# Bossy Verbs: Why Instructions and Recipes Use the Command Form

In Year 2, children learn about imperative verbs—'bossy verbs' that give instructions or commands. These are sentences that tell someone what to do, like 'Mix the flour' or 'Close the door'. The subject (who is doing the action) drops away, and the sentence starts straight with the action. Learning about bossy verbs helps children understand how language changes depending on what we want to say, and it's a natural stepping stone to writing clear instructions and recipes.

## What it is

An imperative verb is a 'bossy verb'—it gives an instruction or command. In a normal sentence, we say who is doing the action: 'You mix the flour.' But with a bossy verb, we drop the 'you' and start straight with the action: 'Mix the flour.' Other examples are 'Put on your shoes', 'Listen carefully', 'Sit down', and 'Open your book.' Imperative verbs are everywhere in everyday life—in recipes, instruction manuals, classroom rules, game rules, and safety signs. They're how we tell people what to do in a quick, clear way. Your child will learn to spot them in texts they read and use them in their own writing, especially when writing instructions or recipes.

## What happens

In Year 2, children learn to identify imperative verbs by looking at familiar texts like recipes, instructions, and classroom rules. The teacher might read a simple recipe together as a class and ask 'Which words tell you what to do?' Children spot the bossy verbs and notice they come at the start of sentences. They learn that these verbs are doing a special job—giving orders or instructions. Then children practise writing their own bossy verb sentences: describing how to make a sandwich, how to play a game, or how to care for a pet. Teachers often use short, practical activities so children can see the pattern clearly. This connects to non-fiction writing, which is a key part of Year 2 English—children write instructions, labels, lists and simple how-to texts.

## What it means for your child

Understanding imperative verbs helps your child become a better reader and writer. As a reader, they start to notice that different types of writing do different jobs. A story uses different verbs than a recipe or an instruction manual. This awareness helps them understand what they're reading and why it's written that way. As a writer, learning about bossy verbs gives them a tool for their own toolkit. When they write instructions—say, 'How to make a paper plane'—they can write clear, direct sentences that tell the reader exactly what to do. It also builds their overall knowledge of how grammar works and how verbs change depending on context. These small building blocks of grammar knowledge add up to stronger reading and writing skills.

## How you can help at home

The easiest way to help is through everyday activities your child already enjoys. Cook or bake together and read the recipe aloud: 'Crack the eggs. Stir the mixture. Pour into the tin.' Ask your child to spot the bossy verbs. You could play a simple game: give each other funny instructions ('Hop to the kitchen', 'Clap three times', 'Wiggle like a snake') and let your child notice they all start with an action word. Read instruction manuals together—for a toy, a game, or a flat-pack item—and talk about the bossy verbs. Let

your child write their own simple instructions for something they enjoy: how to build a block tower, how to feed a pet, or how to draw a picture. Keep it short and playful; the goal is to help them see the pattern, not to drill them. Your warmth and interest matter more than perfection.

## Questions parents often ask

**'Why do they need to know this?'** Understanding how imperative verbs work is part of learning grammar. It helps children notice patterns in language and use them in their own writing. It's not just about recipes—imperatives are in games rules, safety instructions, and all sorts of writing. **'Is my child behind if they find this tricky?'** Not at all. Grammar concepts take time to sink in, and every child learns at their own pace. If your child finds imperatives confusing, keep talking about them in a relaxed way through everyday contexts. **'What if my child mixes up bossy verbs with other verbs?'** That's completely normal at this age. The more they see and use imperative verbs, the clearer the pattern becomes. If you're worried about progress, chat with their teacher, who can offer guidance tailored to your child.

## Sources

- Department for Education (2014). National Curriculum in England: Key Stages 1 and 2 framework document
- GOV.UK: Key Stage 1 English curriculum overview