Tutorial for Verbs

**What are they?**

**Except for *be,* all English** [**verbs**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#v) **have five forms.**

1. **Base Form:** visit   
   Many designers visit Milan for fashion shows each year.
2. **Past** [**Tense:**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#t) visited   
   Reagan and Gorbachev visited Iceland for a summit meeting.
3. **Past Participle:** visited   
   Students have visited the state capitol every spring for decades.
4. **Present Participle:** visiting   
   His cousin from Iowa is visiting this week.
5. **-s Form:** visits   
   Maria visits her grandmother in Puerto Rico as often as possible.

**How to find errors**

**In some situations, you may be unsure of which verb form to use. Here are guidelines to help you identify the most common errors:**

1. **Present-**[**tense**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#t) **verbs with third-**[**person**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#p) **singular** [**subjects**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#s) **that lack the *-s* or *-es* ending.** A third-person singular subject can consist of a singular [noun,](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#n) a singular [pronoun,](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#p) or a singular [indefinite pronoun.](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#i)

**Incorrect**

Mr. King teach English.

(With a present-tense verb and the third-person singular noun *Mr. King,* this sentence requires the *-s* verb form.)

1. **Omitted *-ed* endings on past-tense verbs and past participles.** For regular verbs, both the past tense and the past participle are formed by adding *-ed* or *-d* to the base form of the verb. Some speakers do not pronounce the *-ed* endings of verbs and may unintentionally omit these endings in writing.

**Incorrect**

He had talk to the safety inspectors about plant security.

(The past participle of the verb *talk* requires an *-ed* ending.)

1. **Common errors in irregular verbs such as *lay* and *lie* or *sit* and *set.*** These verb pairs have similar forms and are often confused, but each verb has a distinct meaning: *lie* means to recline or rest on a surface, while *lay* means to put or place something; *sit* means to be seated, as on a chair, while *set* means to place something on a surface.

**Incorrect**

Our dog likes to lay on the couch all afternoon.

(This is the incorrect verb. The dog likes to rest on the couch; the correct verb is *lie.)*

1. **Look at** [**active**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#a) **and** [**passive voices**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#p) **to be sure you have made the best choice.** The active voice expresses ideas more vividly and emphatically than the passive voice does. Whenever possible, use the active voice in your sentences; passive voice sentences may seem indirect, as if the writer is purposely withholding information.

**Passive**

Tea was thrown into Boston Harbor by the colonists.

(The passive voice makes this sentence less vivid.)

Use the passive voice in two situations: when you do not know or do not want to reveal who performed the action of the verb, or when you want to emphasize the object of the action rather than the person who caused it.

**Passive**

Several historic buildings had been torn down.

(The passive voice is appropriate here if the writer does not know or wish to reveal who tore the buildings down, or if the writer wishes to emphasize the fact that the buildings were destroyed rather than the destroyers.)

1. **Look closely at verb tenses when writing about literary works.** It is customary to use the present tense when writing about literary works, no matter how long ago they were written.

**Incorrect**

Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* depicted a tremendously varied group of travelers.

1. **Look at past tenses to determine whether you have used the correct one.** The past tenses distinguish between the immediate past and the less immediate past. The past perfect tense, formed by adding *had* to the past participle, indicates an action that was completed before another action or a specified time.

**Unclear**

Roberto finished three research papers when the semester ended.

(The past tense implies that Roberto finished all three right at the end of the semester.)

**Revised**

Roberto had finished three research papers when the semester ended.

(By the end of the semester, he had written three papers.)

**How to correct errors**

**Here are some guidelines for correcting the most common verb form errors:**

1. **Use *-s* or *-es* endings for present-**[**tense**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#t) **verbs with third-**[**person**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#p) **singular** [**subjects.**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#s) A third-person singular subject can consist of a singular [noun,](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#n) a singular [pronoun,](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#p) or a singular [indefinite pronoun.](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#i)

Mr. King teaches English.

1. **Add any omitted *-ed* endings on past-tense verbs and past participles.** For regular verbs, both the past tense and the past participle are formed by adding *-ed* or *-d* to the base form of the verb. Some speakers do not pronounce the *-ed* endings of verbs and may unintentionally omit these endings in writing.

He had talked to the safety inspectors about plant security.

1. **Learn to recognize and correct common errors in irregular verbs such as *lay* and *lie* or *sit* and *set.*** These verb pairs have similar forms and are often confused, but each verb has a distinct meaning: *lie* means to recline or rest on a surface, while *lay* means to put or place something; *sit* means to be seated, as on a chair, while set means to place something on a surface.

Our dog likes to lie on the couch all afternoon.

1. **Whenever possible, use the** [**active voice**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#a) **in your sentences.** The active voice expresses ideas more vividly and emphatically than the [passive voice](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/EXERCISECENTRAL/StaticContent/HTML/glossary.html#p) does. Passive voice sentences may seem indirect, as if the writer is purposely withholding information.

Tea was thrownThe colonists threw tea into Boston Harbor.

Use the passive voice in two situations: when you do not know or do not want to reveal who performed the action of the verb, or when you want to emphasize the object of the action rather than the person who caused it.

**Passive**

Several historic buildings had been torn down.

(The passive voice is appropriate here if the writer does not know or wish to reveal who tore the buildings down, or if the writer wishes to emphasize the fact that the buildings were destroyed rather than the destroyers.)

1. **Use the present tense when writing about literary works. It is customary to use the present tense for this purpose, even though the works were written in the past.**

Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* depicts a tremendously varied group of travelers.

1. **Use the past tense for the immediate past and the past perfect tense for the less immediate past.** The past perfect tense, formed by adding *had* to the past participle, indicates an action that was completed before another action or a specified time.

**Past Tense**

Roberto finished three research papers when the semester ended.

(The past tense implies that Roberto finished all three right at the end of the semester.)

**Past Perfect**

Roberto had finished three research papers when the semester ended.

(The past perfect tense implies that by the end of the semester, he had written three papers.)