Verbs are words that describe what people do, how they feel and how things are in general. In fact, without a verb, we can’t convey our full thoughts properly because, along with nouns, verbs tell a story about what is taking place.

In English, verbs almost always come after a noun or pronoun. These nouns and pronouns are called the subject.

- We went to the market. (‘we’ is the subject, ‘went’ is the verb that denotes the action)
- Jerry knows the answer. (‘Jerry’ is the subject, ‘knows’ is the verb that denotes the action)

We use verbs to talk about actions:

- He gets up at 7.30 every morning.
- They play football on Saturdays.
- I didn’t want to work yesterday.

We also use verbs to talk about states:

- The weather is very hot today.
- I don’t know the answer.
- She doesn’t like classical music.

Depending on their function within a sentence, verbs can be main and auxiliary.
Main verbs

Main verbs convey meaning.

If looking at the examples above, the main verbs are:

- He gets up at 7.30 every morning.
- They play football on Saturdays.
- I didn’t walk to work yesterday.

- The weather is very hot today.
- I don’t know the answer.
- She doesn’t like classical music.

Auxiliary verbs

Auxiliary verbs are functional units that are used with the main verbs to modify their meaning and form different tenses.

From the previous examples, these are the auxiliary verbs:

- I don’t know the answer.
- She doesn’t like classical music.
- I didn’t walk to work yesterday.

We can use them to form negatives and questions. For example, in the present simple tense:

Present Simple Negatives:

- I don’t know the answer.
- She doesn’t like classical music.
Present Simple Questions:

- *Do* you know the answer?
- *Does* she like classical music?

Past Simple:

- *I didn’t* walk to work yesterday.
- *Did* you walk to work yesterday?

We can also use them to form different tenses:

- *He’s* studying hard for an exam.
- *I have* never been to Canada.
- *We have been* learning English for two years.
Linking verbs

Verbs denoting a state of being or becoming are called linking verbs. They link a subject with a complement in a sentence and are followed by either a noun or an adjective.

The common link verbs are:

- be
- become
- appear
- feel
- look
- remain
- seem
- sound

- He seemed a nice person.
- He seemed nice.
- They looked hungry.
- He looked a good father.

Some link verbs are followed by an adjective. Common verbs like this are:

- get
- go
- grow
- taste
- smell

- He got sleepy in the evening.
- They grew stronger every day.
Modal verbs

Modal verbs are also auxiliary verbs modifying the main verbs’ meaning, when talking about permissions, obligations, requests, offers, suggestions and more.

- *He can* speak Japanese very well.
- *You shouldn’t* eat so much chocolate.
- *I must not* forget my Mum’s birthday.

We use modal verbs with main verbs to add to the meaning.

Watch this video and learn what a verb is and what types of them we use in our speech:

See also:

- Phrasal Verbs
- Verbs: The Infinitive
- How to Form Verbs