



Verb Hints

Here are some key verb forms and types. Understanding these can help you to manage tense structures and can demystify some seemingly idiomatic details of the English language.

Infinitive: the entire verb (e.g., to write)

- Used after an indirect object (e.g., They asked me **to call** you. She wanted you **to edit** the article—even though that isn't writing center policy. They told us **to update** all accounts.)
- Used after certain verbs such as *help, care, hope, seem, cease*, and several others¹ (e.g., They promised **to give** everyone a raise. We decided **to leave** at midnight. We cared enough **to make** multiple copies.)
- Used sometimes as a sentence's subject (e.g., **To heal** is ideal. **To err** is completely normal. **To write** is enlightening.)

Base: the infinitive verb without "to" (e.g., write)

- Used after a modal such as *can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would* (e.g., ... can **go**... or ... will **be** waiting ... or ...must **feel** well... or ...should **have been**)
- Used often in the subjunctive, which can throw people in terms of subject-verb agreement (e.g., It is essential that they **be** made aware of the issue. I propose that he **test** the software. They suggested that each writer **report** what feedback helped the most.). Fortunately, the subjunctive mood is rarely essential and can often highlight the need to simplify sentence structure and make phrasing more direct.

Helping (or auxiliary): help to convey tense, emphasis, and possibility; in short, used with main verbs in verb phrases

- A memorable list of 23, which overlaps with modals. This list includes forms of *be, do, and have* along with the modals. Note: consider how these words work within the many different tenses.

¹ You can find a more complete list within a grammar handbook or via an on-line search.



- Can be contracted in casual conversation and writing (e.g., **We'll** study on Monday. **She's** going to the store. **They've** been studying for 24 hours.) Aim to avoid these contractions in formal prose.

Linking: used to link subjects and complements, which are adjectives or nouns that describe or rename (e.g., San Francisco **is** hilly. He **appears** healthy. She **became** the CEO.)

- An interesting fact: some languages do not use linking verbs in this way, and so a writer might write "San Francisco hilly.")
- Linking verbs make up another fairly memorable list
 - o Is, am, are, was, were, be, been, being
 - o Seems, becomes, grows, feels, appears, tastes, looks, remains, looks, sounds, stays, takes
- To test whether a verb is acting as a true linking verb, replace the verb in question with a form of **be**, **become**, or **seem**. If the phrase makes sense, you're dealing with a linking verb construction.

Gerunds: verbs that end in *-ing* and work as nouns (e.g., **Painting** is a lifelong passion of his.)

- Can be subjects and will take a singular conjugation (e.g., **Writing makes** many people...)
- Used often after prepositions (e.g., We are working **on creating** a new website. Students learn **by writing**. We need a license **for driving**.); some writers will confuse the "to" in an infinitive with a preposition and so create a word form error.
- Used after certain verbs such as *practice, enjoy, tolerate*, and others²(e.g., We will practice **playing** our sport. She enjoys **reading** short stories. He postponed **writing** his paper.)

² You can find a more complete list of these via an on-line search or within a grammar book

