

Stative Verbs for English Language Learners

An active verb, such as *go*, expresses a process (*I'm going to Disneyland over the break*). On the other hand, a stative verb expresses a state of being or a condition (*I am tired*). Unlike action verbs, stative verbs are not used as continuous tense (*-ing*), verbs. For example, we do not normally say *I am being tired*.

Stative verbs express states of being (for example, *was*), preferences (*like*), perceptions (*hear*), beliefs (*hope*), knowledge (*understand*), and ownership (*had*).

Changeable or fixed qualities?

One way to think about some stative verbs is to think of the difference between active qualities that change readily and fixed, or static, qualities that do not change readily. When we think of it that way, we can see that, even though *is (be)* is a stative verb, it's okay to say *He is being silly*—his silliness might change, and he might not be silly a few moments from now. His silliness is not a fixed quality, so we can use the *-ing* verb form. (Another way to say this is *He is behaving silly*.) On the other hand, we would say *She is tall* since she will still be tall in a minute or an hour. She will remain tall. Since her height is a fixed quality, we use the stative form of the verb.

Another way to think about stative verbs is to think of the subject's ability to choose. In *She is tall*, she cannot choose to be tall or have an option not to be tall. On the other hand, in *He is being silly*, he can choose to be silly or not.

Sometimes verbs that are usually stative can be used as active verbs. *I am thinking of applying to Chico State* expresses a process that might change at any moment, while *I think I'll apply to Chico State* expresses a firmer intention. (In addition, native speakers sometimes intentionally misuse stative verbs in informal conversation—for example, *I am loving this!*)

Sense perceptions

Verbs for sense perceptions include *feel, hear, see, perceive, taste, and smell*.

Right! 😊	Wrong ☹️
The water <i>feels</i> cold.	The water is feeling cold.
We <i>heard</i> the radio news.	We were hearing the radio news.
I <i>perceived</i> a very small difference in color.	I was perceiving a very small difference in color.
I <i>saw</i> the plane approaching.	I was seeing the plane approaching.
Do you <i>smell</i> the coffee?	Are you smelling the coffee?
It <i>tastes</i> bitter.	It is tasting bitter.

Preferences (feelings, likes, and dislikes)

Verbs for preferences include *love, hate, like, dislike, intend, surprise, want, wish, and prefer*.

Right! 😊	Wrong ☹️
He <i>abhors</i> war.	He is abhorring war.
You <i>astonish</i> me!	You are astonishing me!
He <i>dislikes</i> most energy drinks.	He is disliking most energy drinks.
I <i>hate</i> it when people lie.	I am hating it when people lie.
She <i>likes</i> pizza.	She is liking pizza.

Do you <i>intend</i> to marry him?	Are you intending to marry him?
I <i>love</i> you.	I am loving you.
I <i>prefer</i> the salmon.	I am preferring the salmon.
Their solution <i>satisfies</i> us.	Their solution is satisfying us.
I <i>wanted</i> to go early.	I was wanting to go early.

Knowledge and beliefs

Verbs expressing degrees of knowledge and belief include *believe*, *doubt*, *guess*, *know*, *mean*, *realize*, *recognize*, *think*, and *wonder*.

Right! 😊	Wrong 😞
I <i>believe</i> in God.	I am believing in God.
I <i>doubt</i> we will be there on time.	I am doubting we will be there on time.
We <i>feel</i> sure you will graduate.	We are feeling sure you will graduate.
She <i>forgave</i> him for being late.	She was forgiving him for being late.
I <i>guess</i> he'll go with you.	I am guessing he'll go with you.
<i>Can you imagine</i> what might happen!	Are you imagining what might happen!
His improvement in Spanish <i>impresses</i> me.	His improvement in Spanish is impressing me.
I <i>knew</i> it!	I was knowing it!
What <i>do you mean</i> ?	What are you meaning?
We <i>didn't realize</i> the bus was late.	We were not realizing the bus was late.
She <i>recognized</i> him from the movie poster.	She was recognizing him from the movie poster.
He <i>remembered</i> the license plate number.	He was remembering the license plate number.
I <i>suppose</i> you are right.	I am supposing you are right.
He <i>thinks</i> your car gets better gas mileage.	He is thinking your car gets better gas mileage.
I <i>understand</i> how you feel.	I am understanding how you feel.

Being and ownership

Verbs that express states of being and ownership or belonging include *be*, *belong*, *contain*, *comprise*, *consist*, *have*, *owe*, *own*, *resemble*, and *seem*.

Right! 😊	Wrong 😞
He <i>is</i> a wide receiver for the Trojans.	He is being a wide receiver for the Trojans.
She <i>belongs</i> to the honor society.	She is belonging to the honor society.
The bread <i>contains</i> whole grains.	That bread is containing whole grains.
The USA <i>consists</i> of fifty states.	The USA is consisting of fifty states.
He <i>has</i> time to see you in the morning.	He is having time to see you in the morning.
She <i>owes</i> me money.	She is owing me money.
They <i>own</i> forty acres of peaches.	They are owning forty acres of peaches.
He <i>possesses</i> a lot of good qualities.	He is possessing a lot of good qualities.
Her hat <i>resembled</i> a bird in flight.	Her hat was resembling a bird in flight.
You <i>seemed</i> excited.	You were seeming excited.

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever



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