

# Action Verbs, Linking Verbs, Helping Verbs!

There are three kinds of verbs: action, linking, and helping. Knowing the difference between the three types of verbs and how to use them is critical to being an effective writer.

**Action Verbs** - Some tell about an action that you can see...

- The boy **kicked** the ball.
- The girl **flew** a kite.
- The dog **ate** her dinner.

Some tell about action that you can't see.

- They **wanted** to win the lottery.
- The fans **hoped** for a victory.
- The children **wished** for a snow day.

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**Linking verbs** - These do not show action. They "link" a subject with another word in the sentence. The most common linking verbs are:

am      is      are      was  
were      be      being      been

- I **am** thrilled.
- The car **was** a lemon.
- The bear **is** angry.
- The team **was** sad that they lost.
- Marvin's parents **were** proud of his wonderful grades.

Other common linking verbs:

look   appear   become   taste  
seem   feel   sound   remain   smell

**BE CAREFUL!** *Context clues* will tell you if the verb is an action or linking verb!

- Jeremy **tasted** the sandwich. (action)
- The sandwich **tasted** funny. (linking)
- Doris **smelled** the flower. (action)
- The flower **smelled** lovely. (linking)
- The bride **looked** at her charming fiancé. (action)
- The bride **looked** beautiful. (linking)

**Verb Phrases** - A main verb plus a helping verb(s) is called a **verb phrase**. The main verb in a verb phrase is always the last one. **The main verb can be an action verb or a linking verb, but it can never be a helping verb.**

**Helping verbs** - Helping verbs do just that...they *help* the main verb in a sentence. They come **before** the main verb and they help to change the tense of that main verb or they establish special conditions.

The most common helping verbs are:

|       |       |        |
|-------|-------|--------|
| am    | is    | are    |
| was   | were  |        |
| be    | being | been   |
| have  | has   | had    |
| do    | does  | did    |
| could | would | should |
| may   | must  | might  |
| can   | will  | shall  |

Helping verbs will be followed by a main verb. The helpers often change the *time* that something occurs.

- We **will eat** lunch at noon. (“will” (HV) “eat” (MV): this will happen in the future)
- We **are eating** lunch. (“are” (HV) “eating” (MV): this is happening right now)
- We **were eating** lunch earlier. (“were” (HV) “eating” (MV): this happened in the past)

Helping verbs allow us to create really complex ideas:

- We **could have eaten** lunch at noon. (“could” and “have” (HV); “eaten” (MV))
  - *The opportunity was there, but they decided not to eat.*
- We **should have eaten** lunch at noon. (“should” and “have” (HV); “eaten” (MV))
  - *The opportunity may have been there, but they didn’t, and now they regret it.*
- We **would have eaten** lunch at noon. (“would” and “have” (HV); “eaten” (MV))
  - *They planned on eating at noon, but something kept them from doing it.*

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**WARNING!** The orange verbs above can be tricky! Depending on how they are used in the sentence, they can be a linking verb or a helping verb. So how can you tell which it is? Here’s the key: *If there is a verb following the orange ones, then the orange verb is a helping verb. If the orange verb is by itself in the sentence, then it’s a linking verb.*

- Kerry **was** happy about her grades. (“was” is by itself - it’s a *linking verb*)
- Kerry **was bragging** about her grades. (“was” is a *HV* because another verb follows it - “bragging”)
- The bulldog **is** sweet. (“is” is by itself - it’s a *linking verb*)
- The bulldog **is licking** the boy’s face. (“is” is a *HV* because another verb follows it - “licking”)

**WARNING!** *A verb phrase only contains verbs - a main verb and its helping verbs.* BUT, *lots* of times *adverbs* will appear in the middle of a verb phrase. Just be aware that there may be sneaky words in a verb phrase that are not verbs themselves.

We could not have eaten lunch at noon.

(“not” is an adverb and is *not* part of the verb phrase)

We should never have eaten lunch at noon.

(“never” is an adverb and is *never* part of the verb phrase)

We would often eat lunch at noon.

(“often” is an adverb and is *never* part of the verb phrase)

We would sometimes eat lunch at noon.

(“sometimes” is an adverb and is *never* part of the verb phrase)

## Verb Note Highlights!

**Action verbs** - Some tell about an action that you can see: run, kick, cook, spin, fly, saw, lift...  
Some tell about an action that you can't see: think, hope, consider, wish, ponder...

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**Linking verbs** - These do not show action. They "link" a subject with another word in the sentence.  
The most common linking verbs are:

am is are was  
were be being been

Other linking verbs are:

look appear become taste  
seem feel sound remain smell

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**Helping verbs** - Helping verbs *help* the main verb in a sentence.

- A main verb plus a helping verb(s) is called a **verb phrase**.
- The main verb in a verb phrase *is always the last one*.
- The main verb can be an action verb or a linking verb but never a helping verb.

The most common helping verbs are:

am is are was were be being been  
have has had do does did  
could would should may might must  
can will shall

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**The orange verbs above can be tricky!**

- They can be linking verbs or helping verbs.
  - The key to figuring out which it is:
    - *If there is a verb following the orange one, then the orange verb is a helping verb.*
    - *If the orange verb is by itself in the sentence, then it's a linking verb.*
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**A verb phrase only contains verbs - a main verb and its helping verbs.**

- *Adverbs* in the middle of a verb phrase are not part of the verb phrase.
- Watch for these common adverbs: not, never, often, sometimes, even, only, really, soon