Word-classes in English for Political Studies

VERBS

English has three kinds of verbs:

1. **full verbs**, also called **main verbs** or **lexical verbs**
   - ✓ tell you "what happened" or "what the situation is";
   - ✓ have **regular** and/or **irregular** forms ➔ **verbal paradigms**;
   - ✓ can be used **transitively** and/or **intransitively**;
   - ✓ have an **active** and a **passive** form.

   Furthermore…
   - ✓ can be used in **lexical collocations** (e.g.: to call a general election, to pass a bill, to cast your vote, to amend a law, to resign as party leader, to file a petition, and so on);
   - ✓ can be used in **grammatical collocations** (e.g.: to call for, to deal with, to focus on, to listen to, to result in, to result from, and so on …);
   - ✓ **false friends** (e.g.: to advertise, to annoy, to attend, to arrange, to expect, to occur, to pretend, to process, to realize, to recover, and so on);
   - ✓ **compound predicates** or **verbs** (e.g.: The ducks flew overhead and landed in the water).

2. **auxiliaries**
   - ✓ to be (was/were, been), to have (had, had), to do (did, done)
   - ✓ are used to make complex verbal structures or verbal phrases.

3. **modals**, also called **auxiliary modals**
   - ✓ can, could; may, might; will, would; shall, should; have to, must, ought to, need … and so on;
   - ✓ add subjective extra meaning.

REMEMBER that auxiliaries and modals differ from full verbs in four ways, the so-called **NICE** features (**N**egation, **I**nversion, **C**ode, **E**mphasis).

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Transitive and intransitive uses

1. **some verbs can be used either transitively or intransitively**[1], as in the examples below:

- **to grow (grew, grown, growing)**[2]
  - He *grows* roses. [tr.]
  - He has spent the past seven years *growing* his business. [tr.]
  - The economy *has grown* by 0.5% over the past year. [intr.]
  - The problem continues *to grow*. [intr.]
  - I *grew up* in Rome. [intr.]

- **to run (ran, run, running)**[3]
  - John can *run* very fast. [intr.]
  - He has no idea how *to run* a business. [tr.]
  - Both candidates *have run* a good campaign. [tr.]
  - Alan *was running* for a bus when he slipped on some ice. [intr.]
  - The college *runs* summer courses for foreign students. [tr.]
  - Hilary Clinton *ran* for president in 2016. [intr.]

2. **pay attention to the differences between English and Italian!** Please reflect on the following sentences and the transitive/intransitive use of each verb used[4]:
   - "The humanitarian community's plan to flood Gaza with lifesaving aid passed an important milestone on Thursday with the news that more than 10,000 relief lorries **have entered** the enclave since the ceasefire began on 19 January." (source: «Gaza: 10,000 aid trucks reached enclave since ceasefire began», *UN News*, 6 February 2025);
   - "Canada's new Prime Minister Mark Carney **entered** politics as trade relations with the U.S. hit a low point." (source: «What to know about Canada's Mark Carney», *NPR*, April 17, 2025);

[1] Remember that when you can use a verb both transitively and intransitively, it is referred to as an example of *functional shift*.
[2] Remember the Italian translation of the verb to grow in such contexts: (intr.) *crescere*; (tr.) *coltivare.*
[3] Remember the Italian translation of the verb to run in such contexts: (intr.) *correre, candidarsi*; (tr.) *gestire, organizzare.*
[4] Some transitive verbs, such as enter, fit, have, lack, resemble, suit, suffer, can never be used in the passive voice.

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- "Experts: Global South countries **suffer from** Trump's tariff policy" (source: *CGTN*, 21 April 2025);
- "UK trade volumes **suffer** record five-year decline" (*Financial Times*, March 1, 2024).
- "Ukraine's Roma **have suffered** worse than most in the war". (*The Economist*, October 3, 2024).
- "Several economists have found that people who **enter** the job market in a recession **suffer** lasting damage to their incomes" (*Financial Times*, April 2, 2021).

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Passive and active forms

[passive form = auxiliary verb "to be" + past participle of a full verb]

English has two forms (or "voices") – active and passive: as it happens in Italian as well, if the subject of a sentence is the 'doer', that sentence is in the active form; if the subject of that sentence is the recipient of the action, that sentence is in the passive form.

Active	Passive
*Currency dealers **trade** millions of dollars every day.*	*Millions of dollars **are traded** every day.*
*Mike **is installing** the software tomorrow.*	*The software **is being installed** tomorrow.*
*The Central Bank **raised** interest rates by 0.25%.*	*Interest rates **were raised** by 0.25%.*
*They **have chosen** Mr Brady as the new CEO.*	*Mr Brady **has been chosen** as the new CEO.*
*We **will make** a decision tomorrow.*	*A decision **will be made** tomorrow.*
*Someone **should clean** this machine every month.*	*This machine **should be cleaned** every month.*

CEO = Chief Executive Officer = MD = Managing Director (BrEng) = Amministratore Delegato = AD

- ✓ Uranium is mined in Australia.
- ✓ A new extension is being built.
- ✓ The Inland Revenue[5] was set up/established/created/founded in 1665.
- ✓ The company has been taken over.

REMEMBER THAT the subject of a passive verb corresponds to the object of an active verb; furthermore, if we want to say who does the action in a passive sentence – the agent – , we use the preposition 'by':

- ✓ Richard Branson founded Virgin Records.
- ✓ Virgin Records was founded by Richard Branson.

There is no doubt that active voice is usually preferred because it is more direct and always less wordy.

[5] The Inland Revenue (UK) corresponded, up to 2005, to the Internal Revenue Service (USA) and to Agenzia delle Entrate (ITALY). Now it is named HM Revenue and Customs.

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USES

1. **FOCUSING ON THE ACTION**: we use a passive construction when we are not interested in who performs an action or it is not necessary to know:
   - ✓ Millions of dollars are traded every day.
   - ✓ The date was changed.
   - ✓ Europe's 2035 combustion engine ban might be delayed.

2. **FOCUSING ON INFORMATION**: in a passive sentence, the grammatical subject receives the focus:
   - ✓ The visiting delegation was met by the President at the airport.

3. **DESCRIBING A PROCESS OR PROCEDURE**: we use the passive because we are more concerned with the process itself than with who carries it out.

   Here follows a description of the wine-making process, where the passive forms (all verbs are in the simple present tense) are highlighted in red:

   > Wine is made from the fermented juice of grapes. Grapes are picked at optimum sugar/acidity levels. After picking, grapes are taken to the winery, de-stemmed and crushed in a variety of presses. Juice is then clarified by settling or by centrifuge; yeast and sugar are added, then wine is left to ferment in tanks. When fermentation is finished, wine is poured into a clean tank to stabilise. It can then be filtered, bottled and left to mature.

4. **WRITING IN A FORMAL STYLE**: when writing reports, minutes of meetings, etc., we often choose an impersonal style by using the passive and beginning sentences with 'it':
   - ✓ It was agreed to increase share capital. /Si concordò/convenne di aumentare il capitale azionario
   - ✓ It was considered to be an unacceptable alternative. / si considerò essere un'alternativa irricevibile

5. **REPORTING UNCONFIRMED INFORMATION**: when the statement is speculative, i.e., based on guessing or opinions, we use the passive of *say*,

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think, *consider*, *believe*, *expect*, *suppose*, *know* followed by an infinitive. This structure is common in newspaper reporting where we want to make our language less certain:

- ✓ The board is thought to be deeply split over the way the company has been run.
- ✓ The economy is expected to decrease next year by around 2%.
- ✓ More than 100 million people across 185 countries are said to use ChatGPT every week.

BEWARE of the translation into Italian of these last passive forms!

REMEMBER THAT:

- A '**compound predicate**' or '**compound verb**' consists of two (or more) verbs sharing the same subject, such as in:
  - ✓ Environmentalists oppose development which produces pollution and endangers the health of local people and depletes resources.
  - ✓ True leaders understand that in order to create a positive culture for their organization, they must lead by example and display the behaviours they want to see exercised by their staff.

- be careful to those verbs which have **two objects** (give, send, show, lend, pay, promise, refuse, tell, offer): it is always possible to put such verbs into their own passive voice:
  - ✓ The director told the staff the news this morning.
  - ✓ The staff was/were told the news by the director this morning.

  - ✓ The bill gave all workers the right to elect a representative in their workplace.
  - ✓ All workers were given the right to elect a representative in their workplace.

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