
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Grammar

State verbs



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Catherine

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Grammar with me Catherine.

Neil

And me, Neil. Hello.

Catherine

In this programme we're talking about **state verbs**. We'll explain what they are...

Neil

We'll show you how to use them...

Catherine

We'll give you lots of examples...

Neil

And we'll finish with a quiz to see what you've learnt.

Catherine

So let's get started. We can separate English verbs into two groups: **state verbs** and **action verbs**. Most verbs are action verbs...

Neil

And of course action verbs describe actions, so verbs like **go, kick, watch, rain** are all **action verbs**. And we can use them in any tense we want – past, present, future, perfect, passive, continuous, the lot.

Catherine

Yes but state verbs are different – because we don't usually use them in the continuous tenses.

Neil

That's right. We don't use state verbs in tenses that use the **i-n-g** form, such as the present continuous and the past continuous.

Catherine

Right, now, you're probably asking: what kind of verbs are state verbs? Well, there are three main types. The first type is verbs that describe **feelings and attitudes** such as **love, hate, like** and **prefer**. Here's Harry with an example.

Harry

What's this music? **I like** it.

Catherine

Thanks Harry. In that example, Harry is talking about his feelings now, but he doesn't say **I'm liking** it.

Neil

No, **I'm liking** is the present continuous tense and with state verbs that's usually wrong. We'll say a bit more about this later on, but the general rule is: use the present simple for verbs of feelings like **love, like** and **hate**.

Catherine

Now for the second type of state verb: that's verbs of **thinking**.

Neil

So verbs like **think, know, believe, understand, remember**. Here are some examples.

Harry

I believe Andrew's living in Dubai now. **Do you remember** if he's married?

Catherine

Good. In this example, Harry's using the present simple tense with the verbs **believe** and **remember**. You can't use them in the continuous.

Neil

And the third group of state verbs are verbs that describe **senses**. Verbs like **see, smell, taste, hear** and **sound**. Another example, please Harry.

Harry

What are you eating? **It smells** delicious!

Catherine

So Harry says **it smells** delicious and not **it's smelling** delicious.

Neil

Exactly. That would be wrong because **smell** is a state verb.

Catherine

It is. And as well as these three main types, there are some other common state verbs, for example: **have, own, belong...**

Neil

...**want, need, mean...**

Catherine

...**cost, seem, appear and wish.**

Neil

Well, that's quite a lot of verbs to remember. But one way to decide if a verb is a state verb is to ask yourself: does it describe an action?

Catherine

Good tip. And if the answer is "no it doesn't", then it's probably a state verb.

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Catherine

And we're looking at state verbs. OK so far? Good. Now: couple of points to make.

Neil

Yes. A few verbs can have two meanings. In one meaning, they are an action verb, so you can use them in the present continuous.

Catherine

But in the other meaning, they are state verbs, so you can't use a continuous tense. Some examples please Harry:

Harry

Mick **looks like** his sister.

Catherine

And:

Harry

Mick's **looking at** his sister.

Neil

Thanks. So, in the first example, **Mick looks like his sister, looks** is a state verb. We're talking about Mick's appearance, not his actions.

Catherine

But in the second example, **Mick's looking at his sister**, Mick's doing something. So, in this sentence, **look** is an action verb.

Neil

Another verb with two meanings like this is **have**, for example: **I have a cat** but **I'm having a bath**.

Catherine

And **think**. Listen. **I think you're right** - but - **I'm thinking of going to Spain**. And all the sense verbs can have two meanings too. Another example, Harry?

Neil

Can you see that man?

Catherine

And:

Harry

I'm seeing the doctor.

Neil

Right. Now, do you remember that we said it's wrong to say **I'm liking it** because it's the present continuous? Well, you might hear this sometimes in very informal spoken English. Or you might hear **I'm hating this movie** or **I'm loving your work**. But only in very informal conversations.

Catherine

Thanks for that Neil, I'm loving your explanations... And now it's quiz time! Are these sentences correct or wrong? Number one: **Do you prefer** jazz or rock music?

Neil

And that is correct. **Prefer** is a state verb so we use the present simple tense: **Do you prefer...?**

Catherine

Well done! Number two: **Are you belonging** to the football club?

Neil

That's not correct. **Belong** is a state verb. We have to say **Do you belong...?** Not: **Are you belonging...?**

Catherine

Right again! Number three: **I'm having** lunch with Kate today.

Neil

And that is correct. **Have** is an action verb here, so it's fine to use the present continuous tense. In this sentence, **I'm having** means **I'm eating**.

Catherine

Well done if got them all right. There's more about this on our website at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Grammar.

Both

Bye.