

Parts of a Sentence

A sentence needs two minimum grammatical components:

A subject and a verb.

So far so good. But what exactly is a verb? (We'll get to Subjects soon)

A verb shows action or a state of being.

There are two basic kinds of verbs, *action verbs* and *being verbs*.

Action verbs:

These are the words that show someone or something **moving**, **doing** something, or **thinking** something.

Examples:

During the movie, he *picked* his nose.

She *saw* him.

She *thought*, "What a loser."

She quietly *excused* herself.

He *felt* sad.

Being verbs:

These tell us that something **exists**. There are not many of them, but we use them a lot. They include: *is*, *was*, *were*, *am*, and *are*.

Examples:

It *was* not his fault.

He *was* itchy.

She *was* too judgmental, but he *is* still alone.

Most everyone agrees on the above definition, ***but is it a helpful one?***

Consider the following sentence:

Sample sentence:

Playing violent first-person shooters seems to frighten most peace-loving people.

Which words are action words? Well, let's underline the ones that show or imply some action.

Possible action words: Playing violent first-person shooters seems to frighten most peace-loving people.

You may argue, and with reason, that not all of these words indicate action to you. But even if you only see playing and peace-loving as action words, you still won't be able to find a verb--because the verb in this sentence is not an action word at all. Nor is it clearly a state of being. And anyway, what exactly is a state of being? It's tough to define. So how do you find a verb?

The problem is that sentences can contain several types of verbs and verb-like words. In terms of the grammar of the sentence, you only need to find the **main verb**, the verb that drives the action in the sentence.

A Working Definition of Verbs

Verbs always tell *the time* (also called the tense) of the sentence. The easiest way to find the main verb in a sentence is to change the time of the sentence and find the word that changes.

How do you do this? Well, choose some time words for the past and future, such as *Last year* or *Yesterday* or *Next year* or *Tomorrow*. Then put them in front of the sentence you are trying to find the verb in and see which word changes. Let's take our previous sentence:

Last year, playing violent first-person shooters seems to frighten most peace-loving people.

It doesn't look right. Read it out loud. It doesn't sound right. "Seems" would have to change to "seemed." That means that "**seems**" is the main verb in the sentence because it's the word that carries or indicates the time.

So, verbs are sometimes action words, but the problem is that lots of words can show action, such as nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. And verbs don't always show action. "Seems" is not an action word. So the action definition is not a helpful one as you identify verbs. Instead, use the steps below to find the main verb of a sentence.

Steps for finding the verb:

Find the verb by applying the time test: change the time or tense of the sentence; the word that changes will be the verb.

Example:

Kanye *demolishes* a Maybach in the video for "Otis."

Can change to: Yesterday, Kanye *demolished* a Maybach in the video for "Otis."

Can change to: Tomorrow, Kanye *will demolish* a Maybach in the video for "Otis."

Notice that only one word changes in the sentence. When you change the time, you have to change *demolish* to *demolished* to *will demolish*, so *demolish* is the verb.

A couple more examples:

Running a marathon *is* not fun.

Can change to: Yesterday, running a marathon *was* not fun.

Can change to: Tomorrow, running a marathon *will not be* not fun.

A few tips:

- You will notice that some verbs seem to consist of two words:
Example: I am hoping to change jobs soon.
The complete verb is *am hoping* but the important verb to look for is the part that carries the time of the sentence.
- Any verb ending in "ing" will only be the verb of that sentence if it follows a "to be" verb (is, am, are, was, and were).
Example: Carmen is helping her mother with the grocery shopping. ("is helping" is the the main verb.)
- The main verb of a sentence will not have "to" before it.
Example: Jamal rented a stretch limo to impress his girlfriend. ("rented" is the main verb.)

PRACTICE finding verbs 1

Change the following sentences to the future or past to find the word. If you try past, and the word doesn't change, then the sentence may already be in the past, so the verb won't change. Then try the future.

Example:

1. (Next year) It took me two weeks to top her highest score on Candy Crush.
(will take)

Answer: "Took" changes to "will take" so "take" is the verb

2. (In the past) I never want to be beaten by her again.
(wanted)

Answer: "Want" would change to "wanted" so "want" is the verb.

1. Video games challenge us to be better.
2. They help us develop problem-solving skills.
3. Competing for a high score teaches us about the rewards of practice.
4. People who play video games regularly are less stressed out than people who never play.
5. Winning at a video game makes us proud of ourselves and losing sometimes motivates us to do better.
6. But not all of us agree that video games are beneficial for kids.
7. Parents try to limit the number of hours that children play video games.
8. They worry that their kids will never learn to make friends in real life.
9. The parents don't know that their kids are making friends all across the world when they play online.
10. Kids these days are more social than they have ever been.

PRACTICE Finding Verbs 2

Directions: Read the following paragraph and underline the verbs. Some sentences will have more than one verb.

There are a few things you should know about losing over 30 pounds. First, you will need new clothes every three months. I lost about nine inches off my waist over about 18 months. I averaged an inch of shrinkage every two months. Second, you're going to get cold more easily. Before losing weight, I rarely got cold. But as the pounds fell away, I found that I was cold all the time. I suspect that my reduced caloric intake is mostly to blame. Last, dudes don't want to fight anymore. When I was 275 lbs and bench pressed 315 lbs, dudes grew aggressive quickly. Disagreements and debates devolved into macho chest pounding. The feeling that a fight would break out at any moment hung over many of my interactions with guys I didn't know. Now, guys have become much more civil to me. Now that my arms shake while carrying grocery bags, these dudes have nothing to prove.

Identifying Subjects

The **subject** of a sentence carries out the action(s) indicated by the main verb; that is, the subject is the *doer* of the action:

The contestant was singing. (the diva is doing the action of singing)

The judge turned around. (the judge is doing the action of turning)

The audience started to applaud. (the audience is doing the action of applauding).

The subject can be single or compound:

Kendrick Lamar and Casey Veggies have a lot in common. (compound subject)

My girlfriend loves playing video games. (single subject)

Finding subjects is easy once you have found the verb in the sentence. Subjects usually come before verbs. The subject is the word that you find when you ask the question.

(Who or What) + (Verb) + (The rest of the sentence)?

Let's take the example from the last lesson:

Playing violent first-person shooters seems to frighten most peace-loving people.

Ask yourself: **What + Verb + The rest of the Sentence?**

(What) seems to frighten most peace-loving people?

The answer is: Playing violent first-person shooters.

So, Playing violent first-person shooters is the subject of the sentence.

In the following examples, the subjects have been circled and the verbs underlined.

Sentence	Question	Subject
<u>Running</u> a marathon <u>is</u> not fun.	<i>What is not fun?</i>	Running
The <u>supermodel</u> <u>is</u> going to Paris.	<i>Who is going to Paris?</i>	The supermodel
<u>Liz and Ryan</u> have been <u>watching</u> bad reality TV.	<i>Who is watching TV?</i>	Liz and Ryan
The <u>bike</u> <u>had been</u> left in the rain.	<i>What had been left in the rain?</i>	The bike

So, to find the subject and verb in a sentence, follow these two steps:

STEP ONE: Find the verb by applying the time test: change the time or tense of the sentence; the word that changes will be the verb.

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Notice that only one word changes in the sentence. When you change the time, you have to change *demolish* to *demolished* to *will demolish*, so *demolish* is the verb.

STEP TWO: To find the subject, ask “Who or what (verb)?”

Example:

“Who or what *demolishes*?” The answer is Kanye, so Kanye is the subject of *demolishes*.

Practice Finding Subjects 1

Let's go back to the last practice exercise, where you already found the verbs, and find the subjects of those verbs.

Directions: The verbs are underlined for you. Find the main subject, and circle it.

Example: He never wants to be anything less than number one at Candy Crush.

Who or what *wants*? He. So, "he" is the subject of the sentence.

He never wants to be anything less than number one at Candy Crush.

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Subject Practice Two

Find the subjects and main verbs in the following sentences. Circle the subjects and underline the verbs

For example: To pump himself up, the athlete played as himself in the new Madden NFL game.

1. On the eighth floor of a building in Downtown Brooklyn, college students gather regularly in the library to play video games.
2. They aren't procrastinating.
3. They're doing their homework.
4. They study the history of games like Street Fighter and Mortal Kombat.
5. Another group of students was directed by a professor to try to glean contemporary design insights from a 1970s video game console, the Atari 2600.
6. Across the country, the academic enthusiasm for video games has, as they say, leveled up.
7. Accomplished designers are being welcomed into higher education for the knowledge they have gained in a multibillion-dollar field for which, not long ago, there was no formal training or coursework.
8. A designer of Doom helps run a new master's program at the University of California, Santa Cruz.
9. The creator of Deus Ex, a 2000 game that is one of the most influential in the medium's history, started a postgraduate program at the University of Texas.
10. A lead designer of Sony's popular Uncharted series is a tenured professor at the University of Southern California.