

State verbs and action verbs

There are mainly two types of verbs: action verbs and state verbs.

Action verbs refer to an action. Examples are: write, work, break, kick, cook, take etc. State verbs or stative verbs refer to a state. The most common state verbs are be and have. They are both primary auxiliaries. The other primary auxiliary - do - is an action verb.

Other common verbs referring to states are: know, believe, like, love, hate, remember, suppose, understand, want, wish etc.

There is an important difference between action verbs and state verbs. Action verbs can have both simple and continuous forms. State verbs, on the other hand, do not normally have continuous forms. This is probably because continuous forms are mainly used to talk about temporary situations. States, on the other hand, tend to be permanent or long lasting.

Examples are given below.

Honesty is the best policy.

My sister is an architect.

I have a sister.

These are permanent situations that are unlikely to change in a long time.

More examples are given below.

I know your hometown. (NOT I am knowing your home town.)

She likes her grandmother. (NOT She is liking her grandmother.)

Your knowledge of something is permanent. You either know something or you don't.

However, some verbs can have an action meaning as well as a state meaning. An example is the verb think.

When think means 'have an opinion' it is not normally used in the continuous form.

State verbs and action verbs

What do you think of her new boyfriend? (= What is your opinion about her new boyfriend?)
(NOT What are you thinking of her new boyfriend?)

Think can have a continuous form when it is used with other meanings.

What are you thinking about?

I am thinking about starting a business.