

CHAPTER 10

the art of language | the ever-changing verb

It's all about *nouns* and *verbs*. All the other **PARTS OF SPEECH**:

pronouns	adverbs	conjunctions	prepositions
adjectives	articles	interjections	

all relate to *nouns* and *verbs*.

For example:

- **adjectives** describe **nouns**;
- **adverbs** describe **verbs**;
- **articles** define **nouns**, etc.

It makes sense, then, for us to focus now on one of these central **PARTS OF SPEECH: VERBS**. **Nouns** are relatively easy to use, whereas **VERBS** require study. You change the *form* of **VERBS** in the sentence to make yourself understood. It's all about being heard, being understood, and effectively saying what you have to say.

You wouldn't say:

I reading the newspaper.

We wouldn't know what you mean. You have to use the right **VERB** in the *right form*. Instead, you would say:

I read the newspaper.

Notice that we've corrected the **incorrect VERB** form "**reading**" to the correct verb form "**read**." The **VERB** always changes as it *responds* to two things:



- the **subject** of the sentence;
- **time**. The **VERB** tells us *when* something happens: in the present, in the past, or in the future.

the ever-changing verb

You already know how to use **VERBS**. You do it correctly all the time. For example, fill in the missing **VERBS** below. You'll see that the **VERBS** change and that you already know how to make those changes.

EXERCISES ON VERBS

1. I like _____ the newspaper.
2. Yesterday, I _____ the newspaper.
3. Tomorrow morning, I _____ the newspaper.
4. Almost every day, I _____ the newspaper.
5. When I _____ the newspaper this morning, I saw an article about a student studying grammar.

You see from the verbs you filled in above that the verb always changes, always *responds to* two things:

- the **subject** of the sentence;
- **time**: The **VERB** tells us *when* something happens: in the present, in the past, or in the future.

the base

IF the **verb** is ever-changing, **IT ALSO** has a home base, a basic form, a place it starts from. We call this **THE BASE**. Here are **THE BASE** forms of several verbs:

drive	walk
read	sing
speak	text
feel	

EXERCISES ON THE BASE

Write the base form for each of the five verbs below:

verb in another form	base form of the verb
1. I had written a good essay.	_____
2. I went to the club last night.	_____
3. I wanted a car for graduation!	_____
4. I played the trombone in high school.	_____
5. I will play the saxophone in college.	_____

to conjugate

What does “**TO CONJUGATE**” mean? What can it do for us? When you **CONJUGATE** a **verb**, you take that **verb** from its base form, and you **change it** into the form you want. Remember: the **verb** changes from the base *in response* to two things:

- the **subject** of the sentence
- **time**: The **VERB** tells us *when* something happens:
in the present, in the past, or in the future.

When you **CONJUGATE** a verb, you do both of these things. You make the **verb** *agree* with the **subject** it goes with, and you put the **verb** in the right form regarding time: the past, the present, or the future.

Here’s how we **CONJUGATE** the **verb** “read” in the present tense.

READ	PRESENT TENSE
<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
I read	We read
You read	You (plural) read
He She/It reads	They read

In English, the conjugation of verbs is often pretty simple. The verb doesn't change much. As you can see from above, we have six "persons" in English.

I	= first person singular	We	= first person plural
You	= second person singular	You	= second person plural
He/She/It	= third person singular	They	= third person plural

EXERCISES ON CONJUGATION

Now, you do it. Fill in the **verb** form of "speak" that goes with the pronoun below:

SPEAK	PRESENT TENSE
<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
1. I _____	4. We _____
2. You _____	5. You (plural) _____
3. He/She/It _____	6. They _____

See? You already know how to do it. You've just conjugated the **verb** "speak" in the **PRESENT TENSE**. You know how to **CONJUGATE verbs**.

verb agreement

When talking or writing, you wouldn't say:

~~I speaks.~~

You would say:

He speaks.

-or-

I speak.

You make the **verb** ("speak") **AGREE** with the **subject** ("I" or "He").

If your Professor writes on your paper that you have a **VERB AGREEMENT** problem (*να*), you've used a **verb** that doesn't **AGREE** with the **subject**.

EXERCISES ON VERB AGREEMENT

Fix the examples below so the **verb AGREES** with the **subject**:

- We ~~reads~~ the newspaper.
We _____ the newspaper.
- They ~~walks~~ to class from the bus stop every morning.
They _____ to class from the bus stop every morning.
- I ~~wanted~~ to have lasagna for dinner tonight.
I _____ to have lasagna for dinner tonight.
- We ~~return~~ to bring back the equipment tomorrow.
We _____ to bring back the equipment tomorrow.
- My mother ~~will buy~~ me a new pair of shoes yesterday.
My mother _____ me a new pair of shoes yesterday.

verb tense

You know how to make the **verb agree** with the **subject**. The **verb** also tells us **when** something happens. An example:

I **walk** around campus looking for my dog.

Yesterday, I **walked** around the campus so much my feet hurt.

“**Walk**” is in the **PRESENT TENSE** {It *happens* now, in the present}

“**Walked**” is in the **PAST TENSE** {It *happened* in the past}

Often, we add “**ed**” to the end of the verb to make the past tense.

Here's a **CONJUGATION** of the **verb** "walk" in the **past tense**¹:

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
I walked	We walked
You walked	You (plural) walked
He/She/It walked	They walked

AND, here's a **CONJUGATION** in the **future tense**.

Here, we use the **helping verb** "will"² to form the future tense.

WALK	FUTURE TENSE
<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
I will walk	We will walk
You will walk	You (plural) will walk
He/She/It will walk	They will walk

EXERCISES ON VERB TENSE AND CONJUGATION

Fill in the **verb** below in the correct **TENSE**. Do you know the old saying, "Don't cry over spilled milk?" Using the correct tense for "cry," fill in the examples below.

1. My baby brother spills his milk, and he _____.
2. Yesterday, when my baby brother spilled his milk, he _____.
3. I bet that tomorrow, when my baby brother spills his milk, he _____.

Let's try one in the **first person**: "I." Let's use the **verb** "text."

4. I _____ my friend, Louise. {present tense}
5. Yesterday, when Louise hadn't called me, I _____ her. {past tense}
6. Tomorrow, as usual, I expect I _____ Louise a few times. {future tense}

¹Spanish speakers often don't hear this "ED" past tense sound because of the way Spanish works, and because we often do not pronounce the "ED" clearly. If Spanish is your first language, or you grew up with Spanish, your particular attention to this "ED" could help you.

²See the **Index of Helping Verbs** on page 255 for all the **helping verbs** in English.

Got it? The **verb**, the ever-changing **verb**, does two things. You've done them both. The verb:

- *agrees* with the **subject**—we call this: **verb agreement**
- *tells* us when something happens—we call this: **verb tense**

the verb “be”

The verb “**be**” is a special case. You will need to know how to use it. We call the **verb “be”** a *passive* verb. “**Be**” is the *only* passive verb in English. You won't have to learn any other passive verbs.

Active verbs describe *action*; the **passive verb** does not describe any *action*; it indicates **being**, indicates that something exists, that it *is*.

Let's look at the **CONJUGATION** of “**be**” in the present, past, and future tenses.

BE	PRESENT TENSE
<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
I <i>am</i>	We <i>are</i>
You <i>are</i>	You (plural) <i>are</i>
He/She/It <i>is</i>	They <i>are</i>

BE	PAST TENSE
<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
I <i>was</i>	We <i>were</i>
You <i>were</i>	You (plural) <i>were</i>
He/She/It <i>was</i>	They <i>were</i>

BE	FUTURE TENSE
<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
I <i>will be</i>	We <i>will be</i>
You <i>will be</i>	You (plural) <i>will be</i>
He/She/It <i>will be</i>	They <i>will be</i>

Again, the verb “**be**” is the *only* *passive verb* in English. **Every other verb** is an *active verb*. What's the difference between the *passive verb* (**BE**) and *active verbs* (all other verbs)?

- **ACTIVE VERBS** show **action**, they show the *subject* acting.

SUBJECT

Bill **hit** the ball.

ACTIVE VERB

The subject "Bill" acts. He **hits** the ball.

SUBJECT

Sandra **loves** her dog.

ACTIVE VERB

The subject "Sandra" acts. She **loves** her dog.

• **PASSIVE VERBS** show something *acting on* the subject.

SUBJECT

The ball **was hit** by Bill.

PASSIVE VERB

The subject "ball" does not act. It **does** not do something. It is acted upon "by Bill."

SUBJECT

Her dog **was loved** by Sandra.

PASSIVE VERB

The subject "dog" does not act. It **does** not do something. It is acted upon "by Sandra."

active verbs

versus

the passive verb

This section on **passive verbs** will give you a tool to help you avoid a lot of errors in your writing. One simple trick can save you a lot of work.

The simple trick:

In general, not always, but usually, *use* **ACTIVE VERBS**.

Which is the better sentence?

Billy **hit** the ball. |—— ACTIVE VERB

The ball **was hit** by Billy. |—— PASSIVE VERB

When you use **ACTIVE VERBS**, you correct a lot of other problems, and you correct a lot of awkwardness in your sentence.

When my girlfriend *asked* me if I would *go* to the movies with her or with someone else, I told her I was too busy to go with anyone.

—— MOSTLY ACTIVE VERBS

When I *was asked* by my girlfriend, *was* she the one I would go to the movies with, she had *to be* told by me that I *was* too busy to go with anyone.

—— ALL PASSIVE VERBS

A Quick Trick:

When you want to change a passive verb into an active verb, you will often find the active verb already in the sentence but in the wrong form.

Watch this:

When I **was asked** by my girlfriend . . .

When my girlfriend **asked** . . .

- Change the **passive verb** “*was asked*” into the **active verb** “*asked*.”
- Ask yourself: What does the **subject** of the sentence do? What does “my girlfriend” do? She **asks** me . . .

Sometimes, you want a **passive verb**:

The sky is blue.

But, most often, you want an **active verb**:

My dad *cut* down the tree that *blocked* our window. |—— ACTIVE VERBS
 The tree that *had been* blocking our window *was cut* down by my dad. |—— PASSIVE VERBS

BE as a helping verb

In the section “Active Verbs vs. The Passive Verb, on page 136, when we **CONJUGATED** the verb “walk” in the **future tense** (I *will* walk, you *will* walk, etc.), we used the **helping verb “will”** to form the **future tense**.

Sometimes, we use **BE** as a **helping verb** to form other tenses. For example:

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------|
| I am walking to class. | helping verb: am ; | verb: walking |
| I was drinking too much coffee. | helping verb: was ; | verb: drinking |
| I will be coming late to the party. | helping verb: be ; | verb: coming |

EXERCISES ON ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VERBS

Indicate the **active verbs** and the **passive verbs** below:

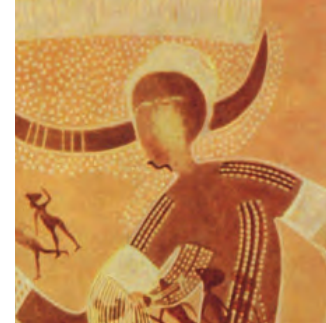
- I typed Sandy’s paper for her. _____ (active or passive?)
- Many of Sandy’s errors were corrected by me. _____ (active or passive?)
- Sandy’s paper on solar eclipses was fascinating. _____ (active or passive?)
- Sandy said she would take me out for dinner. _____ (active or passive?)
- Sandy agreed with all the corrections I made. _____ (active or passive?)

Chapter Review: The Ever-Changing Verb

It's all about *nouns* and *verbs*. All the other **PARTS OF SPEECH: pronouns, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, adjectives, articles and interjections all** relate to *nouns* and *verbs*.

The **VERB** always changes as it *responds* to two things:

- the **subject** of the sentence
- **time:** The **VERB** tells us *when* something happens: in the present, in the past, or in the future.



When you **CONJUGATE** a verb, you do both of these things:

- You make the **verb** *agree* with the **subject** it goes with;
- you put the **verb** in the right form regarding time: the past, the present, or the future.

The **verb** also tells us *when* something happens.

“**Be**” is the *only* passive verb in English.

the **passive verb—be—**does not describe any **action**; it indicates **being**.

ACTIVE VERBS show **action**, they show the *subject acting*

PASSIVE VERBS show something *acting on the subject*.

In general, not always, but usually, **use ACTIVE VERBS**.

We also use **BE** as a helping verb.