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## The Verbal Group in English

### I-Introduction

Verbal groups refer to actions, events and states. It is the grammatical unit by means of which we most typically talk about events, actions, states:

- Mary and John bought a new house.
- The policemen caught the culprit.
- She became very angry when she heard the news.

Every time we encode an event of our experience through a finite clause, we select one or other tense, one or other aspectual distinction (progressive, non-progressive, perfective).

### II-The structure of the verbal group/phrase:

The verbal group consists of a main element (the main verb) and one or more optional elements (auxiliaries) which precede it. All these elements are realised by verbs.

Examples:

- She arrived late to the train station
- They can go home tomorrow
- He is making too much noise.
- She might be leaving next week.
- He will have been waiting an hour.
- They have got to obey the orders
- He is due to arrive soon.
- How dare she speak to her mother this way?

The main element of the verbal group is realised by a lexical verb (a finite or non-finite form of a lexical verb), whereas the optional elements are realised by auxiliary verbs. These optional elements which are auxiliary verbs precede the main element in the verb phrase.

### III-Lexical Vs Auxiliary verbs

The elements of the VG are realised by the following classes and forms of verbs :

Lexical/ full verbs: come, eat, feel, become, hits, like, think, etc.

Primary auxiliaries: be (am, is, are, was, were, being, been) have (has, had, having)

Do (does, did)

Modal auxiliaries: shall, should, will, would, can, could, may, might

Must, ought.

Semi-modals: need, dare (modals in certain uses)

Lexical auxiliaries: (i) be able to, be about to, be apt to, be bound to, be due to, be

Be going to, be liable to, be likely to, be certain to, be sure to, be meant to,

Be to, be unlikely to, be supposed to,

ii) have to, have got to

iii) had better, would rather, would sooner

The primary auxiliaries 'be', 'have', 'do' can have two functions: They can function as main elements or auxiliaries in the clause. For example:

<u>Main element</u>	<u>Auxiliaries</u>
She <u>does</u> beautiful work.	Does he enjoy himself there?
They <u>have</u> headaches	They have been listening to music
They <u>are</u> soldiers.	You are doing a beautiful job

#### IV-Types of verbal groups

The verbal group can be either simple or extended.

##### 1-Simple verbal groups:

A simple verbal group (phrase) consists of a single element, usually the lexical element realised by a finite or non-finite form of a lexical verb:

Finite forms:

- They drive on the left in the UK
- He congratulated his students for their success.

Non-finite forms

- Drive carefully (drive: imperative)
- She told him to refrain from smoking. (to refrain: infinitive)
- Driving to work this morning, I heard the 9 o'clock news. (driving: present participle)
- Driven away by night, the car was then abandoned. (driven: past participle)

#### Exercise

Are the verbal groups in the passage below simple or extended?

Rivers perhaps are the only physical feature of the world that appear at their best from the air. Mountain ranges, no longer seen in profile, dwarf to anthills; seas lose their horizons, lakes have no longer depth but look like bright pennies on the earth's surface.; forests become a thin impermanent film, a mass on the top of a wet stone, easily rubbed off. But rivers, which from the ground one usually sees in cross sections, like a small sample of ribbon—rivers stretch out serenely ahead as far as the eye reaches.

##### 2-Extended verbal group:

An 'extended' Verbal Group structure consists of a lexical verb preceded by up to four auxiliaries. Consisting of one or more auxiliaries + a main verb:

The cat may have been running.

The auxiliaries in an extended VG can express one or more of the following grammatical meanings:

- Tense (past, present)
- Finiteness (finite, non-finite)
- Aspect (progressive, non-progressive, perfective, non-perfective)
- Modality (certainty, probability, obligation, etc)
- Polarity (negative, positive: They can't speak French)

## Exercise

**Read the passage below. Which type of verbal groups does it contain?**

One day, as you are washing your hands, you happen to glance into the mirror over the basin and a sudden doubt will flash across your mind: 'Is that really me?' 'What am I doing here? 'Who am I?'

Each one of us is so completely cut off from everyone else. How do you know you are reading a book? The whole thing may be an illusion. How do you know that red is red? The colour could appear blue in everyone else's eyes. A similar doubt, differently expressed, is inherent in the well-known question: 'A tree that has fallen in the forest, far from the nearest man—when it fell, did it make any noise?'

Magnus Pike, the Boundaries of Science

## V-Transitive vs intransitive verbs

### Intransitive verbs

When a verb has no object in the sentence, it is called an intransitive verb. They can be divided into two types:

a- Pure intransitives:

They are almost exclusively intransitive, such as arrive, elapse, fade, vanish, rise, materialise rain, snow. Many of these verbs express behaviour which is typically involuntary or semi-involuntary like, cough, collapse, blush, die, cry, sleep, slip, smile, sneeze, scream, tremble, yawn.

e.g. It is snowing/ raining

The money vanished

Her dreams materialised

She is coughing

b- Verbs that are used both transitively or intransitively

a- The Direct or Indirect Object may be left unexpounded when its referent is understood by social convention (drive, park):

-Mary was driving (her/the car) when she saw them crossing the road

-He drinks.

### Transitive verbs:

They are the type of verbs which prototypically take one Object (Direct Object) or a Prepositional Object (object of preposition).

Mary broke the cup

The cat ate the fish

## VI-Static vs dynamic verbs

### Stative verbs:

States are durative, in that they last throughout time; they are unbounded in that non end-point is implied in the verb itself. The following are the four main types of stative verbs:

-Relational verbs: be, belong, consist, cost, depend, own, possess, see, sound

-Verbs of voluntary perception: see, hear, smell, taste, feel

-Verbs of cognition: know, think, understand, recognise, etc.

-Verbs of affectivity: like, dislike, hate, detest, love (except: I'm loving every minute of it).

### Dynamic verbs

There are two types of dynamic verbs:

- 1- **Durative:** They are the type of verbs representing dynamic situations which extend through time such as rain, read, sleep, etc. They can be either agentive (play, speak, sing) or non-agentive (grow, rain, snow):

e.g. The passengers waited for six hours at the airport. (agentive)

Did they speak with the director? (agentive)

It was raining very hard yesterday. (non-agentive)

The apples will ripen in a few weeks time. (non-agentive)

The wall prevented people from crossing to the other side (non-agentive)

- 2- **Punctual:** They are the type of verbs which do not extend through time such as kick, hit, swat, jump

e.g. He swatted the mosquito with a newspaper (agentive)

The thief jumped out of the window (agentive)

Petrol prices went up rapidly because of the crisis. (non-agentive)

The mosquito stung him on his face.

### Exercise:

Below are a number of sentences. What kind of verbs do they contain?

1-The children have gone off to play.

2-Trees blossom in the spring.

3-The footballer kicked the ball.

4-Temperatures decreased sharply.

5-We saw locusts everywhere

6-He bit into the apple

7-The hurricane destroyed everything in its path

8-I recognised her face from the moment I saw her.

9-They are angry

10-She likes swimming