Subjects and Verb Tenses

1. Every complete sentence must contain a subject and a verb. The subject is always the person, place, or thing doing an action. The simplest form of a verb is always an action.

   The cat meowed at her kittens.

   In this sentence, the cat is the thing doing an action, meowing. Therefore, the cat is the subject, and meowed is the verb.

2. Sometimes it can be difficult to locate a subject:

   On a hill under an old, gnarled tree howled a wolf.

   If you aren't sure what the subject is, try to find the verb. In this case, the verb (action) is howled. Now, ask yourself, "What howled?" The answer: a wolf howled. Therefore, in this sentence, wolf is the subject, and howled is the verb.

3. When an action happens habitually, or is a statement that is generally true with no time limit, the simple present tense is used. With third-person singular subjects, verbs in simple present tense have an -s ending:

   I like sushi. She likes sushi. We eat sushi every week.

4. Could, should, would, may, might, shall, will, can, and could are another kind of verb called modals or delayed action verbs. They pass the action onto a base verb:

   You should see me now.
   I could take a nap.

   In cases like these, both modal and base verb together (should see, could take) are considered one verb.

5. Other kinds of verbs are used to link a subject to an adjective, such as present and past tense forms of be (am, is, are, was, were), appear, and seem.

   I am ready to eat.
   You seem angry with me.

   Both ready and angry are adjectives, used to describe the subjects I and you. The verbs am and seem link the subjects with their adjectives.
6. If the word “to” comes before the base form of a verb, it is not a verb! Instead, it is called an **infinitive**. Infinitives have no tense and cannot be active verbs.

   I *am* happy to *be* here.

   Here, the main verb is *am* and *be* is not a verb because it comes after the word *to*.

7. The following **auxiliary verbs** are always verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Verb</th>
<th>am</th>
<th>are</th>
<th>be</th>
<th>been</th>
<th>is</th>
<th>was</th>
<th>were</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be:</td>
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<td>Have:</td>
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<td>have</td>
<td>had</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8. One verb form can be particularly confusing: **passive voice**. The purpose of the passive voice is to shift attention away from the subject to the object, or recipient, of the action:

   Mistakes *were made* by the government.

   The essay *was written* skillfully.

   The linking verb (*was, were*) and the main verb (*made, written*) make one verb.

9. Verbs often contain more than one word. The **present perfect tense**, which shows an action was completed in the past but is still true now, contains the word *have/has* followed by the **past participle**. Here are some examples of past participles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Form</th>
<th>Simple Past</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>swim</td>
<td>swam</td>
<td>swum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td>thought</td>
<td>thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ride</td>
<td>rode</td>
<td>ridden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   I *have swum* in the ocean before.

   He *has ridden* a motorcycle for years.

10. The **past perfect tense** is formed by combining the simple past of have (*had*) with the past participle. The past perfect is used for a past action in relation to another action at a different time in the past.

    Our team *had scored* five more goals to win when the buzzer sounded.

    The bus *had stopped* by the time I woke up.
11. The **simple future tense** discusses future events and is created by adding the base form of a verb after *will*:

   I *will call* you tomorrow.
   The bill *will come* Thursday.

12. The **present progressive tense** is used to show an ongoing action right now. It is formed by adding the present tense of *be* (am, is, are) to the **present participle**. Here are some examples of present participles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base Form</th>
<th>Present Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>call</td>
<td>calling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td>thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eat</td>
<td>eating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   I *am calling* you in response to your invitation.
   You *are thinking* about it.
   We *are eating* right now. (Please call back later!)

13. Three other progressive tenses include the **past progressive**, the **future progressive**, and the **past perfect progressive**. Form the past progressive by using *was/were* + the present participle. Form the future progressive by using *will be* + the present participle. Form the past perfect progressive by using *had been* + the present participle.

   **Past progressive**: I *was sleeping* when you called me.
   **Future progressive**: They *will be driving* when you call.
   **Past perfect progressive**: I *had been walking* for two hours when I found you.

14. The present participle (-ing form) is part of a verb only when a form of *be* comes in front of it:

   My friend and I *have been running* today.
   My friend *is hardly sweating* at all from the exercise.

   In the first sentence, **running** is part of the verb because it has a form of *be* (the present perfect *have been*) before it. In the second sentence, **sweating** is part of the verb because it has a form of *be* (the third-person-singular simple present form *is*) in front of the adverb before it.