

Verbs

A verb is a part of speech that conveys action (e.g., *talk*, *walk*, *run*) or communicates a state of being (e.g., *be*, *exist*). Verbs change according to person (point of view): first (I, we), second (you), or third (he, she, it, one, they) as in “I *go*,” “you *go*,” or “he *goes*.” They also change according to number (singular or plural), voice, and mood. You can distinguish verbs by looking at how they behave. Unlike other parts of speech, verbs can

- be negated (e.g., *Do not run!*)
- be made into a command (e.g., *Read the following passage.*)
- follow a modal auxiliary, which precedes the main verb (e.g., *You must eat.*)
- have endings that change according to tense (e.g., *realize*, *realized*, *realizing*)
- occur with both a present-participle ending (e.g., *realizing*) and a past-participle ending (e.g. *was/had realized*)

Some words can be both verbs and nouns. In the first sentence below, *attacks* functions as a verb. It is the action of the sentence (performed by the subject—the dog). In the second sentence, we know the word *attacks* is not a verb because an article or an adjective can go before it.

The dog *attacks* the boy. (verb)

The *attacks* were horrible. (noun)

Verbs can also be identified by their form because they have been created from other parts of speech (e.g. *simplify*, *detract*). Other verbs are recognized by their changing forms, which change according to person and tense (e.g. she *sits*; she *sat*; she *is sitting*).

Verb Tests

Without context, the part of speech for a word like *attacks* can be hard to recognize. Two types of frame sentences can help you determine if a word is a verb.

Frame Sentence 1

They must _____ (it).

The parentheses around *it* indicate that a noun or a noun substitute, such as a pronoun or gerund, may be required after the verb.

Test the frame sentence with each of the following verbs: *construct*, *decide*, *sell*, *shape*, and *show*. Each verb, when used in the frame, forms a sentence.

Now, try using a noun like *construction* or *sale* or an adjective like *decisive* or *pretty*. Using a noun or an adjective in the frame does not form a sentence.

Frame Sentence 2

They must _____ good/well.

Although some verbs will fit the first frame sentence, others will fit when followed by an adjective.

Test the frame sentence with each of the following verbs: *be*, *smell*, *sound*, and *taste*. Each of these verbs forms a sentence in the frame.

Activity

Next to each word, indicate which, if any, of the following rules of thumb for verbs apply.

- a. can be negated
- b. can be made into a command
- c. changes ending according to tense
- d. has both present- and past-participle ending
- e. fits one of both of the frame sentences

- 1) frighten
- 2) howl
- 3) look
- 4) sigh
- 5) fish
- 6) creation
- 7) open
- 8) officer
- 9) beautiful

Answer Key for Activity

- 1) a, b, c, d, e
- 2) a, b, c, d, e
- 3) a, b, c, d, e
- 4) a, b, c, d, e
- 5) a, b, c, d, e
- 6) none, not a verb
- 7) a, b, c, d, e
- 8) none, not a verb
- 9) none, not a verb

References

Klammer, Thomas, Muriel Schulz, and Angela Della Volpe. *Analyzing English Grammar*. San Francisco: Longman, 2010. Print.

Lunsford, Andrea. *The Everyday Writer*, 4th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. Print.