



## 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 others<sup>1</sup> (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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 others<sup>2</sup>(e.g., We will practice **playing** our sport. She enjoys **reading** short stories. He postponed **writing** his paper.)

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

