

Ancient Languages First Aid

VERBS



SECTION 1. PROPERTIES OF A VERB

SECTION 1.0.1. VERBS

A '**verb**' is a word which expresses an action of a **subject** in a '**clause**', i.e. a verb is a *doing, being, or having* word. The verb is the most important (and interesting!) part of speech. They contain all the meaning and dictate how everything relates to each other. A group of words (a '**sense unit**') without a verb is called a '**phrase**', a sense unit with a verb is a '**clause**', and a group of sense units with at least one verb is a '**sentence**'.

A verb has five properties, **number, person, tense, voice, and mood**. Each of these properties in an ancient language are expressed by changes to the **stem** of a verb, the most basic form. These properties are expressed in changes to the ending of the verb (known as **inflection**), **augmenting** to the beginning, or a **convertor** attached to the verb. All of these changes are indicators which will help you work out the meaning of the verb and how the sentence fits together. Each verb will have a set of '**principle parts**' which will be different forms of the verb. By learning them you can see how to form the verb in its various uses. Each set of principle part forms will vary from language to language. ***They are your friends and you should learn them!***

SECTION 1.0.2. NUMBER

Verbs have '**number**' which defines how many nouns or pronouns make up the subject of the clause. Depending on the ancient language, verbs may be in **singular, dual, or plural**. Singular is used for a single noun, while plural is used for a group (more than one) of nouns. Dual is used for a subject which is naturally double, like a "pair of glasses". The dual form is rarely used and when used is often in archaisms (deliberately old forms and stock phrases). It isn't found in many ancient languages. The verb will always '**agree**' with the number of the subject: that is, if the subject is singular, the verb will be singular, and so on.

English examples:

Singular	The senator speaks
Dual	You two senators speak
Plural	The senators speak

SECTION 1.0.3. PERSON

Verbs have '**person**' which determines who the subject in a clause is. They can be **first**, **second** or **third** person and will agree with the person of the subject.

English examples:

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I walk	We walk
Second Person	You walk	You walk
Third Person	He/She/It walks	They walk

SECTION 1.0.4. TENSE

Verbs have '**tense**' which determines when the action of the verb takes place; it is the temporal element of the verb. Tenses can be divided into three major time periods: **past**, **present**, and **future**. These time periods can be further divided into more specific tenses. Each ancient language will have its own combination of tenses. Not all tenses are found in each '**mood**' (Section 1.0.7). Tense can be shown by changes to the endings of the verb ('**inflection**'), and also by an '**historic augment**' or a '**convertor**' at the beginning of the verb, depending on the language. An '**historic augment**' is a **vowel** which changes the front of the verb to show us that it is in the **past**. If the verb starts with a **consonant**, the augment will go in front of it. If it starts with a **vowel**, this vowel will be '**augmented**' – that is changed, to sound longer. A '**convertor**' is a letter, a short prefix, or even a short word which gets attached to the verb to show you that it is being '**converted**' into another tense. Convertors also change other properties of a verb, like **mood**.

Don't be afraid of these things! Firstly, most of them do not occur in all languages (this document is meant to reach a variety of students), and secondly, they are all clues which help us to figure out what is happening with the word.

In English, we have a '**simple**' form of a tense and a '**continuous**' form; the difference between them is 'I walk' and 'I am walking'. Ancient languages can have only one form and it is up to the translator to determine which makes the most sense.

SECTION 1.0.4.1. TENSE - PRESENT TENSE

The **present tense** of the verb is the tense used to define what is happening *now*. It is the simplest form of the verb and is most often ***the form of the verb found in the dictionary.***

Present Tense	Simple	I talk
	Continuous	I am talking

SECTION 1.0.4.2. TENSE - FUTURE TENSE

The **future tense** of the verb is the tense used to define what will happen.

Future Tense	Simple	I will talk
	Continuous	I will be talking

SECTION 1.0.4.3 .TENSE - FUTURE PERFECT TENSE

The **future perfect tense** of the verb is a **completed** form of the **future** tense and is used to define what will have happened by a certain time.

Future Perfect Tense	Simple	I will have talked
	Continuous	I will have been talking

SECTION 1.0.4.4. TENSE - IMPERFECT PAST TENSE

The **imperfect tense** of the verb is the **incomplete** form of the **past** tense used to define what was happening.

Imperfect Tense	I was talking
------------------------	---------------

It is perfectly acceptable and sometimes necessary to use 'I talked', 'I used to talk', and 'I began talking'.

SECTION 1.0.4.5. TENSE - AORIST PAST TENSE

The **aorist** tense of the verb is a completed form of the **past** tense used to define what happened.

Aorist Tense	I talked
---------------------	----------

It is, however, acceptable to use 'I was talking'.

SECTION 1.0.4.6 .TENSE - PERFECT PAST TENSE

The **perfect past tense** of the verb is strictly speaking the **completed** form of the **present** tense which is used to define the completion or realisation of a state. In translation it often comes out as if it were a past tense. In Latin, there is no aorist tense and its function is absorbed into the perfect tense.

Perfect Tense	Simple	I have talked
	Continuous	I have been talking

SECTION 1.0.4.7. TENSE - PLUPERFECT TENSE

The **pluperfect tense** of the verb is the **more completed** form of the **past** tense used to define what had happened. If the perfect tense is taken as the completed form of the present tense, then the pluperfect is simply a completed form of the past tense and its meaning does not change.

Future Tense	Simple	I had talked
	Continuous	I had been talking

SECTION 1.0.5. THE VERB “TO BE” AND TENSE

The verb “to be” can also show present, past and future tenses by using the following forms:

Singular	Present	Future	Future Perfect
First Person	I am	I will be	I will have been
Second Person	you are	you will be	you will have been
Third Person	he/she/it is	he/she/it will be	he/she/it will have been
Plural			
First Person	we are	we will be	we will have been
Second Person	you are	you will be	you will have been
Third Person	they are	they will be	they will have been
Singular			
	Imperfect	Aorist	Perfect
First Person	I was being	I was	I have been
Second Person	you were being	you were	you have been
Third Person	he/she/it was being	he/she/it was	he/she/it has been
Plural			
First Person	we were being	we were	we have been
Second Person	you were being	you were	you have been
Third Person	they were being	they were	they have been
Singular			
	Pluperfect		
First Person	I had been		
Second Person	you had been		
Third Person	he/she/it had been		
Plural			
First Person	we had been		
Second Person	you had been		
Third Person	they had been		

SECTION 1.0.6. VOICE

Verbs have '**voice**' which determines how the action of the verb affects the subject. There are three voices of the verb; **active**, **middle** and **passive**. The **active voice** determines whether the subject does the action of the verb, the **middle** whether the subject does the action for itself, and the **passive** whether the action is done to or experienced by the subject.

Some ancient languages, like Latin, only express the **middle** in '**deponent verbs**', where others, like Ancient Greek, express all three voices. **deponent verbs** are said to have 'put aside (Lat. *depono*)' their **active voice** form and use the **passive form** with **active meaning**. However, in reality they are using the **middle** and **passive voices** which happen to look the same.

A fine example of the three voices is the verb of *persuading*:

Active	The man persuades
Middle	The man trusts (persuades himself)
Passive	The man is persuaded

SECTION 1.0.7. MOOD

Verbs have '**mood**' which defines the tone of the verb and reflects the way in which the action of the verb is expressed. There are four **moods** of the verb; the **indicative**, **imperative**, **subjunctive**, and **optative**. Not all are expressed in all ancient languages as individual **moods** and they sometimes have different names. All moods of the verb are used in both **main and subordinate clauses**, but some clauses are exclusive to one mood. This helps us to work out the function of the clause when we learn what moods are used in which clauses. The moods other than indicative will not necessarily possess all the tenses of the verb for various reasons.

SECTION 1.0.7.1. INDICATIVE MOOD

The **indicative mood** of the verb defines actions which, if they are not facts, are presented as facts.

Some examples of the **indicative mood**:

He *crossed* the river; she *wanted* to cross the river; they *will cross* the river.

SECTION 1.0.7.2. IMPERATIVE MOOD

The **imperative mood** of the verb is used give commands. Its **main clause** is the **direct command**. Imperatives can be in all **numbers** of the verb, but **only** in the **second and third person**. A **first person command**, or an **exhortation**, will use the **potential moods**.

An example of the **imperative mood**: *Cross* the river!

SECTION 1.0.7.3. SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD

The **subjunctive mood** of the verb is used for expressing actions which are potential, hypothetical, or uncertain. It is also used to express actions in **subordinate clauses**. When being used in this function, the **subjunctive mood** often loses the **potential, hypothetical, or uncertain** nature and is often translated *as if it were indicative*. The subjunctive should not be thought of in terms of a universal or main meaning, but should be learned as a mood with diverse functions which change depending on the clause type in which it is used.

Some examples of the **potential, hypothetical, or uncertain** uses of the **subjunctive mood**:

He *may* cross the river; she *should* cross the river; they *could* cross the river.

It is difficult to give examples for the other functions of the subjunctive mood since in English they would appear as if they were indicative.

SECTION 1.0.7.4. OPTATIVE MOOD

The **optative mood** of the verb is used to express **vaguer** notions than the subjunctive when it is potential. The **optative**, like the subjunctive, is also used in subordinate clauses for not-potential reasons. The **optative** is used to express **wishes**. In ancient Greek, it is used to **stress a result or outcome**, and also in conditional clauses. These uses can have English translations which will sound like the indicative mood.

An example of the **optative mood** in a wish: If only we could *cross* the river!

An example of the **optative mood** in a potential statement: You *would* cross the river, but there are no boats.

Like the subjunctive, it is difficult to give examples for the other functions of the optative mood since in English they would appear as if they were indicative.

SECTION 1.0.8. VERBAL ASPECT

'**Verbal aspect**' is nothing you need to worry about in your first year of ancient language learning, and when you get to a stage where it becomes a real factor your lecturer will give you a solid run through. It is, however, helpful to have a simple, brief overview so you have an idea of it when you see it in your textbooks. You don't have to understand it right now!

Outside of the **indicative mood**, the mood which denotes **fact**, there can be no sense of **time** as we know it in English: time exists in reality, and reality is fact. Despite this loss of **time**, the other **moods** and **verbal** forms still possess **tense**, a property of a verb which we usually associate with **time**. When we have tense without time, what we have is '**aspect**' or '**time relative**': that is, one point is related to another through tense. Take this example: "In the alphabet, **y** comes before **z** but after **x**."

Now we know that **relative** to **y**, the letter **x** is in the **past**, and the letter **z** is in the **future**, or rather **relative** to **y**, the letter **x** is **completed**, and the letter **z** is **yet to happen**. However we don't know *when* this is happening, we just have the general statement "in the alphabet" and this has no sense of **time**.

If we now say, "yesterday when I said the alphabet, **y** came before **z** but after **x**," then we know that this is happening in the **past** because the verb '*said*' is past and the adverb '*yesterday*' also indicates that the action occurred in the past. Now we know that **x**, **y**, and **z** are all **completed**, but **x** is most completed **relative** to **z**.

This is what is called '**aspect**'. This table gives a simplified summation.

TENSE	
Time	Aspect
Past	Complete
Present	Incomplete
Future	Yet to begin

SECTION 1.0.9. SEQUENCE OF TENSES

The '**sequence of tenses**' refers to the process of how the **tense** of the **indicative verb** in the **main clause** relates to either the corresponding **tense** of the **subjunctive verb** in the **subordinate clause** or the **infinitive** form of the verb in an **indirect statement**.

There are two sequences: **primary** and **historic** (or **secondary**). **Primary** consists of the **present** and **future tenses**, and **historic** the **past tenses**.

Examples of this **sequence of tenses** are:

Primary Sequence - 'He is teaching so that they can/may learn.'

Historic Sequence - 'He was teaching so that they could/might learn.'

Primary Sequence - 'He is teaching'

- 'He says that he is teaching'

Historic Sequence - 'He was teaching'

- 'He said that he was teaching'

If you have a **primary verb** in the **main clause**, then your **subordinate clause** or **phrase** must have a **primary verb** or **primary verbal form**; likewise, **historic** will correspond to **historic**.

SECTION 1.0.10. COMPOUND & AUXILIARY VERBS

Compound verbs are verbs that consist of more than one word. They are constructed using **auxiliary verbs** and **non-finite** forms of the verb (infinitives or participles). They may also be referred to as **verb phrases**.

Examples:

We are going to the games of Septimius Severus.

We have been looking forward to the games for many months.

Some **auxiliary verbs** that are used to show tense are: *have, be, shall/will, do*.

Others take **prolative infinitives** – infinitives which complete the meaning of verbs like 'to try', 'to want'. For example, 'I try *to do well*' or 'We want *to eat bread*.'

SECTION 1.0.11. REGULAR & IRREGULAR VERBS

As in any language, ancient languages possess many so called **irregular verb** forms. Despite this it is important to note that what is called 'regular' only means most common, and often there are more so-called 'irregular' forms than 'regular' ones. It is imperative that all verbs are learned as individuals as well as in groups.

The table below shows a 'regular' English verb. Notice that the morphology is quite similar in all forms.

'to walk'	SINGULAR	PLURAL
PRESENT	I walk	we, you, they walk
	you walk	
	he, she, it walks	
PAST	I walked	we, you, they walked
	you walked	
	he, she, it walked	
FUTURE	I will walk	we, you, they will walk
	you will walk	
	he, she, it will walk	

Compare this to the paradigm for the verb 'to go'.

'to go'	SINGULAR	PLURAL
PRESENT	I go	we, you, they go
	you go	
	he, she, it goes	
PAST	I went	we, you, they went
	you went	
	he, she, it went	

Such so-called 'irregularity' happens in many common verbs. This is the result of one verb, in this case '*to go*,' borrowing a form from another verb (here, '*went*') which then becomes standard due to the frequent use of the verb. Such common verbs are easily memorised – you will quickly learn the nuances of them since they are so frequent.

SECTION 1.0.1.1. PRONOUNS AND THE VERB “TO BE”

The verb '*to be*' has its own rule: it takes the same case **after it** as **before it** because it links a **subject** to a **predicate/compliment**. Therefore, the nominative form of the pronoun is used before and after the verb '*to be*'.

Example: *It is he* who won the battle.

In this example, 'it' is the **subject** of the clause and 'he' is the **complement**; '*is*' is a part of the verb '*to be*'. Intuitively, one would use 'him' instead of 'he', as 'him' is the normal accusative form of the pronoun. However, according to the rule of the verb '*to be*', the nominative 'he,' rather than 'him,' is used as it is a predicate/complement of the verb '*is*'.

SECTION 1.1. TYPES OF VERBS

SECTION 1.1.1. FINITE VERBS

'**Finite**' forms of the verbs have a **subject**. **Finite** verbs can stand alone without a helping verb. Without a finite verb there can be no clause.

An example of a **finite verb** in a clause:
The priestess *approached* the altar.

In this example, the finite verb is *approached*. To test if a verb is finite, you can ask 'who or what performed the action?' For this example we can ask 'Who approached?' and the answer is 'the priestess', the subject of the clause. If you arrive at an answer, the verb is finite. The finite verb 'she approached' stands alone; it does not need another verb to help it make sense. As finite verbs are linked to their subject, they must agree with their subject in person and number.

SECTION 1.1.2. NON-FINITE VERBS

'**Non-finite**' forms of the verb cannot stand alone and make sense. Unless the **non-finite** form is paired with a **finite** form there can be no clause and the sense unit is merely a phrase. For example, we cannot say:

“To go to the edge of the Parthenon.”

In this case, if we ask 'who is going to go?' we do not arrive at an answer. As such, '*to go*' is a non-finite form of the verb. '*To go*' is a verbal noun, specifically a '**prolative infinitive**' which can complete the meaning of certain finite verbs. If a finite verb is added to the phrase it will become a clause, like in the following example:

- *“I am going + to go to the edge of the Parthenon.”*

There are two kinds of **non-finite** verbs: **infinitives** and **participles**, which are dealt with in the section on verbal forms.

SECTION 1.1.3. TRANSITIVE & INTRANSITIVE VERBS

'**Transitive verbs**' always take a **direct object**. The word 'transitive' means '*passing over*'.

For example: 'Rameses *drove* the chariot.'

Here 'Rameses' is the **subject** and 'the chariot' is the **object** of the **transitive verb** '*drove*'. In the example, the action '*passes over*' from the verb '*drove*' to the **object** 'the chariot'.

'**Intransitive verbs**' do **not** take a **direct object**. They can **stand alone**, take an **indirect object**, or a **predicate**.

For example: 'Rameses *walks*.'
'Rameses *runs* with his chariot.'
'Rameses *is* the charioteer.'

The verb '*walks*' does not take a direct object; it stands alone.

The verb '*runs*' takes the indirect object 'with his chariot'.

The verb '*is*' is a form of the verb '*to be*'. This verb will take the same case of noun after it as before it. The noun 'Rameses' is nominative, singular, and masculine; so is 'the charioteer'. Since it is in **nominative** it cannot be the **object**. Since there is **no object** the verb '*is*' is **intransitive**.

SECTION 1.1.4. IMPERSONAL VERBS

'**Impersonal verbs**' are verbs which have no personal ending except the **third person singular** form. This does not mean they do not take a **subject**, for the **third person singular** must take a **subject** even if that subject is not specified.

Impersonal verbs can be found in natural phenomena, e.g. '*it rains*'. They can be found in expressions of necessity or permission, like '*it is necessary*'. When impersonal verbs are used the verb can take an **indirect object** and use a **prolative infinitive** to complete its meaning; an example is '*It is permissible* for me to leave'. In all of these examples 'it' is the **unspecified subject** of the verb.