

State verbs and action verbs

1 States and actions

STATES

A state means something staying the same.

The flat is clean.

The farmer owns the land.

The box contained old books.

State verbs cannot usually be continuous.

NOT *The farmer is owning the land.*

ACTIONS

An action means something happening.

I'm cleaning the flat.

The farmer is buying the land.

He put the books in the box.

Action verbs can be simple or continuous.

He put / He was putting everything away.

Some state verbs: be, believe, belong, consist of, contain, depend on, deserve, exist, hate, know, like, love, matter, mean, own, need, prefer, remember, resemble, seem, understand

2 I think/I'm thinking etc.

Sometimes we can use a verb either for a state or for an action.

STATES (simple tenses)

I think you're right. (= believe)

We have three cars. (= own)

I come from Sweden. (= live in)

I see your problem. (= understand)

Do you see that house? (= have in sight)

This picture looks nice.

She appears very nervous. (= seems)

The bag weighed five kilos.

The coat fits. (= is the right size)

ACTIONS (simple or continuous)

I'm thinking about the problem.

We're having lunch. (= eating)

I'm coming from Sweden. (= travelling)

I usually come on the plane.

Mark is seeing his boss. (= meeting)

I see Daniel quite often.

I'm looking at this picture.

She appeared/was appearing in a film.

They weighed/were weighing my bag.

I'm fitting a lock to the window.

These examples with the verb be are about how people behave.

PERMANENT QUALITY

Claire is a very sociable person.

That man is an idiot.

TEMPORARY BEHAVIOUR

Andrew is being very sociable today.

You are being an idiot this morning.

(= You are behaving like an idiot.)

We use am/are/is being only to talk about behaviour, not about other things.

I'm better now, thanks. Are you ready? Is anyone interested?

3 I like/I'm liking etc.

We can use some state verbs in the continuous to talk about a short period of time.

PERMANENT STATE (simple tenses)

I love/enjoy parties.

I like school.

Holidays cost a lot of money.

SHORT PERIOD (continuous)

I'm loving/enjoying this party.

I'm liking school much better now.

This trip is costing me a lot of money.

Sometimes we can use either the simple or the continuous with no difference in meaning.

You look well. OR You're looking well. We feel a bit sad. OR We're feeling a bit sad.

Practice

A States and actions (1)

Tom is on the Internet. He's telling people about himself.

Say which verbs express states and which express actions.

- I surf the Net most evenings.
- 1 My flat is in the town centre.
- 2 I drive a taxi in the daytime.
- 3 I own two cars.
- 4 I go to lots of parties.
- 5 I love football.

action

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

B I think/I'm thinking etc. (2)

Complete the conversation. Choose the correct form of the verb.

Emma: Hi, Matthew. What (►) do you look/are you looking at?

Matthew: Oh, hi. These are photos of me when I was a child.

Emma: Oh, look at this one. (1) I think/I'm thinking you look lovely, Matthew.

Matthew: (2) I have/I'm having some more photos here.

Emma: Look at this. Why such a big coat?

Matthew: It was my brother's. That's why (3) it didn't fit/it wasn't fitting properly.

Emma: Oh, (4) I see/I'm seeing. And (5) you have/you're having your tea here. And in this one (6) you think/you're thinking about something very serious.

Matthew: This is a photo of the village (7) I come/I'm coming from.

Emma: Oh, that's nice.

Matthew: And I caught this fish, look. (8) It weighed/It was weighing about half a kilo.

Emma: What a nice little boy! And what a sentimental old thing you are now!

C The verb be (2)

Put in the correct form of *be*.

- Daniel is doing some of the work. He 's being very helpful at the moment.
- I am tired. I want to go home.

- 1 The children very polite today. They don't usually behave so well.
- 2 I'm afraid Melanie can't come because she ill.
- 3 Of course you can understand it. You stupid, that's all.
- 4 We interested in doing a course here.
- 5 Vicky very lazy at the moment. She's done no work at all today.

D I like/I'm liking etc. (3)

Write a sentence which follows on. Choose from these sentences.

I think it's going to be perfect for me.

And I've still got a chance to win.

I've never wanted to change it.

It uses so much petrol.

It's too expensive to buy.

I play it every weekend.

- I enjoy the game. I play it every weekend.

1 I'm enjoying the game.

2 The car costs a lot of money.

3 The car is costing a lot of money.

4 I'm liking my new job.

5 I like my job.