

Verb forms for English Language Learners

Verbs contain a lot of information—about when something happens, about whether an event is complete or not, about whether it is likely to recur, and more. Because verbs are so important in English, verb errors can be distracting and make your writing seem confused. The first step in getting verbs right is to choose correctly from the three main verb forms.

Infinitives and three main forms (v1, v2, v3)

The first form of a verb (called v1) is the *base form*: *register*. You use it to make infinitives (*to register*) and commands and requests (*Register before the class fills.*) It is also used to create the simple present tense (*I register later than you do this year*). The second form of a verb (v2) is the *past-tense form*: *registered*. To create a past-tense verb, you usually add *-ed* or *-d* to the base form, but many past-tense verbs are irregular and do not follow this pattern. The third form (v3) is the *past participle form*. It is used with the helper, or auxiliary, verb *have* (*has* and *had* are other forms). The past participle form, too, is often irregular.

Type of verb	Infinitive	Base (v1)	Simple past (v2)	Past participle (v3)
Regular verbs	to register	register	registered	registered
	to work	work	worked	worked
	to cook	cook	cooked	cooked
Irregular verbs	to see	see	saw	seen
	to sleep	sleep	slept	slept
	to freeze	freeze	froze	frozen

The –s form

There are two other important verb forms to pay attention to (turn this page to see them). One is the *–s form*. When you pair a verb in the simple present tense with a subject in the 3rd person singular (such as *he, she, it, the president, Alexa, or the car*), the verb must be in the *–s form* (sometimes *–es*, depending on the spelling):

He registers late every semester.
Alexa works at the bookstore.
He cooks for his family three or four nights a week.

The –ing form

The other important verb form is the *–ing form*, or present participle. When you use it as the verb in a sentence, you must also use a form of *to be* as an auxiliary (*am, are, is, was, were, been*):

I am freezing the leftover soup.
Were you sleeping when the rain started?
*He has been working late every night this week (because you can't use the past participle *been* without the auxiliary *has*).*

However, an *–ing* word is not necessarily a verb. It may instead be working as an adjective or a noun. In that case, it is used without an auxiliary verb:

Don't wake the sleeping baby (adjective).
This room feels freezing (adjective)!
There is more to life than working late (noun).

Common verbs and verb forms

Type	Infinitive	Base (v1)	-s form	Simple past (v2)	Past participle (v3)	Present participle
Regular	to add	add	adds	added	added	adding
	to answer	answer	answers	answered	answered	answering
	to continue	continue	continues	continued	continued	continuing
	to dance	dance	dances	danced	danced	dancing
	to delete	delete	deletes	deleted	deleted	deleting
	to drop	drop	drops	dropped	dropped	dropping
	to erase	erase	erases	erased	erased	erasing
	to fix	fix	fixes	fixed	fixed	fixing
	to hope	hope	hopes	hoped	hoped	hoping
	to intend	intend	intends	intended	intended	intending
	to laugh	laugh	laughs	laughed	laughed	laughing
	to marry	marry	marries	married	married	marrying
	to memorize	memorize	memorizes	memorized	memorized	memorizing
	to persist	persist	persists	persisted	persisted	persisting
	to remember	remember	remembers	remembered	remembered	remembering
	to search	search	searches	searched	searched	searching
	to study	study	studies	studied	studied	studying
to text	text	texts	texted	texted	texting	
to visit	visit	visits	visited	visited	visiting	
to want	want	wants	wanted	wanted	wanting	
Irregular	to be	be	is	Was (singular) were (plural)	been	being
	to become	become	becomes	became	become	becoming
	to break	break	breaks	broke	broken	breaking
	to build	build	builds	built	built	building
	to choose	choose	chooses	chose	chosen	choosing
	to do	do	does	did	done	doing
	to drink	drink	drinks	drank	drunk	drinking
	to drive	drive	drives	drove	driven	driving
	to eat	eat	eats	ate	eaten	eating
	to find	find	finds	found	found	finding
	to fly	fly	flies	flew	flown	flying
	to forget	forget	forgets	forgot	forgotten	forgetting
	to grow	grow	grows	grew	grown	growing
	to have	have	has	had	had	having
	to hit	hit	hits	hit	hit	hitting
	to know	know	knows	knew	known	knowing
	to make	make	makes	made	made	making
	to read	read	reads	read ("rĕd")	read ("rĕd")	reading
	to run	run	runs	ran	run	running
	to say	say	says	said	said	saying
	to speak	speak	speaks	spoke	spoken	speaking
	to steal	steal	steals	stole	stolen	stealing
	to swim	swim	swims	swam	swum	swimming
to take	take	takes	took	taken	taking	
to think	think	thinks	thought	thought	thinking	
to throw	throw	throws	threw	thrown	throwing	
to understand	understand	understands	understood	understood	understanding	
to wake	wake	wakes	woke	woken/waked	waking	
to wear	wear	wears	wore	worn	wearing	

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever



This Yuba College Writing & Language Development Center Tip Sheet is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>