action that will have been completed at some point in the future.
- I will have run to work by 12 o'clock.

 Future Perfect Progressive Tenes. The future perfect.

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Future Perfect Progressive Tense. The <u>future perfect progressive tense</u> is used for an ongoing action that will be completed at some specified time in the future.

• I will have been running for 3 hours by 12 o'clock.

Verb Tense Widget

Use this widget to learn about the different tenses. How do you use this widget? Well, if there's a button, a drop-down menu, or a ⊞, then you can click it!

to say

(irregular verb)

Select the tenses. Show all tenses Show simple tenses only Show progressive tenses only Show perfect tenses only Show perfect progressive tenses only



Present Tenses

Simple Present **⊞**

I say you say he/she/it says we say you say they say

Simple Past **⊞**

I said you said he/she/it said we said you said they said

Future Tenses **=**

Simple Future **■**

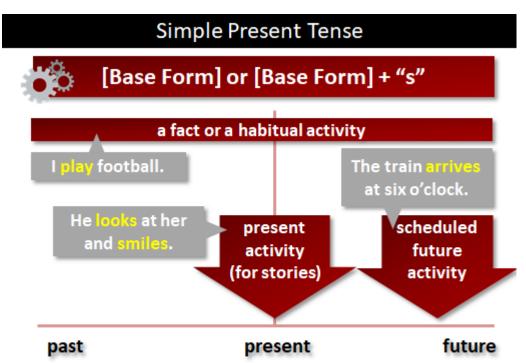
I will say you will say he/she/it will say we will say you will say they will say



Slide Show of the Tenses

This slide show gives an overview of the 12 different tenses.

1 / 12



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