

Vital Information on Verbs

1. What is a verb?

A verb is a word that either shows action or movement (eat, drive, dance), OR it could also imply a state of existence (is, are, was, were).

2. Is a verb important?

YES! A verb is THE most important part of speech and THE most important part of any sentence. In fact, without a verb, there IS no sentence! The verb is what makes the sentence make sense.

3. How many types of verbs are there?

Main verbs – Charley studies for long hours every night.

Helping verbs – Charley should study every night.

Infinitive verbs – Charley began to study every night.

Imperative verbs – “Hey, Charley – study!!!” (Giving an order or command)

4. Do verbs have different parts or forms?

Yes! Main verbs have three types or forms: the present, the past, and the past participle.

Present tense – the form of the verb used when the action is going on NOW – in the present time.

I *walk* three miles everyday.

Past tense – the form used when the action of the verb is over and finished.

Yesterday I *walked* three miles.

Past participle – the form of the verb used with the word have or has:

In the past I *have walked* as many as ten miles.

5. How are these forms used?

a. The past tense never changes in form – regardless of who is doing the verb.
I walked, he walked, ten people walked. (The verb walked remains the same.)

b. The past participle form will use either *has* or *have*, depending on who is doing the verb (but the verb part will stay the same):

Bob has walked Many people have walked
(Notice that the main verb walked stays the same in either case.)

- c. The present tense form WILL change based on who is doing the verb. If only one person or thing is doing the verb, then the form will have an *s* after it. If more than one person or thing is doing the action, then the form will NOT have an *s* after it.

For example: One dollar goes practically no place these days.
Two dollars go much farther.

Very important!

A singular subject = *s* after the present tense verb

A plural subject = no *s* after the present tense verb

6. Are there some special words and phrases that present special problems with verbs?

Yes! Here is a list of them:

- a. The following words are all SINGULAR and therefore take a singular form verb:

everyone, everybody, anyone, anybody, no one, nobody, someone, somebody, one, none

Examples: Everyone makes . . . Somebody is . . . No one takes . . .

- b. The two phrases *Each of* . . . and *One of* . . . always take a singular verb.

Each of the four drivers HAS a good record.

One of the football players WAS throwing a pass.

- c. The words There and Here at the start of a sentence can take either a singular OR a plural verb, depending on the words that come after them in the sentence.

There IS a large vase over there on that table.

There ARE two large vases over there on that table.

- d. Watch out for inverted word order. That means that the true subject might come near the end of the sentence.

On the table WERE several books and papers.

(Several books and papers were on the table.)

- e. Omit the prepositional phrase between the true subject and verb.

A row of columns WAS on the east side of the museum.

A row [of columns] WAS on the east side of the museum.

A row WAS on the east side of the museum.

f. Neither . . . nor and either . . . or are special phrases which require special attention.

1. If both sides of the phrase are singular, then use a singular verb.

Either Mark or Susan plans to go to SIU in the fall.

2. If both sides are plural, then use a plural verb.

Neither the teachers nor the parents were very responsive at the meeting.

3. If one side is singular and the other plural, then the one that is CLOSER to the verb determines which verb will be used.

Either Mary or her two sons HAVE been to Europe before.

Neither Mary's two sons nor Mary herself HAS been to Europe before.

g. If a subject is a COMPOUND subject (more than one thing joined by and), then use a plural verb.

Art and music ARE my favorite subjects.

My mom and my dad WERE once dancers on Broadway.