

Stative and Action Verbs

What is the difference between stative (state) verbs and action (dynamic) verbs? Well, the answer is simple. Stative verbs describe a **state** and action verbs describe an **action**.

For example:

- *Mary **likes** ice cream.*
- *The book **belongs** to Peter.*

The verbs *like* and *belong* describe a state rather than an action.

Let's look at some action verbs:

- *Simon **is reading** a book.*
- *Sara **always cycles** to school.*

The verbs *read* and *cycle* are action verbs because they refer to an action rather than a state.

What is the difference between them? Action verbs can be used in all tenses while stative verbs cannot be used in continuous tenses.

For example:

- *We **usually cycle** to work.*
- *We **are cycling** to work now.*

"Cycle" is an action verb, so we can use it in both Present Simple and Present Continuous.

But stative verb **"want"** cannot be used in continuous forms.

- *Tim **wanted** to buy a bicycle.*
- *Tom **was wanting** to buy a bicycle when we were in town. (we cannot use it in continuous form because it is a stative verb.)*

Let's look at some stative verbs:

Verbs of feelings and emotions

Love, like, hate, prefer, adore, need, want, wish, etc.

For example:

- *We **need** coffee (not we are needing coffee)*
- *Simon **loves** his new trainers.*
- *Clare **adored** her daughter.*
- *I've **always wanted** to travel.*
- *Peter **wished** he exercised more when he was younger.*

Verbs of thoughts and opinions

know, understand, believe, agree, recognise, suppose, doubt, mean, remember, etc.

For example:

- *Thomas understood clearly what his mother told him.*
- *I've known him since high school.*
- *No one believed us when we told them that we saw aliens.*
- *I'm afraid I don't agree (disagree) with you.*
- *I recognized her immediately although I hadn't seen her for a long time.*
- *Do you suppose that they will hire him?*

Verbs of possession

Have, possess, own, belong, etc.

- *I've had this car for ten years.*
- *He was arrested because he possessed a gun.*
- *Mark owns a restaurant.*
- *These plates belong in that cupboard.*

Verbs of senses

See, hear, smell, taste, feel, look, seem, sense, etc.

- *I saw a great film last night.*
- *Have you heard what happened?*
- *The soup smells delicious.*
- *The salad tastes too salty.*
- *She's never felt so happy.*
- *You look great in that dress.*
- *Brian seemed younger than he was.*

Verbs that are both stative and action verbs

Some verbs can be both stative and action verbs, depending on the context they are in. These verbs are: *be, have, see, taste, smell, look, think, feel, weigh, fit, appear, etc.*

| Verb | State | Action |
|--------|--|--|
| Be | Adam is always so polite. (it happens all the time) | You are being so selfish all day! (it is happening today) |
| Have | The Taylors have a big house. (it is about possession) | I can't talk to you now, I'm having breakfast. (it is happening now) |
| See | I see them coming down the road! (state) | The children are seeing the dentist tomorrow morning. (action) |
| Taste | The dish tastes bitter and sour. | The cook was tasting the soup when we came. |
| Smell | He always smells of cigarettes and alcohol. | Brenda was smelling the roses. |
| Hear | I've heard that you got married. Is it true? | Oh, it's you. I thought I was hearing things. |
| Look | She doesn't look her age. | I'm looking for my car key all day. Have you seen them? |
| Appear | New variants of the virus appear all the time. | They will be appearing in court on Monday. |
| Think | I don't think I've seen that film before. | They are thinking about moving house to Canada. |
| Feel | How do you feel about going on holiday to Greece? | Norman is still feeling weak after the flu. |
| Weigh | Sandra weighs ten kilos less than last year. | I'm weighing the ingredients for the cake. |
| Fit | This telephone fits into the palm of your hand. | They are fitting the carpets in all bedrooms this weekend. |