

Verbs Defined

A verb gives life to a sentence. As the main words of predicates, verbs express action, a state of being, or a relation between other words in the sentence. Verbs reflect the following properties: **tense** (*past, present, or future*), **number** (*singular or plural*), **mood** (*such as subjunctive*), **person** (*first, second, or third*), and **voice** (*active or passive*). Conjugated verbs are verbs that have been changed from the basic infinitive form to communicate one or more of these properties. Verbs also show agreement with their subjects/objects. Simply put, a complete sentence cannot exist without a main verb connected to a clear subject; it determines whether a sentence declares something, poses a question, commands something, or expresses a possibility.

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Verb Tenses

The three foundational forms of simple verb tense are **past**, **present**, and **future**, and they reflect actions that have a specific time duration. The action took place in the past, is taking place in the present, or will occur in the future. Within each tense, variations of time are reflected by forming the **continuous** and **perfect** tenses. The continuous form of the verb tense indicates an ongoing duration of time by employing the present participle form of the verb (ending in “ing”) in a verb phrase. Perfect tenses reflect events that have a continued effect on a setting; they are formed by creating a verb phrase that consists of the past, present, or future form of the verb “have” as an auxiliary verb, combined with the past tense form of the main verb. Maintaining consistent verb tense within sentences and paragraphs assures clear communication in the sequence of events and helps avoid reader confusion caused by sudden shifting of verb tenses. The proper sequencing of verb tenses conveys an accurate timetable of actions and events described in the narrative.

12 Basic Verb Tenses

Tense	Example
Present Simple	He listens to classical music.
Present Continuous	He is listening to classical music now.
Present Perfect	She has listened to jazz music.
Present Perfect Continuous	She has been listening to jazz music.

Past Simple	They watched the movie last night.
Past Continuous	They were watching the movie during the storm.
Past Perfect	They had watched the movie until they lost power.
Past Perfect Continuous	They had been watching the movie since 7 p.m.
Future Simple	Students will study in the library.
Future Continuous	Students will be studying in the library.
Future Perfect	Students will have studied in the library.
Future Perfect Continuous	Students will have been studying in the library.

Beyond the basic verb tenses, **progressive** and **conditional** verb tenses may also be needed to describe specific timeframes in relation to another event. The progressive verb tense characterizes actions that have been, are, or will be in the process of occurring, while the conditional verb tense describes actions that are dependent on another action. With verb phrasing similar to the continuous tense illustrated above, the progressive tense likewise employs the present participle form of the verb (ending in “ing”) in a verb phrase, but does so in connection with another event. The conditional tense uses “would” to form the verb phrase and often employs “if” clauses that reference other events somewhere in the sentence.

Verb Tenses Examples and Practice

Examples: Review the following sentences using progressive and conditional tenses.

Progressive Tense:

Paul *was eating* pizza when his mom came down for breakfast. (Past Progressive: The action happened in the past, and continued to happen when another action occurred.)

Her teacher’s constant encouragement *is helping* Susan while she deals with this tragedy.

(Present Progressive: The encouragement is going on at the same time as another action, and continues to occur.)

The symphony *will be giving* a concert next month. (Future Progressive: The action has not occurred yet, but will occur in the future at a certain point in time.)

Conditional Tense:

If I were facing academic probation, I *would study* for the exam with a tutor before taking it. Provided that one condition is true (I am on academic probation), another action will occur (I would study). The action (exam) has not occurred yet, but is going to.

If he had a clearer understanding of the risks, Ken *would have thought* more before going scuba diving. An action (scuba diving) would occur based on a condition (understanding risks). The action has already taken place and the writer is reflecting on it.

Practice

Practice identifying progressive and conditional tenses by labeling each bold verb phrase as “progressive” (*past, present, or future*) or “conditional.”

1. _____ My sister *will be leaving* for France at the end of the week.
2. _____ When the proctor turned, two students *were cheating* on a test.
3. _____ If I were in that much debt, I *would take* the extra shift at work.
4. _____ You *are driving* them crazy by constantly playing wrong notes.
5. _____ If he knew the coach was only going to pick two players, Aaron *would have practiced* many more times per week.
6. _____ As she walked into the rehearsal hall, the director *was rehearsing* lines with another actress.

Answers: 1. future progressive 2. past progressive 3. conditional 4. present progressive 5. conditional 6. past progressive

Practice using the correct verb tenses by revising the verbs in bold to the tenses indicated in parentheses to achieve consistent verb tenses across the sentences.

1. John _____ (**talk**/future tense) to his instructor about when the essay is due.
2. When Mom used to live alone, she _____ (**lock**/simple past) her windows and doors every night.
3. I arrive at the finish line of the course and realize I _____ (**sprint**/present perfect) five miles.
4. He returned home from the car dealership and realized he _____ (**spend**/past perfect) way above book value on the used car.
5. We **ate** _____ (simple present) dinner with our parents every Sunday.
6. After finishing my final shift next month, I _____ (**work**/future perfect) thirty-five years for this factory.

Answers: 1. will talk 2. locked 3. have sprinted 4. had spent 5. eat 6. will have worked

Regular and Irregular Verbs

English verbs are categorized as either **regular** or **irregular**. Regular verbs refer to those whose **simple past tense** and **past participle** are formed by adding -ed or sometimes -d. Irregular verbs form the simple past tense and the past participle in any number of unique ways, without a predictable pattern. Some irregular verbs do not change from present to past forms, such as *let, hurt, spread, cut, and hit*. Other verbs, such as *teach*, transform into variations of the infinitive (*taught*) to form the past tense and past participle. Some change forms entirely (sing) to become the past (*sang*) and past participle (*sung*). The past participle of an irregular verb can also function as an adjective: *a broken dish*. Some irregular verbs become completely different

words in the past tense forms, such as the verb *go*, whose simple past tense form is *went*. Some of our most commonly used verbs in writing are classified as irregular verbs: *make, be, go, do, get, say, have, take, come, and see*.

Subject-Verb Agreement

A subject is always the main noun in a sentence. There must be agreement in number (singular or plural) and person (first, second, or third) between the subject and main verb in the sentence. Singular subjects require singular verb forms, and plural subjects require plural verb forms. A singular verb in the present form often ends with “s” while the subject does not. On the other hand, plural subjects require plural verb forms that do not end in “s.” Be sure to check for subject-verb agreement by looking only at the ‘simple sentence’ of the subject and verb in the sentence. Remember that the verb must agree with the subject, rather than with nouns within a modifying clause or the object of the prepositional phrase that may be adjacent to the verb.

Determining if the subject is treated as singular or plural follows specific rules and conventions that go beyond whether the subject is singular or plural. Keep the following in mind as you conjugate verbs to achieve proper subject-verb agreement in number.

- Plural words such as athletics, economics, mathematics, physics, statistics, measles, and news are usually treated as singular subjects, despite their plural forms. (**Economics** *is* the most challenging subject in the degree program.)
- Most subjects joined with “and” are treated as plural subjects. (**Kevin** and his **sister** *share* the farm chores after school.)
- With subjects joined by “or” or “nor,” the verb must agree with the subject nearer to the verb in the sentence. (e.g. Neither the **teacher** nor the **students** *were* in class.)
- Collective nouns, such as jury, herd, flock, team, staff, audience, committee, or couple, are typically treated as singular. (The **audience** *claps* after each movement of the piece.)
- Titles of books, movies, novels, and other similar works are treated as singular and take a singular verb. (**The Birds** *is* a classic Alfred Hitchcock film.)
- When sentences start with “there” or “here,” the subject will always be placed after the verb. Be sure to carefully identify the correct subject following the verb in such sentences. (Here *are* the **documents** you requested.)
- Similarly, subjects do not always come before verbs in the phrasing of interrogatives (questions). Again, make certain to accurately identify the subject before conjugating the verb. (When *is* the **package** due to arrive?)
- If the word “each,” “every” or “no” comes before the subject, the verb is singular. (Every **adult** and **child** *is* required to exit the plane.)
- “Anyone,” “everyone,” “someone,” “no one,” and “nobody” always require singular verbs. The singular verb form is usually reserved for units of measurement or time.

Examples and Practice Exercises

Examples: Review the singular and plural *verb forms* in agreement with their **subjects**.

- ✓ The **customer** *takes* advantage of the Wednesday sale price.
- ✓ The school **busses** *leave* the parking lot at 3:15 p.m.
- ✓ The smallest **bird** in the flock of ten seagulls *soars* above them all. (Notice that the singular subject requires the singular verb form “soars.” The plural noun seagulls is the object of the preposition, which is why the plural verb form “soar” would be incorrect.)

Practice

1. The unique blend of herbs and spices (brings / bring) out the flavor of the food.
2. Under the file cabinets (lies / lie) the missing envelope.
3. The mayor of New Orleans, along with those of other major cities in Louisiana, (has / have) asked the President for assistance after the hurricanes.
4. One of our managers (is / are) preparing the spreadsheet.
5. The company, in addition to the employees, (is / are) hoping there will be a bonus this year.
6. A number of the tardies (seems / seem) unacceptable.
7. The musicians, including David, (hopes / hope) there will be a concert this fall.
8. The law firm (is / are) planning its annual Christmas party.
9. No one (wants / want) his team to forfeit the game.
10. The students, as well as the instructor, (keeps / keep) very busy.
11. The administrators, who wrote the guidelines, (sticks /stick) to the rules.
12. The *X-Men Heroes* (is/ are) released next week.
13. A passport or two credit cards (is /are) required.
14. Mathematics (was / were) never my favorite subject in high school.
15. Each of the houseplants (has / have) been sold.
16. Some of the rocks (is /are) slippery.
17. Neither of the teachers (is / are) interested in hearing excuses from students.
18. Dr. Collins knew that Kyle was the only one of his sons who (was / were) qualified to lead.
19. The statistics (indicates / indicate) that crime is decreasing in the city.
20. Each tree, shrub, and vine (need / needs) to be trimmed.
21. Jill’s God-given ability and her desire to help others (has / have) led to a career in ministry.
22. There (is /are) surprisingly few children in our neighborhood.
23. High levels of air pollution (causes / cause) damage to the respiratory system.
24. Neither the students nor their teacher (wants / want) to postpone the exam.
25. Everyone (is / are) hoping that school will dismiss early on Monday.

Answers: 1) brings 2) lies 3) has 4) is 5) is 6) seem 7) hope 8) is 9) wants 10) keep 11) stick 12) is 13) are 14) was 15) has 16) are 17) is 18) was 19) indicate 20) needs 21) have 22) are 23) cause 24) wants 25) is

Passive vs. Active Voice

For more lively and persuasive sentences that engage the reader, structure sentences using **ACTIVE** verbs (where the **subject is performing the action**) rather than **PASSIVE** verbs (where the **subject receives the action**). The passive voice is generally formed using a form of the verb *be*—such as *is*, *was*, or *has been*—and the past participle of the verb, as in "The kite was flown by Anna." Rephrasing with a clear and strong subject that performs the verb action in the sentence, rather than using weak subjects such as "this" or "there," results in the active voice that will engage the reader. In the previous sentence illustration, rephrasing with an active voice yields, "Anna flew the kite." Overuse of "there" as the first word of a sentence often results in a sentence structure with a "passive voice" rather than an "active" one, due to the commonly used linking verbs in such sentences. Forms of the verb "to be" tend to be overused and can often be replaced with more colorful verbs that will engage the reader. Often, rephrasing sentences with stronger subjects to eliminate repeated uses of "this is" or "there are" will eliminate many of these linking verbs, and serve to achieve the goal of an 'active voice' vs. a 'passive voice' with verb phrasing.

Examine the following sentences, initially written using the passive voice, and how they are rephrased to achieve the active voice.

<u>Passive Voice</u>	<u>Active Voice</u>
The mountain is roamed by coyotes and lions.	Coyotes and lions roam the mountain.
I have been informed of the loss through a telegram.	A telegram informed me of the loss.
The rescue team was brought in using a helicopter.	A helicopter brought the rescue team.
Mistakes were made as the new VP took office.	The new VP made mistakes as he took office.
My old filling was removed during a visit to the dentist.	The dentist removed my old filling.
Students' concerns are addressed by teachers.	Teachers addressed students' concerns.
The tires were rotated at the body shop.	The body shop rotated the tires.
The entire resort was destroyed in a wildfire.	A wildfire destroyed the entire resort.

Practice

Rephrase the following *passive voice* sentences to form sentences using the *active voice*.

1. Construction of the new prison is financed from property taxes.

2. A new system of immigration was set up when the government took power.

3. Training was conducted in six counties after the new school board was elected.

4. Innovative marketing programs were approved before the former CEO resigned.

5. The entire estate was renovated by Susan.

6. Heart disease is considered the leading cause of death in the U.S. according to Mayo Clinic researchers.

Possible Answers: 1) Property taxes finance construction of the new prison. 2) Upon taking power, the government set up a new immigration system. 3) The new school board conducted training in six counties after election. 4) The former CEO approved innovative marketing programs before his resignation. 5) Susan renovated the entire estate. 6) Mayo Clinic researchers consider heart disease to be the leading cause of death in the U.S.

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