

General Characteristics

- **Tense** is the way a verb changes (its conjugation) in order to reflect a different **time frame**. There are **two main verb tenses, present and past**. There's no future tense, as there's no **future ending**. Some grammarians and linguistics refer to the future as a sense of 'futura'. "Will (have)", 'going to', '-ing', 'the simple present' and 'be to' are the ways we express futurity. In terms of meaning 'will' can be **extrinsic** (possibility/probability) or **intrinsic** (weak or strong will).
- **Aspect** is the speaker's perception of the event and there are two kinds, 'perfect' and 'continuous', although some grammar books point to three, including the 'simple' aspect. The progressive and the perfect aspects are formed by a combination of auxiliary verbs and participles. The aspect of a verb phrase is the speaker's 'view' of a communicative event and is expressed by the verb phrase, **regardless of the time of the event itself**. Aspects have to do with the internal nature of the event and is worried about, for instance, its duration, its completeness, or its repetition.

Basic Classification of Verbs

- Verbs can be categorized as '**full** verbs (or **lexical** or **main**)' and '**auxiliary** verbs (or **delexicalised verbs**)'. Auxiliary verbs have a grammatical role and are combined with full verbs to change **tense** or **modality**. Auxiliaries can be **modal** or **primary** (be, have, do). The latter expresses the grammatical categories of **voice** and **aspect**, while the former is always placed first in a **verb group**, modifying the rest of it. Modals help the speaker or writer say something about their **attitude** towards the context in which the message is being offered.
- Verbs can also be classified as **finite** (marked for person or tense), or **non-finite** (infinitive or participle).
- **Intransitive** verbs take no object, whereas **transitive** ones do, and can be used to for passive constructions. Consequently, a clause **with an object** is called a **transitive clause** and a clause **without an object** is **intransitive clause**. Note that the classification of verbs is debatable, as some grammarians point out that some verbs are transitive or intransitive, but others can be used in both transitive and intransitive clauses. They prefer to refer to this as **transitive and intransitive uses** of verbs. **Mono-transitive** verbs take only one object, while in **ditransitive** constructions there are two objects. Constructions that take an object and a complement are called **complex-transitive**.
- Note: when a verb denotes an action, the subject NP is the agent, and the object NP is the patient. This order is inverted in passive formations.

Modality

- Modality refers to ways to help the speaker **express attitude** towards a situation. This attitude normally expresses a view in terms of the likelihood or desirability of a situation. There are nine **true modal** operators (if we add 'ought'). Likelihood, for instance, can be expressed **lexically** (**Maybe** he will buy it.) or **grammatically** (He **might/may** buy it.). There are also verbs called **semi-modals** like 'need' and 'dare.'
- Modal verbs can express both **extrinsic** and **intrinsic** modality. The former refers to the speaker's/writer's view of the likelihood of a situation. The latter refers to how necessary or desirable the speaker/writer views the situation, expressing **wishes, abilities** or **obligations**. 'Have to' is used to express obligations that are externally imposed whereas 'must' expresses a self-imposed obligation.
- Considering the many uses of modals (especially intrinsic) they end up also serving the purpose of expressing **functions**, which causes them to always be placed in the syllabuses of A1 courses.

Mood & Voice

- The choice of language made by the speaker/writer when conveying information, giving directions, giving order, or the like, is called **mood**. There are three kinds of mood: **indicative, subjunctive, and imperative**.
- **Voice** gives information about the roles of different participants in a communicative event (the agent and the patient (or recipient)). Voice helps the speaker/writer center the information being given on **what is known**, which generally comes in the beginning of the sentence.
- The passive is also used when we want to give emphasis to an action and not its doer.
- Passives are much **more common in writing**, especially in scientific, technical and academic writing where the reader is most interested in events and processes.

The Verb Phrase

Conditionals

- Broadly speaking, and having in mind **pedagogical purposes**, there are **three kinds** of conditional tenses. When it come to understanding **conditions in context**, the variations can reach more than 12 types according to some grammar books. Saying whether a conditional sentence is correct is very difficult without its **context**.
- The three kinds above are organized under **two basic groups**: the **real** one and the **unreal** one. Both groups may refer to the past, the present and the future.
- A probable teaching sequence for conditionals is: promises (If you + present, you will) → rules (If your answer is right, you'll score 5 points.) → advice (If I were you, I would) → wishing (If I had some money, I would ...) → regretting (If I hadn't married her, I would be ...) → threatening (If you don't obey, you will ...).
- Other conditional forms: If only ... / I wish I hadn't ... / I'd rather you didn't ... / You act as if you did ... / It's time we did ...

Imperatives

- These are formed from the **base form** of the verb. Their negative form is form by placing '**don't**' before the verb.
- They can have **third person subjects**, which vary in terms of the level of formality.
- They can be **softened** by the use of modals and polite markers.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

After you study the verb phrase a bit more, try to answer the following questions:



1. Is there a clear relation between time and tense?
2. How many verb tenses are there in English?
3. Why is the verb phrase still heavily present as the center of language courses?
4. How do we help students learn verbs?
5. How is the overgeneralization of rules a learner problem?
6. What's the relationship between verbs and social distance?