

## Understanding Verbs II: Action Verbs vs. Linking Verbs

There are two basic kinds of verbs in the English language: **action verbs** and **linking verbs**.

The term **action verb** is self-explanatory; it refers to any verb that tells an action, such as *to run*, *to listen*, *to teach*, *to think*, *to negate*, *to adhere*, or *to comply*. Note that not all actions are physical actions or actions that can be visualized; some action verbs are abstract.

An important characteristic of **action verbs** is that they are often modified by **adverbs**, such as *quickly*, *contentedly*, *sweetly*, or *often*:

*In Miss Piggy's dreams, she and Kermit the Frog always **ran quickly** across the beach and into each other's arms.*

*Miss Piggy **listened contentedly** to Kermit's "sweet nothings."*

*In Miss Piggy's dreams, Kermit **lied** to her very **sweetly** and very **often**.*

**Linking verbs** are so called because they serve to link the subject of a clause with an adjective that describes it (called a **predicate adjective**) or with a noun or pronoun (called a **predicate nominative**) that is being identified with the subject. Because they don't name actions, **linking verbs** are usually not modified by adverbs. (There are exceptions to this general pattern, however.)

The most common **linking verb** is the verb *to be* (*is*, *are*, *am*, *was*, *were*, *being*, *been*):

*This frog soup **is** good.*

In the sentence above, the linking verb *is* links the subject *soup* with the **predicate adjective** *good* that describes it.

*Kermit and Miss Piggy **were** once fools for each other.*

Here, *were* links the compound subject *Kermit and Miss Piggy* with the **predicate noun** *fools*, which renames the subject.

Other common **linking verbs** include *to become* and *to seem*.

A number of **action verbs** can also function as **linking verbs**. To determine whether one of these verbs is an **action verb** or a **linking verb**, you must think about how it is being used in the sentence:

*Kermit **looked** at Miss Piggy **dreamily**.* (action verb)

*Miss Piggy knew she **looked beautiful** as she strutted into the room.* (linking verb)

In the first sentence above, the verb *looked* refers to the action of looking, and it is modified by the adverb *dreamily*. In the second sentence, *looking* is not an action performed by someone; the verb *looked* simply serves to link the subject *Miss Piggy* with the **predicate adjective** *beautiful* that describes it.

Other examples: *to appear*, *to smell*, *to taste*, *to sound*, *to feel*, *to grow*, *to remain*

*However, as beautiful as she felt, she still **remained sad** about Kermit's new girlfriend.*

*Remaining* is not really an action that is being performed; this verb is simply used to indicate that the condition of the subject ("sad"), a condition named in the predicate, has not changed.

*Her heart **grew heavy**, and even the best food **smelled bland and tasted stale**.*

An easy way to tell whether one of these verbs is functioning as a **linking verb** is to replace it with the verb *to be*; if the sentence essentially retains its original meaning, the verb is almost certainly a **linking verb**:

*This frog soup **tastes good**. = This frog soup **is good**.*

*Miss Piggy knew she **looked beautiful**. = Miss Piggy knew she **was beautiful**.*

*Kermit **looked at** Miss Piggy dreamily. ≠ Kermit ~~was at~~ Miss Piggy dreamily.*

In some cases, a modifier may *seem* to be modifying a verb when it is actually part of a phrase modifying the subject:

*Miss Piggy stared daggers at Kermit for several minutes, ~~angrily~~ that he would dare show off his girlfriend in front of her.*

It would make sense to modify the verb *stared* with the adverb *angrily*:

*Miss Piggy **stared at Kermit angrily**.*

In the case of the original sentence, however, the modifier is part of a longer adjective phrase modifying the subject *Miss Piggy*. We can see this clearly by moving the phrase to the beginning of the sentence:

***Angry that he would dare show off his girlfriend in front of her, Miss Piggy** stared daggers at Kermit for several minutes.*

Watch out for potentially confusing sentences like this one. Ask yourself: *Does the sentence mean to suggest that the action is being done in a certain way, or is a noun or pronoun actually the focus of the description?*

The difference between *good* and *well* can sometimes be confusing as well. In general, *good* is an adjective, and *well* is an adverb:

*Miss Piggy thought the **frog soup was good**.*

*Good* is an adjective because it modifies the noun *frog soup*.

*Miss Piggy thought the cook had **prepared the frog soup well**.*

Here, *well* is an adverb because it modifies the verb *prepared*. However, *well* is an adjective when it means “in good health”:

*When Kermit asked Miss Piggy how she was, she replied, “I am **well**, thank you.”*

In this sentence, *well* is an adjective because it modifies the subject *I*.

To describe someone’s mood, emotional state, energy level, etc., *good* should be used. In the sentence below, the adjective *good* follows the linking verb *feel*:

*“But I don’t feel very **good**, you pond-dwelling scumbag,” she thought. “I think I’ll have some more of this delicious frog soup.”*