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All verbs in English are classified as either *state* or *action* verbs (also known as ‘dynamic verbs’). **Action** verbs describe actions we take (things we do) or things that happen. **State** verbs refer to the way things ‘are’ – their appearance, state of being, smell, etc. The most important difference between state and action verbs is that action verbs can be used in [continuous forms](#) while state verbs cannot.

Action Verbs

We often use verbs to talk about actions:

- He **swims** at the beach every morning.
- I **cooked** pasta for dinner last night.
- She’s **studying** French at the moment.

We can use *action verbs* in different tenses, including continuous tenses:

- He **is swimming** at the beach right now.
- I **was cooking** pasta for dinner last night, when the phone rang.

State Verbs

We also use verbs to talk about states:

- He **needs** to travel to the US.
- I **didn’t understand** the homework.
- They **like** basketball more than football.

We don’t usually use state verbs in continuous tenses:

- **NOT:** He ~~is needing~~ to travel to the US.
- I ~~wasn’t understanding~~ the homework.
- They ~~are liking~~ basketball more than football.

We often use state verbs to talk about mental or emotional states, thoughts and opinions:

believe feel forget
hate know like
love mean need
need remember think
want understand wish

Other common state verbs can denote possession and senses:

be belong have
own possess doubt
feel smell see

Some verbs can be both state and action verbs when they have different meanings:

- *What do you **think** of the decision?*
- *I **feel** it's a mistake.*

Here we are using 'think' and 'feel' to talk about opinions. They are state verbs so the continuous tense is not possible:

- **NOT:** *What are you ~~thinking~~ of the decision?*
- *I'm ~~feeling~~ it's a mistake.*
- *What do you **think** of the decision?*
- *I **feel** it's a mistake.*

In the following examples 'think' and 'feel' are action verbs so we can use them in a continuous tense.

- *What **are** you **thinking** about?*
- *I'm **thinking** about our holiday.*
- *How **are** you **feeling**?*
- *I'm not **feeling** very well.*

In the following example we are using 'have' to talk about possession. It is a state verb so the continuous tense is not possible:

- **NOT:** *He is ~~having~~ a red car.*

- *He **has** a red car.*

Here 'has' means 'eats':

- *She **has** breakfast at 7.30 every morning.*

It is an action verb so we can use it in a continuous tense:

- *She **is having** breakfast now.*

In this video from 7ESL, you'll learn what state and action verbs are and how to use them:

See also:

[Present Simple or Present Continuous?](#)