

The Verb Group

What is the VG? The verbal element of the sentence: You *can drive* my car; She *has gone* to Exeter for the weekend.

The VG is the morphological unit which realizes the Predicator element in the sentence.

The term "verb" refers to some classes of words with certain morphosyntactic characteristics, one of which is their ability to function as elements of the VG.

Structure of the Verb Group:

Syntactically: Head + Dependents --> Aux. elem. + Main Verb

Morphologically:

Main Verb:

Realization: the verb in its base form

Function: bearer of semantic content of VG (state, action, process)

Auxiliary Element:

Realization:

0 + Head: *They play football here.*

Inflectional morpheme -ed₁ + Head : *They played...*

Auxiliary verb + Head: *They may play football here*

Aux. verb + inflectional morpheme (-ed₂/-ing)+ Head:
They have played ...

Aux. verbs + inflectional morphemes (-ed₂/-ing)+ Head:
They may have been playing...

Function: to modify the main verb with some semantic contributions: tense, mood, phase, aspect and voice.

Some important distinctions should be established now:

1. *Main verb* is a function (head) within the VG.
2. *Lexical verb* is a class of verbs with certain specific features, different from auxiliary verbs.
3. *Auxiliary element* is another functional constituent of the VG
4. *Auxiliary verbs* is a class of verbs with certain morphosyntactic features.

The **Main verb** is a simple element, always formed by the base form of the verb, which functions as the head of the VG. There must be only one in the VG and it is always the last element.

The Auxiliary element is a combination of five modifications, which are, in fixed order: **{Tense}, {Mood}, {Phase}, {Aspect}, {Voice}**.

Tense makes a VG be remote, if marked with the $-ed_1$ morpheme in the initial verb form (They *play-ed*) or non-remote, unmarked (They *play*).

Mood can make it modal if marked with a modal verb (They *will play*) or non-modal if no modal verb appears.

A VG can be **phased** (Phase modification) if marked with the combination "have + $-ed_2$ " (They *have play-ed*) or non-phased if it is unmarked.

Aspect makes a VG be progressive if marked with the combination "be + $-ing$ " (They *are play-ing*) or non-progressive if unmarked.

Finally, **voice** makes the VG passive/voiced if marked with the combination "be + $-ed_2$ " (They *are interview-ed*) and non-passive/non-voiced if unmarked.

We should comment on some other modifications such as **number and person**. Classical languages, such as Latin, and some modern ones, such as French or Spanish, have morphological distinctions for these modifications, but **English language has no such distinctions**.

However, we have some vestige of person in the irregular verb "be". In the non-remote tense there are first, second and third person (am/are/is); in the non-remote tense there is a distinction between 1st and 3rd person (was) against the rest (you/we/you/they were). About the category of number, the only inflectional morpheme is the "-s" of the singular non-remote tense (come-s/come).

Another very important distinction is that of **Tensed and Non-tensed VG**. The difference between them is that Tensed VGs have no restriction on verb modifications, but **Non-tensed VGS have a main restriction, they never can take tense**: *Play-ed* is remote tense, *to play* is neither remote nor non-remote, because it actually has no tense.

In *I want to go to Madrid in June* it refers to the future; in *She would have liked to go but it was impossible*, it refers to the past; and in *He has to go now* it refers to the present. Apart from tense, mood is also affected by the quality of being non-tensed, because **modal verbs cannot appear with these non-tensed VGs**. About the rest of the modifications there is certain freedom, and Phase, Aspect and Voice can be used with non-tensed VGS.

There are three types of non-tensed VGs: **the infinitive VG**, either with the particle "to" or without it, **the -ing VG** and **the -ed₂ VG**. None of them can function as Predicator of independent sentences, but other functions are open to them:

Here are some examples:

Infinitive clauses:

Subject: *To smoke like that may be dangerous.*

Od: *I don't like to be hated by people.*

A (purpose/result): *To have lost his way, he must have been very careless.*

Complement in NGs: *He is the man to follow.*

-Ing clauses:

S: *Having to wait for three years deprived him of his title.*

Co: *I hate anyone listening while I'm telephoning.*

A (time/cause/condition): *Having been found out, he tried to escape.*

-Ed clauses

Od: *The genial smile seemed painted on his face.*

A (time/cause/condition): *Admirably written, it's a good book on English history.*

Types of Auxiliary verbs:

1. Primary auxiliary verbs: **BE and HAVE**. They are used to express aspect (progressive modification: *He is cooking*) and voice (passive modification: *The room is repainted every year*) and phase modification (*He has arrived early*).
2. Pro-auxiliary **DO**: Dummy operator, always followed by the base form of the verb, does not combine with any other auxiliaries (**He does not may come today*).
3. Central modal verbs: **CAN, MAY, SHALL, WILL, MUST and OUGHT TO**. They express mood modification. They do not have singular non-remote inflection -s.
4. Semi-auxiliary verbs: **USED TO** (followed by an infinitive; no non-remote form), **BE TO** and **BE GOING TO** ("Be to" always in non-remote form), **HAVE (GOT) TO, HAD BETTER, KEEP -ING** (idea of continuation) and **GET -ED₂** (voice marker, idea of change).

English verb modification:

TENSE:

- Grammatical category realized by means of inflections (-ed₁) attached to first form in VG.
- It expresses:
 - a. time of event
 - b. time of speaking
 - c. the speaker's perspective
- Remote (-ed₁): the speaker locates the event as something distant.
- Non-remote: the event is located as something close to the speaker.

PHASE:

- Phased (have + inflectional morpheme -ed₂): The event has two points of reference because it is either anterior to some point of reference or of continuing relevance from a point to another.
- Non-phased: The event has only one point of reference.

ASPECT:

- Progressive (be/keep + -ing): the action is seen as in the middle of its process.
- Non-progressive: the action is seen as a whole.

VOICE:

- Passive (be/get + -ed₂): The speaker focuses on a different part of the sentence.
- Non-passive: The speaker uses the non-marked word order.
- Voice is a marginal category in the English VG, which presents some constraints because it is limited to transitive verbs.

MOOD:

- Modal: They express statements depending on the speaker's attitudes, being them prediction, obligation, desire and permission.
- Non-modal: They present the simple statement of facts.

English verb conjugation is based on these five modifications. A verb form is the result of the combination of either the unmarked or the marked forms of the five modifications. Furthermore, all the modifications are equally important because they are the means that a speaker uses to express him or herself.

TENSE, PHASE and ASPECT

Present Simple:

Being not formally marked by any modification makes it the most neutral form and the one with the widest range of uses.

- **Timeless reference** (no specific temporal reference):
 - Universal general truths: *The Earth revolves around the Sun.*
 - Habitual occurrences (normally adverbial expressions needed): *They usually play chess every Sunday.*
- **Present time reference**, to express actions, events and states that have current relevance, e.g., instructions or explanations: *You open the box removing the lid...*
 - Actions which cannot be seen in the middle of their process:
 - Verbs of feelings/emotions: like, dislike,...
 - Verbs of opinion/believing: doubt, forget, know,...
 - Verbs of perceptions of senses: hear, feel, taste,...
 - Verbs of possession: belong, own, have,...
 - "Being" and "Seeming": appear, look, cost,...
 - Other verbs: matter, continue, deserve, require, owe,...
- **Future time reference**: The future action is considered so close that it is included within the speaker's present perspective.
 - In dependent clauses: If-clauses, nominal clauses after "care, matter, hope,..", adverbial time/concessive/manner clauses, adjectival relative clauses.
 - In independent clauses:
 - Immutable events (on calendar/activities already fixed)
 - Plans and arrangements (very definite and closed, it expresses formality)
- **Past time reference**:
 - To express vividness/immediacy, it may be either extremely colloquial or very formal.
 - Verbs of communication in conversations or letter-writing.

Present Progressive:

Marked with the *be -ing* combination, the modification adds the meaning of "action-in-the-middle-of-its-process"

- **Present time reference**:
 - Action in progress at the time of speaking (normally not finished).
 - The ideas "Present simple = habitual action" and "Present Progressive = current action" are not part of the meaning of the verbs, rather it is contextualization the deciding factor.
- **Future time reference** (adverbial/contextual specification always needed):
 - Unfinished action already started
 - Plans or arrangement (present simple is too formal).
- **Past time reference**:
 - To express vividness and/or immediacy in formal writing or informal conversation: *Three weeks ago, I'm walking along the street when a man comes to me and...*
- **Timeless reference**:
 - Frequent actions (adverbial required) expressed in an emphatic

subjective form. Sometimes used to express annoyance, disapproval or surprise or the contrary.

Past Simple:

Marked with the *-ed₁* inflection, the action or event is seen as remote from the speaker's perspective.

- Past time reference:

- Actions occurred in the past, usually finished.
- With some adverbials, the idea of "frequency of occurrence" is added to the verb.

- Future time reference:

- Future-in-the-past: the event is future in relation to another past point
"Ben asked him to hurry because his plane left at 5"
- Hypothetical reference, idea of counterfactuality: With linkers "if/as if/only/I wish/it's time". The proposition has the value of being remote from actual or future realization (distancing effect).

- Present time reference:

- It is called the attitudinal past because it is used to express the speaker's attitude, for instance, in requests, to make them more distant, formal and polite: *"I wanted to ask you something"*

Past Progressive:

Marked with the combination *be -ing* (action-in-the-middle-of-its-process) and the *-ed₁* inflection (remote).

- Past time reference:

- Usually frame for a shorter action: *"I was having a bath when the phone rang"*
- Also in past descriptive narrative contexts: *"The sun was rising. Cars were already moving along the streets..."*
- Habitual reference with adverbial/contextual specification: marked emphatic subjective information, either negative or positive.

- Future-in-the-past reference: Hypothetical clauses, idea of counterfactuality.

- Present time reference:

- Attitudinal past progressive: polite requests with present reference.

Present Perfect Simple:

Marked with the *have -ed₂* combination, it expresses that there are two points of reference, one of them is anterior, when the action began to take place, the other one is posterior, included in the speaker's present perspective and still relevant.

- Present time reference:

- It links the past point (beginning of the action) with the present point, when the action is still relevant.
- The action may still be relevant either because it continues up to the moment of speaking (continuative perfect) or because the result of the past action is relevant at the time of speaking (resultative perfect) or because the action is a habit continuing from the past up to the moment of speaking (habitual perfect).

- Past time reference:

- To refer to some indefinite happening occurred in the past: *Have you*

been to America?

- **Future time reference** with adverbial future time clauses: "*Wait till I have finished*"

Present Perfect Progressive :

Marked with the *have -ed₂* combination (two points of relevance) and the *be -ing* combination (action-in-the-middle-of-its-process).

- Present time reference:

- It links an action presented in the middle of its process, occurred or began in the past, with a present point to which the action is relevant. It may be a continuative, resultative or habitual perfect, as above.

- Past time reference:

- Contexts which refer to some indefinite action prior to the speaker's present perspective.

The Semantic of Modal verbs

Two types of modality:

- **Knowledge modality:** Predictions about the truth of some fact.
- **Influence modality:** Necessity or possibility of an action being influenced by the speaker or the circumstances.

Knowledge Modality:

They are concerned with *the truth value of propositions*. They establish a classification in terms of possibility and necessity. These two poles can then be a *conjecture* or a *deduction*; then these ones can be either neutral or tentative.

- Neutral possibility: CAN (deduction) and MAY (conjecture, guess-work)

Can as "capacity" or "ability": prediction of qualities inherent in person involved; the idea of capacity/ability is included in the main verb, not in the modal aux.

- **Tentative possibility:** COULD (deduction) or MIGHT (conjecture); they are more hypothetical and hesitant predictions.

- Neutral necessity: MUST (deduction) and WILL (conjecture)

SHALL is a formal variant of WILL.

BE GOING TO is interchangeable with WILL in many contexts; stylistically, it is more colloquial; semantically, it represents the ideas of certainty, inevitability and imminence.

HAVE (GOT) TO is equivalent to MUST (BrE HAVE GOT TO, AmE HAVE TO)

IS TO expresses certainty, inevitable events; it is quite formal (for instance, to announce formal arrangements or public duties).

- Tentative necessity: Remote forms of modals in neutral necessity.

WOULD (conjecture) expresses a tentative prediction; it is used either with past prediction or with present tentative prediction.

SHOULD is the formal first person variant, but it is mainly used as the remote form of MUST. So, it expresses a weaker element of necessity than MUST.

OUGHT TO is the alternative to SHOULD, which is more frequent.

Influence modality:

Necessity or possibility of an action being influenced by the speaker or the circumstances.

There are three semantic fields: *Obligation, Desire and Permission*.

Obligation:

IS TO: strong obligation, formal register, authority of speaker over addressee.

HAVE (GOT) TO: Strong, external obligation (circumstances compel)

MUST: Strong obligation, either because of the authority of the speaker or because of some external obligation.

NEED: Impersonal obligation because of some physical or intellectual requirement.

Desire:

Volition:

SHALL: Strong determination, formal register.

WILL: "Be inclined or prepared to"

WOULD: Polite requests

BE GOING TO: Present decision or intention to act; it is more colloquial than SHALL and WILL.

Advice:

SHOULD and OUGHT TO: Soft, polite obligation; there is even an option of not fulfilling the obligation; SHOULD is more frequent.

HAD BETTER: Fairly strong advice about the best course of action; implication of unpleasant consequences.

Permission:

MAY and CAN: They serve to ask for and give permission; may is more formal.

MIGHT and COULD: They serve only to seek permission; COULD is more frequent.

The Passive Voice

Semantically, the speaker is not interested in how an agent performs an action, but in how an object is affected by a certain process.

Formally, it is created by the addition of the combination of the Auxiliary verb BE + the -ed₂ inflectional morpheme to the main verb.

Syntactically, it is a transformational process in which the subject of the active sentence becomes the passive by-agent, and the active subject becomes the passive subject.

Regular and Irregular Verbs

In English there are two main types of verbs: **regular** and **irregular** verbs.

Regular verbs are those to which **–ed** is added to for the simple past and the past participle:

I counted my books last month – I have two.

I have counted my books again– I still have two.

The –ed forms of regular verbs have three **pronunciations**:

- a. /ɪd/ after verbs ending in /d/ or /t/:
 - a. pat – patted /-tɪd/
- b. /d/ after verbs ending in voiced sounds other than /d/, that is, vowels, nasals, voiced sibilants, /b/ and /g/:
 - a. call – called
- c. /t/ after verbs ending in voiceless sounds other than /t/, that is, /p/ and /k/:
 - a. pass – passed

The spelling of regular verb inflection:

Doubling of consonant before –ing and –ed:

A single consonant letter at the end of the verb is doubled before –ing and –ed when the preceding vowel is stressed and spelled with a single letter:

Bar – barring – barred

The only exceptions in BrE are travel (travelled), program (programmed) and worship, handicap and kidnap (worshipped).

Deletion of and addition of –e

If the verb ends in an unpronounced –e, this –e is normally lost before –ing and –ed.

Before the –s ending, an –e is added after the following letters, representing sibilant consonants:

Pass – watch – buzz – wash – coax

An –e is added after –o in go, go, echo and veto.

Treatment of –y

In verbs ending in a consonant followed by –y, the following changes take place:

- a. –y changes to –ie- before –s: carry – carries
- b. –y changes to “i” before –ed: carry – carried

The –y remains, however, where it follows a vowel letter: stay – stayed.

A different spelling change occurs in verbs whose bases end in –ie:

Die – dying, lie – lying.

Irregular verbs are all those which do not follow the rule above.

There are several types:

1. Those which do not change:
 - 1.1. Cost
 - 1.2. Cut
 - 1.3. Hit
 - 1.4. Hurt
 - 1.5. Let
 - 1.6. Put
 - 1.7. Shut
2. Those which change the vowel sound:
 - 2.1. Become
 - 2.2. Begin
 - 2.3. Come
 - 2.4. Drink
 - 2.5. Find
 - 2.6. Get
 - 2.7. Hold
 - 2.8. Light
 - 2.9. Meet
 - 2.10. Read*
 - 2.11. Ring
 - 2.12. Run
 - 2.13. Shine
 - 2.14. Shoot
 - 2.15. Sing
 - 2.16. Sit
 - 2.17. Stand
 - 2.18. Swim
 - 2.19. Understand
 - 2.20. Win
3. Those which end in “-ought”:
- 3.1. Bring
- 3.2. Buy
- 3.3. Catch
- 3.4. Fight
- 3.5. Teach
- 3.6. Think
4. Those which end in “-t”
 - 4.1. Build
 - 4.2. Feel
 - 4.3. Keep
 - 4.4. Leave
 - 4.5. Lend
 - 4.6. Lose
 - 4.7. Mean
 - 4.8. Send
 - 4.9. Sleep
 - 4.10. Spend
5. Those which end in “-d”
 - 5.1. Have
 - 5.2. Hear
 - 5.3. Make
 - 5.4. Pay
 - 5.5. Say
 - 5.6. Sell
 - 5.7. Tell
6. Those whose past participle end in “-en” or in “-n”:
- 6.1. Beat
- 6.2. Bite
- 6.3. Blow
- 6.4. Break
- 6.5. Choose
- 6.6. Do
- 6.7. Draw
- 6.8. Drive
- 6.9. Eat
- 6.10. Fall
- 6.11. Fly
- 6.12. Forget
- 6.13. Give
- 6.14. Go
- 6.15. Grow
- 6.16. Hide
- 6.17. Know
- 6.18. Lie
- 6.19. Ride
- 6.20. Rise
- 6.21. See
- 6.22. Show
- 6.23. Speak
- 6.24. Steal
- 6.25. Take
- 6.26. Tear
- 6.27. Throw
- 6.28. Wake
- 6.29. Wear
- 6.30. Write

The verb “be” is a bit special:

Be/am/is/are – was/were – been

The following verbs can be regular or irregular:

Burn: burned or burnt

Dream: dreamed or dreamt

Learn: learned or learnt

Smell: smelled or smelt

Activities

1. Identify the modifications present in the following verb groups and explain their uses.
 1. The Earth revolves around the Sun.
 2. Snow fell throughout the day on London.
 3. They have gone ahead with the project.
 4. She is digging in search of an ancient bracelet.
 5. We had been cooking for three hours before their arrival.
 6. I wanted to ask you something now.
 7. Have you ever been to America?
 8. My child is always playing with her computer.
 9. He has been working hard for the money since October.
 10. The fast-ferry was crossing the Straits of Gibraltar early in the morning.

2. What do the following modal verbs add to the meaning of the verb group?
 - They will not wait for us more than ten minutes.
 - He must be mistaken about his daughter's age.
 - You can't be so cheeky to say that.
 - Ben should take two tablets every day.
 - There may be a traffic jam on the motorway this afternoon.
 - I must have the baby vaccinated today.
 - They ought to be silent while the pianist is playing.
 - He will telephone us immediately if he can.
 - With their fast patrol-boats, the police can capture drug-traffickers operating in the Straits.
 - Prices may go up while everyone is on holiday.

3. All the underlined VPs are wrong. Explain why and write the correct form of the VP (1.5 points).
- Jenny has left school in 1981.
 - The moon is going round the earth.
 - Are you believing in God?
 - Have you seen the news on television last night?
 - Can you hear those people? What do they talk about?
 - The Chinese have invented printing.
 - Bob is a friend of mine. I know him for a long time.
 - I like your house. How long are you living there?
 - My mother said to me that my boyfriend was having an accident and he stayed in the General Hospital.
 - It seems difficult to think that I had been arrived here two weeks ago.