

Classification of verbs

Transitive and intransitive verbs

Verbs can be classified in several ways. First, some verbs require an object to complete their meaning.

'She read...' Read what? 'She read a story.'

These verbs that require an object are called transitive verbs. Verbs that do not require an object are called intransitive verbs.

Note that most verbs can be both transitive and intransitive.

'The ship sank.' (Intransitive)

'The explosion sank the ship.' (Transitive)

Some verbs can take a direct object and an indirect object. These verbs are sometimes called ditransitive verbs. Of course, this is not a term you will hear every day.

'Loud music gives me a headache.'

In the example given above, the verb gives has two objects – me and headache.

Finite and non-finite verbs

Verbs can also be classified as finite or non-finite.

A finite verb can be the main verb of the sentence. Its form is determined by the number and person of the subject.

I work at a bank.

He works at a bank.

I have worked with children before.

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She has worked with mentally challenged people.

Non-finite verbs cannot be main verbs. There are mainly three types of non-finite verbs: infinitives, gerunds and participles.

Linking Verbs

A linking verb connects a subject with its complement. These verbs are often called copular verbs or copulas.

Most linking verbs are forms of the verb be.

She is my sister.

We are happy.

They were shocked to hear the news.

A few other verbs related to the five senses are also considered as linking verbs. Examples are: look, feel, sound, taste, smell. Some stative verbs are also considered as copular verbs. Examples are: appear, seem, become, grow, turn, prove and remain. Note that a linking verb should be followed by a noun or an adjective.

Students sometimes incorrectly use adverbs after linking verbs. This is a mistake.

She looked happy. (NOT She looked happily.)

The fish smells awful. (NOT The fish smells awfully.)

I feel bad. (NOT I feel badly.)