Verbs

Verbs show actions (walk, run, write) or a state of being (be, feel, smell, and seem). Verbs have several characteristics: form, tense, person, number, voice, and mood. Some verbs can stand alone in sentence; other verbs are "helping verbs." Helping verbs are forms of the words do, be, and have, or the words shall/will, might/must, would/could/should, and can/may. They combine with other verbs to form a complete verb phrase (e.g. was sleeping). Still other verbs are called "linking verbs." Linking verbs link the subject of a sentence to a description that follows. Linking verbs include forms of the verb BE and the verbs seem, appear, become, grow, remain, stay, prove, feel, look, smell, sound, and taste.

Verb forms

Verbs have four primary forms.

Present Form—the main entry in the dictionary
Past Form—created by using the present form and adding –d or –ed (for regular verbs)
Past Participle Form—created by using the past form and adding a helping verb (for regular verbs)
Present Participle Form—created by adding –ing to the present form and adding a helping verb (for regular verbs)

If a verb is "regular," it follows the forms above. If a verb is "irregular," a dictionary will list the verb's present form, past form, and past participle form, in that order (go, went, gone). If the dictionary lists only two forms (wash, washed), then the past and the past participle forms are the same.

Present Tense

In addition to forms, verbs also have tenses that show the time an action occurred. The most common tenses are the present tense, the past tense, the future tense, the perfect tenses, and the progressive tenses.

Rule #1:

Use the present tense to show action that is occurring now. Create the present tense by using the present form of the verb.

Example of Rule #1:

I work in the Accounting Department.

Past Tense

Rule #2:

Use the past tense to show action that was completed in the past. Create the past tense by using the past form of the verb.

Example of Rule #2:

Last year, I worked in the Accounting Department.
**Future Tense**

**Rule #3:**

Use the future tense to show action that is expected to occur in the future. Create the future tense by putting the helping verb will before the present form of the verb.

**Example of Rule #3:**

I will work in the Finance Department after my assignment.

**Present Perfect Tense**

**Rule #4:**

Use the present perfect tense to show action that started in the past and is continuing or is linked to the present. Create the present perfect tense by putting the helping verb has or have before the past participle form of the verb.

**Examples of Rule #4:**

I have worked in the Communications Department for most of my career.
Marilynne has worked in the Public Health Department for the past nine years.

**Past Perfect Tense**

**Rule #5:**

Use the past perfect tense to show action that was completed before another past action. Create the past perfect tense by putting the helping verb had before the past participle form of the verb.

**Example of Rule #5:**

Marilynne had worked in Human Resources before she joined the Public Health Department.

**Future Perfect Tense**

**Rule #6:**

Use the future perfect tense to show action that will be completed before another future action. Create the future perfect tense by putting the helping verbs will have before the past participle form of the verb.

**Example of Rule #6:**

I will have worked for this firm for twenty-five years.

**Present Progressive Tense**

**Rule #7:**
Use the present progressive tense to show an action that is occurring now and is continuing. Create the present progressive tense by using the present participle and putting the helping verb is, am, are, was, were, or be before it.

**Example of Rule #7:**

I am working as hard as I can to complete this project.

**Past Progressive Tense**

**Rule #8:**

Use the past progressive tense to show a continuing action that occurred in the past. Create the past progressive tense by using the present participle and putting the helping verb was or were before it.

**Examples of Rule #8:**

I was working at my computer when the fire alarm sounded.

**Future Progressive Tense**

**Rule #9:**

Use the future progressive tense to show a continuing future action. Create the future progressive tense by using the present participle and putting the helping verbs will be before it.

**Example of Rule #9:**

I will be working on this report until next year.

**Verb person and number**

Verbs are also characterized by person (1st, 2nd, or 3rd) and number (singular or plural).

**Rule #10:**

Make sure the subject of the sentence and the verb agree in person and in number.

**Examples of Rule #10:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st person</strong></td>
<td>I work</td>
<td>we work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd person</strong></td>
<td>you work</td>
<td>you work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd person</strong></td>
<td>he, she, it, one works</td>
<td>they work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Only 3rd person singular has an –s or –es ending.

**Verb voice**
If the performer of the action is the subject of the sentence, the verb is in active voice. If the performer of the action is not named or is not the subject of the sentence, the verb is in passive voice.

*Active:* Judy conducted the meeting.
*Passive:* The meeting was conducted by Judy.

**Rule #11:**

As a general rule, make the performer of the action the subject of the sentence and write in active voice. Words that have the following endings usually signal passive voice: –ion, –ment, –ance, –ence, and –able. To change passive voice to active voice (1) locate the action, (2) locate the performer/actor, and (3) put the performer/actor before the action.

**Examples of Rule #11:**

*Passive:* The wallet was found in the hallway.
*Active:* He found the wallet in the hallway.

**Verb mood**

Moods are changes in the verb to show the speaker's or writer's attitude. English has three moods: the indicative mood (states a fact or opinion or asks a question), the imperative mood (gives a command, request, or warning), and the subjunctive mood (indicates something that is not a fact—a wish, desire, plan, or thought).

**Indicative Mood (active voice):** The writer holds the pen.

**Indicative Mood** (passive voice): The pen is held by the writer.

**Imperative Mood:** Hold the pen.

**Subjunctive Mood:** If the pen was held . . .

**Rule #12:**

Keep the mood consistent within a sentence or among related sentences.

**Examples of Rule #12:**

_Correct:* The bank approved the loan. The client signed the papers.
_Incorrect:* The bank approved the loan. The papers were signed by the client.