

Section 1 is What to do

2 is tense

3 is modals

4 is perfect

5 is continuous

6 is stative

7 is voice

8 is transitive

> 1, 0, What to do

VERBALIST is an attempt to capture in a program everything an English speaker knows about forming verbs and verb phrases. Play with it by clicking on the buttons. See if you can catch it out (as you will sooner or later). In the process you will be bringing to the surface all the subconscious knowledge you have about how these aspects of the English language work.

As soon as any form is chosen which requires a 3rd person -S, an -ING form or a past tense or past participle, a relevant rule will appear explaining what the program has one to inflect the verb.

If you try every possible combination of the switches, you will have created 292 different forms of a single verb. If you combine these with all the possible pronoun and modal verb selections, you will have made 6132 different verb phrases from a single verb. Many of them may seem unlikely to occur in normal conversation. Try to find possible contexts in which somebody might actually use the phrases you create.

>2, 0, Tense

The word tense refers to the way words are written, not to what they mean. English has just two tenses, past and not-past (often called present). These two tenses can be used to talk about many different times. We can use the past to talk about the future, as in "It's time we went home ..." or the present to talk about the past as in "Plato tells us that ..."

We can create complex verb phrases by using modals, perfect aspect, continuous aspect, and passive voice. These forms are often loosely referred to as the different 'tenses' of English.

>3, 0, Modal

The modal verbs are words like SHALL, CAN or MUST. They do not take a third-person s-ending. They have many different meanings.

>4, 0, Perfect

The perfect aspect is made by putting a form of the verb HAVE into the verb phrase. The next form after it must be a past participle (like EATEN or WALKED). The present perfect is often used to talk about events in the past when we are interested in the results of the event, not in when or how it occurred, for example: "I have lost my watch. Has anybody seen it?"

>5, 0, Continuous

The continuous aspect is made by putting a form of the verb BE into the verb phrase, followed by an -ING form, sometimes called a present participle.

"We are waiting for a 59 bus."

"We must have been waiting for hours."

You can use it to refer to something that is happening at the same time that you are speaking, or to emphasize that something is temporary:

"We are living in a small flat, but we hope to move soon."

The past continuous is often used when one event is interrupted by another:

"What were you doing when the lights went out?"

>6, 0, Stative

Most verbs describe events which can start or stop, but some verbs describe states which can start but which cannot be stopped in a deliberate way. These cannot normally be used in continuous forms.

Click on the Stative Verbs button when the Continuous button is active to see a list of all the stative verbs in the database.

>7, 0, Passive

Verbs are usually in the ACTIVE voice, but they can also be made PASSIVE. The passive voice is used when we are more interested in what happened to somebody or something than in the causes. It can be used to make statements vague or to hide the identity of those who are responsible for something, as in: "A lot of money has been wasted on this project."

To make a verb passive, make the original object into the new subject and, if necessary, put the original subject into a phrase with BY. For instance the slogan "Top people read the Times" becomes "The Times is read by top people."

>8, 0, Transitive

Transitive verbs have an object. With some verbs you must include the object, "I want some more", while with others the object can be left out, "Let's eat.". Some verbs can have two objects, "I sent my mother a birthday card." In this sentence "my mother" is the indirect object and "a birthday card" is the direct object. Transitive verbs can be made passive. Intransitive verbs cannot have an object, and so they cannot be made passive.

Click on the Intransitive button while the Passive button is active to see a list of intransitive verbs in the database.