



To be and the tricky ones: The most common linking verb is the verb *to be*: *I **am** a poet. Ovid **was** a storyteller.* There are other linking verbs, though, that sound at first like action verbs, including *become*, *grow*, *seem*, *sound*, *smell*, and *taste*.

Action verb:	We smelled the blossom.
Linking verb:	The dog smells clean.
Action verb:	Lynn grew strawberries.
Linking verb:	Lynn grew excited.

Linking verbs can link adjectives to pronouns: One of the most important functions of a linking verb is to link an adjective to a pronoun. If we have an adjective such as *torpid* (sluggish), we easily can modify a noun: *a torpid assistant*, but how do we modify a pronoun? We cannot say *the torpid he*. The linking verb solves the problem: *He **was** torpid as he sorted the documents.*

What is a *being* verb? A being verb is a third type of verb, more rare than action or linking verbs, that **expresses pure existence**—**being**—as when Hamlet said, “To be, or not to be, that is the question.” When the philosopher Descartes (day-CART) said, “I think; therefore I *am*,” he meant “I think; therefore I *exist*.” So the *am* in Descartes’s sentence is a true being verb. A more common form of being verb comes in a sentence such as “Once, long ago, there ***was*** a fortress.” In that sentence, *was* is a being verb; the verb means that a fortress existed. Do not confuse linking verbs and being verbs; the two functions are not the same. A being verb is not a type of linking verb. Most of the verbs you encounter will be either action or linking, showing that the subject does something or that the subject equals something.

Action verbs express action.
Linking verbs express equation.
Being verbs express existence.

Sometimes the equation in a linking verb is implied, especially in conversation. If someone asks “Who is ready to go?” and someone answers “I am,” that *am* is not a being verb. It is a linking verb, with the equation understood; it means “I am ready to go.” Linking verbs link equations, and being verbs express existence. Study these closely because you cannot memorize lists of examples; you have to recognize functions.



Action verb:	Lou saw an artifact.
Action verb:	Lou has an artifact.
Action verb:	Lou tasted a sandwich.
Linking verb:	Lou was an archaeologist.
Linking verb:	The sandwich tasted good.
Being verb:	There was an artifact.

To keep verbs straight, always consider what the verb is doing. Is it showing the subject acting or receiving action? Is it linking the subject to another word in a grammar equation? Is it expressing pure existence, asserting the presence of something?

Verbs are *tense*.

Verb tense: In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.” True, and we can tell it by the verbs. Verbs show us the poignant temporality of human existence. As human beings we experience a moving current of time, borne forward always, awake or asleep, unable to halt, to slow down, or to return. Time flows past us, from the future to the past, like an unstoppable river. We see the present that is, we remember the past that was, and we wonder about the future that will be. Time is so powerful that we put it in every sentence by expressing each verb in a **tense**. Verb tenses locate ideas in time. We use six basic tenses—and some other forms of these that we will examine—to indicate time. The six tenses include three ordinary tenses and three perfect tenses, which are based on the four principal parts of the verb. Some writers prefer to use the word *aspects* for the perfect tenses rather than to call them *tenses*.

Six Verb Tenses

1. Present
2. Past
3. Future
4. Present perfect
5. Past perfect
6. Future perfect

Examples

- I see.
I saw.
I will see.
I have seen.
I had seen.
I will have seen.