

Verb Phrases and Forms

ACTIVITY: FINDING VERBS

Read the excerpt below⁴ from “In honor of final exams, we give you sleep,” by Tatiana Vorozhkoon¹. Underline everything you think is a verb.

Lack of sleep affects the so called “executive function” of the brain the most. This is the ability to think through your actions, execute them according to the plan, anticipate consequences, and achieve intended results. The ability to concentrate and maintain focus suffers as well. In one study, researchers tested cognitive abilities of people who slept four, six and eight hours. It turned out that the cognitive abilities of the sleep-deprived group (both who slept 4 and 6 hours) were diminishing daily until they stabilized at a low level. Another consequence of sleep deprivation is weight gain.

I have a theory that the low status women experience in most societies since the Dawn of Agrarian Civilization can be explained by sleep-deprivation during child-rearing. People have thought of them as less intelligent, less in control of their own emotions, and less capable, which coincides with less sleep.

WHAT IS A VERB?

One of the first things we learn about verbs is that they are one of the main parts of a sentence. Being able to find verbs can help you develop your editing skills by identifying some of the most common grammar errors: verb tense, verb agreement, verb form, and sentence structure. Verbs have very specific criteria; if you have all of the following on your checklist, you can be confident you have a verb:

A verb demonstrates a **physical** or **mental** action:

College students study.

Professors give out a course syllabus in order to inform students of class expectations.

Academic advisors help students register for classes.



ACTIVITY: CHECK FOR WORDS SHOWING A PHYSICAL OR MENTAL ACTION

Go back to the excerpt and check what you have underlined. Do those words show a mental or physical action?



A VERB MAY BE A LINKING VERB

Not all verbs demonstrate an action. A verb can also demonstrate a *state of being*. These verbs are also called “linking verbs” because they connect (link) the subject to the noun or adjective after the verb. Think of a linking verb as a link in a chain connecting the subject to the noun or adjective complement.

First-year college students are often *overwhelmed* by the demanding expectations of college.

Michelle’s professor seems quite *knowledgeable and caring*.

Professor Peterson is a published *author*.

Some common linking (state of being) verbs in addition to “be” (is, am, are, was, were) are:

appear	become	feel	grow	keep	look	prove
remain	seem	smell	sound	stay	taste	

¹ <https://blogs.voanews.com/student-union/2017/04/27/in-honor-of-final-exams-we-give-you-sleep/>

ACTIVITY: CHECK FOR LINKING VERBS

Go back to the excerpt and check what you have underlined. Label any *linking verbs* you find.

WHAT IS A VERB PHRASE?

Sometimes, actions happen quickly or simply, so there is only one word in the verb phrase, as in the examples above. However, sometimes the activity or condition continues over a long stretch of time, happens regularly, or occurs in relationship to other events. In these instances, a single-word verb like *study* or *are* cannot accurately describe what happened, so writers use verb phrases (or verbs that are made up of more than one word) to communicate what they mean. As many as four words can comprise a verb phrase. A verb phrase always contains a *main verb*, and sometimes it contains *helping (auxiliary) verbs*.

Verb phrases may include *auxiliaries or helping verbs*.

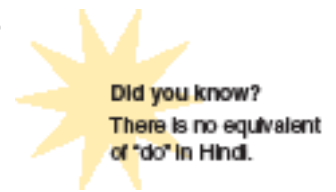
VERB AUXILIARIES (HELPING VERBS)

These can be a little confusing because sometimes they are *main verbs (stand-alone verbs)*, and sometimes they are *helping verbs*. It depends on how they are used in the sentence.



be (is, am, are, was, were)

have (has, had) do (does, did)



Here are some examples showing them as main verbs and as auxiliaries.

MAIN: A university is not simply a place to train students for specific jobs or careers.

AUX: Things are moving very fast for Michelle, and she's having a hard time keeping up.

MAIN: I have no idea what this means.

AUX: She has found that things are not what she expected.

MAIN: You're old enough to take responsibility for what you do.

AUX: Do not wait until the last couple of weeks to meet with your professors.

ACTIVITY: FINDING THE WHOLE VERB PHRASE

Underline the verbs/verb phrases in each sentence. Put a check next to the sentences that have auxiliary verbs.

1. _____ Recently, researchers at the University of Wisconsin–Madison found that sleep helps improve brain performance.
2. _____ Jawbone's study seemed to suggest that college students were getting enough sleep.
3. _____ It is not uncommon for students to sleep 12 or 14 hours one day, after sleeping for little or no time the day before as they cram for tests.
4. _____ Students at the University of New Hampshire, the University of Oregon, and the University of San Diego had the most sleep, Jawbone said.
5. _____ Four hours is not enough sleep, but is better than none, he advised.

ACTIVITY: CHECK FOR AUXILIARY VERBS

Go back to the excerpt and check what you have underlined. Label any *auxiliary verbs* you find.

MODAL AUXILIARIES

The words below are *only* helping verbs, so they must always be followed by the main verb. Modal auxiliary verbs never change form. You *cannot* add an *-ed*, *-ing*, or *-s* ending to these words. They have only *one* form.

can shall could should may might would must ought to will

The following are also used as modals in spoken or more casual English:

be able to	have to	had better
be going to	have got to	used to
be supposed to	be allowed to	be about to
would rather	need to	

We must provide students with the skills necessary for gainful employment.

You need to/have to study at least two to three hours outside of class for each hour in class.

Modal + Main Verb

Students **have to register early for Fall classes.**

Modal + Be + Present Participle

Students **must be registering this week.**

Modal + Have + Past Participle

Students **should have registered by now.**

Why do we use modal auxiliaries?

Auxiliaries give us more detail about the mood of the verb. They provide more detail than simply what time the verb is in. They give the verb an additional detail about certainty.

Modal auxiliaries indicate *necessity or obligation*:

College students should study each day in order to retain information.

College students ought to be attending class regularly.

College students have to be organized.

College students are supposed to come to class prepared.

Modal auxiliaries indicate *possibility*:

Students might try a tutor for more feedback on their writing.

My roommate could have gone to her T.A. for additional advice.

Modal auxiliaries also show *willingness or ability*:

Marie will go to her professor's office hours to ask questions.

John can attend the 12 p.m. section to make up missing class on Tuesday.

Stephanie is able to make up the exam this Friday.

Did you know?

There are no modal verbs in Arabic.

ACTIVITY: FINDING AND CATEGORIZING MODALS

Underline the modals in the sentences below. Then choose whether the modal shows necessity, possibility, or willingness/ability.

1. Students cannot see the consequences of sleep deprivation.

- | | | |
|---|-------------|---------------------|
| necessity | possibility | willingness/ability |
| 2. Students have to try and get at least seven hours of sleep every night. | | |
| necessity | possibility | willingness/ability |
| 3. Will lack of sleep eventually affect learning? | | |
| necessity | possibility | willingness/ability |
| 4. Should students sleep the entire day after not sleeping the night before? | | |
| necessity | possibility | willingness/ability |
| 5. We are supposed to manage our time so that we study in smaller intervals. | | |
| necessity | possibility | willingness/ability |
| 6. Students might even say that they can function just fine on four hours of sleep per night. | | |
| necessity | possibility | willingness/ability |

ACTIVITY: CHECK FOR MODALS

Go back to the excerpt and circle any *modals*. Then, label whether the modal shows necessity, possibility, or willingness/ability.

Verbs have certain forms or “outfits.”

VERB FORMS

Verbs, whether they stand alone or function with auxiliaries and modals, come in specific forms. The Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marines have very different and distinct uniforms, yet they all make up the military. When we speak of verb forms, we are referring to their distinctive “looks.” All verbs come in five forms (except for the verb *be*; it is the only English verb with more than five forms). Verbs in English have one of the five following forms:



BASE FORM

This is the plain verb in its original form, with no changes. This form follows the modal auxiliaries or appears with main verbs in the present tense with the subjects *I, you, we, and they*.

walk stay study eat open write run think appear

ACTIVITY: CHECK FOR BASE FORM

Check the verbs you have underlined in the excerpt. Label any *base form verbs*.

PARTICIPLE FORMS

These forms use auxiliaries to describe very specific time frames.

Present Participle Form: This is the [base form] + [-ing].

walking saying eating opening studying

If the *-ing* form is functioning as a verb, it must have “be” (*am/are/is/was/were*) before it. If the present participle (verb + *-ing*) does not have a form of “be” before it, it is probably being used as a noun/gerund (“Running is good exercise”) or an adjective (“The house has no running water”).

Past Participle Form: Uses the helping verb “have” with the past participle.

- a. Regular Verbs: The past participle of regular verbs is the [*base form*] + [*-ed*].

have walked have opened have studied

- b. Irregular Verbs: There are fewer irregular verbs than regular verbs in English. However, these verbs are some of the most commonly used verbs. *They do not use -ed*. Many irregular verbs have a completely different form in the past participle.

Past Tense Form	Participle Form
said	have said
thought	have thought
ate	have eaten
ran	have run

ACTIVITY: CHECK FOR PARTICIPLE FORMS

Check the verbs you have underlined in the excerpt. Label verbs in the **past participle** or **present participle** forms.

TENSED FORMS

The following forms are used to show tense (time) *without auxiliaries*.

Third-Person Singular Form: This is the [*base form*] + [*-s*] or [*-es*]. It is used with *he, she, or it* in the present tense.

He/She/It opens, says, writes, studies, runs, eats, thinks, walks

Past Tense Form: This form depends on whether the verb is regular or irregular.

- a. Regular Verbs: Most verbs are regular verbs. With these, past tense is the [*base form*] + [*-ed*].

walked opened studied

- b. Irregular Verbs: There are fewer irregular verbs than regular verbs in English, but these few verbs are some of the most commonly used English verbs. We call these verbs irregular because they don’t use *-ed* in the past tense form.

ate gave said thought wrote ran went came

At this point, you may be sure you have a verb or verb phrase, but even now you cannot be sure that what you have marked is a verb. The final criterion is the *most* important:

Subjects are **nouns**. A noun is a **person, place, thing, idea or animal**.

Pronouns replace nouns and noun phrases. Pronouns that can be subjects are **I, you, he, she, it, we, and they**. Relative pronouns, like **that, which** and **who**, can also be subjects.

Gerunds (present participle/**-ing form WITHOUT be**) and infinitives (to + base form) can also be subjects because they function as nouns.

Compound Subject:
A sentence can have **more than one subject and more than one verb**. Two subjects are joined by a coordinating word (usually **and or or**),

Librarians are experts in conducting research. In fact, they are often called subject specialists.

Subject specialists are experts who conduct research in specific fields.

Faculty and TAs are required to hold office hours and meet with students for these reasons.

Testing is frequent and covers small amounts of material.

To check comprehension is the purpose of testing.

FINDING THE SUBJECT

The *subject* of the sentence usually 1) occurs before the verb and 2) tells who or what does the action or expresses the state of being or state of mind.

So, if you think you have found the verb phrase, simply ask:

“Who or what (verb phrase) ?” The answer to the question is your subject.

What is the subject in the following sentence?

College can be (verb: modal auxiliary + base form) very stressful, even overwhelming, for a large number of first-year college students.

Explanation: The verb phrase is “can be” because we know that “can” is a modal auxiliary and must be followed by a main verb, in this case, “be.” When we ask “who or what can be?” The answer is “college,” so it is the subject.

Grades on tests and major papers usually provide most of the course grade.

Explanation: The verb is provide because we know that it is the base form. When we ask, “who or what provide?” The answer is “grades,” so it is the subject.

*Note: “Tests and papers” are also nouns that occur before the verb, but they are *not* the subject because they follow a preposition. They describe what kinds of grades. (See Nouns earlier in this unit).

You may have more than one subject-verb phrase in a sentence because you are probably writing longer sentences now that you are in college. Below there is one sentence with many subject-verb phrases:



Did you know?

In Arabic, personal pronouns are often added to verbs.

For example, one might say, “My teacher she is from Canada.”

Even though first-year students face many challenges when they first get to college, they eventually adapt to their new environment.

ACTIVITY: FINDING SEVERAL VERB PHRASES AND THEIR SUBJECTS

The following sentences have more than one subject and verb phrase. Can you find them all?

1. Researchers tested cognitive abilities of people who slept four, six and eight hours.
2. When we sleep our cells are renewed and repaired, which slows down aging and improves looks.
3. The syllabus reflects the way that the class is organized.
4. As I'm sure that you've noticed, your syllabus is divided into multiple sections.
5. The Grading Scheme is where your professor will break down how each assignment will affect your grade.

ACTIVITY: FIND VERBS AND THEIR SUBJECTS

Underline the verb phrases and highlight or circle the subjects. Then choose which type of subject it is: noun, compound, gerund, infinitive, or pronoun.

1. Most students stay up all night studying for exams or writing papers.
noun compound subject gerund infinitive pronoun
2. West Point, the Naval Academy, and the Coast Guard Academy require students to rise before 7 a.m.
noun compound subject gerund infinitive pronoun
3. Being able to maintain focus is tied to getting a good night's sleep.
noun compound subject gerund infinitive pronoun
4. To get enough sleep each night should be a priority for students.
noun compound subject gerund infinitive pronoun
5. I often get about four to five hours of sleep each night.
noun compound subject gerund infinitive pronoun
6. Both these and other studies demonstrate the negative impacts of sleep deprivation.
noun compound subject gerund infinitive pronoun

ACTIVITY: FINDING THE HEAD NOUN IN A SUBJECT NOUN PHRASE

Underline the correct subject in each sentence. You may want to review Noun Phrases in the Nouns section of this unit.

1. Grades on tests and major papers usually provide most of the course grade.
2. Professors in different courses usually schedule tests without regard to the demands of other courses or outside activities.
3. Testing in college is usually infrequent and may cover large amounts of material.
4. Graduation requirements are complex and differ for different majors.
5. Good notes on your part are a must.

ACTIVITY: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Below is the same excerpt you have been working with in this section. Go back through it, underlining the verb phrases and highlighting or circling their subjects.

Lack of sleep affects the so called "executive function" of the brain the most. This is the ability to think through your actions, execute them according to the plan, anticipate consequences, and achieve intended results. The ability to concentrate and maintain focus suffers as well. In one study, researchers tested cognitive abilities of people who slept four, six and eight hours. It turned out that the cognitive

abilities of the sleep-deprived group (both who slept 4 and 6 hours) were diminishing daily until they stabilized at a low level. Another consequence of sleep deprivation is weight gain.

I have a theory that the low status women experience in most societies since the Dawn of Agrarian Civilization can be explained by sleep-deprivation during child-rearing. People have thought of them as less intelligent, less in control of their own emotions, and less capable, which just happens to coincide with less sleep.

ACTIVITY: CHART, PART 1

Take the verb phrases you have underlined from the excerpt and put them in the chart according to their form.

Base Form	Third-Person Singular	Past Tense	Present Participle	Past Participle
1. affect	affects	affected	is/am/are/was/were affecting	has/have/had affected
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				

ACTIVITY: CHART, PART 2

Now go back to the chart and look at each verb you entered. Fill in the rest of the boxes in the row by changing the form of the verb into the remaining four forms. The first one has been done for you.

ACTIVITY: EDITING STUDENT WRITING

Underline all verb phrases and their subjects. Check all verb forms and edit any errors in the way the verbs look.

Four students are talk about how do they making friends in college. They using some different ways.

Making friends in classes and finding the same hobbies are two good ways to make friends.

Most of the students have think that joining a club is a good way to make friends because you can meets a lot of people and seen the same few people every day. After that, you can easy to make friends with those people and getting to know more people in the club.