**CCSU Writing Center**

***Grammar Guides***

**VERBS**

By definition, a verb identifies an action or state of being, like *run* or *is*. This sounds simple enough, right? A few factors, however, complicate verb usage. In order to utilize verbs correctly, you must consider both the *subject* (who or what is doing or being) and the specific time in which the action happens (past, present, future, etc.). Together, these elements result in the most common verb usage errors and will be this guide’s focus.

**Subject/Verb Agreement**

When deciding which basic verb form to use, you must consider a couple things about the *subject*: which point of view is being used and is the subject singular or plural. Keep in mind that, although mass nouns (like bread or population) are often made up of many things, they are grammatically singular. Verb confusion often occurs with the verb “to be” and the (present) *third person* point of view.

**root verb: be**

**POV Singular Plural**

1st I *am*/*was* we *are*/were

2nd you *are*/*were* you *are*/were

3rd it *is*/*was* they *are*/*were*

**root verb: walk**

**POV Singular Plural**

1st I *walk* we *walk*

2nd you *walk* you *walk*

3rd he *walk****s*** they *walk*

Notice how the third person singular verb gains

an “s,” while all other forms remain the same.

Sometimes the words between a subject and verb confuse these simple rules, so identify your subject and consider its POV and number before determining which basic **verb** form to use. Here are some examples:

The man with all the snakes and lizards **walks** to the pet store every day.

The store **is** like his second home.

His wife, who must have a tremendous amount of patience to deal with all those pets, **drives** him on Sundays.

These rules apply to all subjects and verbs, so also remember to consider them for dependent clauses, which do not express complete thoughts, but still contain both subjects and **verbs**.

I **think** she **is** sweet, but Ian **thinks** they **are** both a little weird.

Although the animal collection **seems** a little odd, the man **loves** his pets, and they **love** him.

**Verb Tense**

The next thing to consider is when in time the action takes place. The basic difference here is betweenpresent and past. For *regular verbs*, you can signify the *simple past* simply by adding an “ed,” while *irregular verbs* each have unique forms.

When you want to indicate an action’s specifics, tense gets a bit more complicated, but once you know the basics, it really just comes down to putting all the right pieces together. The result is a *verb phrase*, like *would have been walking*.

**To start**, here are the basic verb forms:

**Tense Regular Irregular**

root form walk break

simple present walk(s) break(s)

simple past walk**ed** broke

past participle walk**ed** broken

present participle walk**ing** break**ing**

Both *simple past* and *simple present* function alone, meaning you can just add them after your subject. For example:

Kelly Ann usually **drives** to the store, but yesterday she **walked.**

She **walked** into the store and **broke** the lamp.

**Next**, if you want to convey more specific times of action, you need to add *auxiliaries* (or “helping verbs”), which always appear BEFORE the main verb. Together, auxiliaries and the correct **main verb** form create *aspects* (perfect and progressive) that indicate when specifically an action happens.

***Present perfect*** indicates an action that began in the past and still continues OR that was recently completed.

has/have + **past participle**

Kelly Ann has **talked** about that lamp ever since she broke it.

The store owners have **decided** not to charge her for it.

***Past perfect*** indicates anaction already completed at some point in the past.

had + **past participle**

By the time they told her this, she had **saved** the money to pay for it.

***Present progressive*** indicates an action currently in progress.

am/is/are + **present participle**

She is **walking** there now to thank them.

They are **waiting** for her to arrive.

***Past progressive*** indicates an action in progress at some point in the past.

was/were + **present participle**

They were **rearranging** the store when Kelly Ann broke the lamp.

***Present perfect progressive*** indicates an action currently in progress that began in the past.

has/have been + **present participle**

The owners have been **updating** the store for several months now.

***Past perfect progressive*** indicates an action in progress in the past, prior to another past action.

had been + present participle

Kelly Ann had been **walking** into the store when she realized it was in disarray.

**The final** piece of a verb phrase is a *modal*, which indicates an action of future, ability, possibility, permission, or obligation (will, shall, can, could, would, might, may, should, must, has/have to, and ought to). Add the modal BEFORE all the other elements of the verb phrase. For example:

Kelly Ann could **have been walking** recklessly when she broke the lamp, but she clearly wasn’t.

Although you do not often need all of these parts, whichever ones you do need should always appear in this order:

**modal + has/have/had + is/are/be/was/were/been + verb**

Examples:

She **has been waiting** all day to talk to them.

She **will thank** them for not making her pay.

They **should be thanking** her for her patience.

***Additional Resources***

**When in doubt, look it up!**

Bacon, Nora. *The Well-Crafted Sentence (A Writer’s Guide to Style)*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford, 2013. Print.

Vitto, Cindy. *Grammar by Design*. 2nd ed. Buffalo: Broadview, 2006. Print.

***Additional Resources***

When in doubt, look it up!

*Oxford English Dictionary* online

http://www.oed.com

*The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person’s Guide to Writing in the 21st Century* by Steven Pinker.

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**Some Irregular Verbs**

**Root Simple Past**

**form past participle**

bear bore borne

begin began begun

bite bit bitten

choose chose chosen

do did done

draw drew drawn

drink drank drunk

drive drove driven

eat ate eaten

fall fell fallen

fly flew flown

forget forgot forgotten

get got gotten

give gave given

go went gone

grow grew grown

hide hid hidden

know knew known

lay laid laid

lie lay lain

prove proved proven

ride rode ridden

ring rang rung

rise rose risen

see saw seen

shake shook shaken

speak spoke spoken

swim swam swum

take took taken

tear tore torn

throw threw thrown

wear wore worn

write wrote written