Action Words: Spotting Verbs in Year 1 Sentences

Verbs are the 'doing' and 'being' words in sentences. In Year 1, children learn to spot them among other words they already know, like nouns (naming words) and adjectives (describing words). Understanding verbs helps children build strong foundations for reading, writing and grammar learning.

What it is: Understanding verbs

A verb is a word that describes an action or a state of being. In Year 1, children learn simple action verbs through words they use every day: run, jump, sleep, eat, play. These are straightforward because children can physically do them—they can jump up and down to show what "jump" means. Your child has already learned about nouns (naming words like "cat" or "book") and adjectives (describing words like "red" or "happy"). Verbs are the next piece of the puzzle. They tell you what someone or something is doing, or what they are. This is an important building block for later grammar work in Year 2, where children will learn about tenses and how to construct more complex sentences.

What happens: How verbs are taught

The teaching approach in Year 1 keeps verbs practical and concrete. Teachers use simple sentences about everyday actions: "The cat runs." "The children jump." "I sleep." Pupils then act out the verb to test their understanding—if you can do it with your body, it's likely a verb. This physical, playful method helps cement the idea that verbs are action words. The work fits alongside other grammar learning. A worksheet might ask children to match action words to pictures, or to sort words into "doing words" and "non-doing words." This repetition and variety of activities means children see verbs in different contexts and start to notice them in sentences they read.

What it means for your child: Why this matters

Learning to spot verbs is a foundation for everything that comes next in grammar and writing. In Year 2, children begin to learn about tenses—past, present, future—and verbs are central to that. By the end of Key Stage 1, they will use verbs correctly in their own writing. Understanding verbs also helps children make sense of sentences they read. When they see "The dog barked," they can recognise which word tells them what happened. This kind of word knowledge, built step by step across Year 1 and 2, is what allows children to become confident readers and writers. There's no pressure here; it's simply about noticing patterns in language that children already use naturally when they speak.

How you can help at home: Simple ideas

You don't need special materials. Play a simple "doing words" game: call out an action—run, hop, wiggle, freeze—and your child acts it out. Pause and ask, "What word did you just do?" This anchors the verb in their body and makes the idea concrete. When you read stories together, you can point out action words: "Look, the rabbit hopped. Hopped is a doing word." Keep it light and brief; a minute or two is plenty. During everyday routines, notice verbs aloud: "We're washing hands. Washing is a doing word." At bath time, ask, "What verbs can you do in the bath?" and let them splash, float, and pour. The goal is to make it playful and natural, not a formal lesson at home.

Questions parents often ask

Do I need to teach my child about verbs at home? No—the school will teach them. But if your child enjoys noticing words, the ideas above can make it fun. **What if my child finds this confusing?** Year 1 children are all at different stages with grammar. It's completely normal if verbs take time to "click." Keep things light and playful. **Is it important that my child learns the word "verb"?** Knowing the label "verb" is less important than spotting that some words describe actions. The word comes later; understanding the idea comes first. **What if my child asks about "being" verbs like "is" or "am"?** These are less obvious than "run" or "jump." Year 1 teachers often focus on action verbs first. If your child is curious, you can say these are also verbs—they tell us about being or existing—but it's not essential to go into detail at this stage.

Sources

- National Curriculum for England: English programme of study (Key Stage 1) – Department for Education
- GOV.UK: Key Stage 1 information and guidance