Bossy Verbs: Understanding How Instructions and Recipes Work

Key points

- A 'bossy verb' is an action word that tells someone what to do – like 'Mix', 'Cut', or 'Close' – and it appears in recipes, instructions and rules.
- Bossy verbs work by starting a sentence with the action rather than saying who should do it: 'Mix the flour' instead of 'You mix the flour'.
- Year 2 children are learning about bossy verbs (called the imperative mood in grammar) so they can write their own instructions and rules clearly.
- Spotting bossy verbs helps children understand that different types of writing have different patterns – a recipe sounds different from a story.
- Bossy verbs make instructions quick and clear because they focus straight on what needs doing, without extra words.
- You'll see bossy verbs everywhere: in cooking, building, game rules, classroom rules and safety instructions.

Things to try at home

- Choose a simple recipe together (toast, a sandwich, or a drink) and find all the bossy verbs: 'Spread', 'Pour', 'Mix'. Your child could underline or circle them.
- Write instructions together for something your child knows well – how to get ready for bed, how to feed a pet, or how to play a favourite game – and see if every step is a bossy verb.
- Look at a board game or toy instruction leaflet together and spot the bossy verbs that tell you what to do.
- Play a game where you take turns writing one bossy verb instruction and the other person acts it out – 'Hop', 'Clap', 'Spin' – this makes grammar playful.
- Ask your child to write or draw instructions for their favourite activity – painting, building with blocks, or making a snack – using as many bossy verbs as they can.

Find out more

- Your child's teacher or school – ask what grammar work they're doing in class and which books are good for spotting bossy verbs.
- The Department for Education's National Curriculum for English sets out what Year 2 children learn: www.gov.uk/national-curriculum.
- Visit your library and ask staff to recommend children's cookbooks or instruction books – these are full of bossy verbs to spot together.