Stative Verbs

Verbs can show actions or states.

**Action verbs** show that something is happening. Examples are *play, take, stop, buy* or *cry.*

A **stative (or state verb)** is a verb describing a state of mind or of being. Something stays the same.

State verbs express things like *having* or *owning,* *feelings,* *beliefs,* *opinions* and *being.*

We can say, *I really like your new shirt.*

In this sentence I am not doing anything,

I'm feeling something. *Like* is a state or stative verb.

In the sentence *"These shoes belong to my sister:"*

The shoes are not doing anything. *Belong* is a stative verb.

There are many state verbs.

Here are some state verbs that are used for thinking: *believe, suppose, know, understand, recognize, prefer, realize, remember, mean, imagine, agree, disagree, doubt.*

Here are some that describe how we feel: *hope, want, wish, detest, hate, loathe, dislike, like, love, appreciate, adore, care.*

These ones are used to describe possession: *possess, own, belong, contain, cost, have (when it means own).*

The verbs describing the five senses are usually state verbs: *look, hear, taste, smell, feel.* (However, sometimes they can be actions. See below for an example of 'taste' as an action.)

State verbs are **not** used with the continuous. Here are some examples of this:

State verb: own - *I'm owning this car.* (Wrong) Correct: *I own this car.*

Action verb: drive - *I am driving this car.* Correct.

State verb: know - *I'm knowing the answer.* (Wrong) Correct: *I know the answer.*

Action verb: tell - *I am telling the teacher the answer.* Correct.

Some verbs have different meanings and can be an action or a state depending on the meaning that is being used.

e.g. Have can mean 'eat' (an action), and 'possess or own' (a state).

State verb: *have* (own): *I am having a large house near Richmond.* (Wrong) Correct: *I have a large house near Richmond.*

Action verb: *have* (eat): *I'm having brunch with my friends now. Can I call you back?* Correct.

Another example of a verb with different meanings is fit.

State verb: fit (meaning whether something is the right size in clothes): *This dress is fitting me very well.* (Wrong) Correct: *This dress fits me very well.*

Action verb: fit (meaning installing or putting together): *The carpet layers are fitting the new carpet downstairs.* Correct.

Other verbs like this include:

- **taste** - Action: *The chef is tasting the soup to see if it is okay.* State: *This soup tastes delicious.*

- **admire** - Action: *I'm just admiring your new painting.* It's great. State: *I really admire her for her bravery.*

- **weigh** - Action: *The butcher is weighing the meat now.* State: *This meat weighs six kilograms.*

- **see** - Action: *I'm seeing Neil at three o'clock.* State: *I can see a black cat on the piano.*

- **think** - Action: *What are you thinking about? You're looking serious.* State: *What do you think of this statue?*

Sometimes we can use some state verbs in the continuous when we see something as an active thought or feeling for a length of time, not something that is a permanent state.

*I enjoy romantic comedies.* (permanent) I am really enjoying this movie. (active feeling for a period of time)

Some verbs can **never** be continuous because they always express states.

Examples of these are *depend on, belong to, contain, desire, know, own, possess, prefer, seem.*
Exercise 1:

**Right or Wrong?** Write ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ beside each sentence. Should each verb be in the continuous or not?

1. I'm having lunch with Jo tomorrow. **right**
2. She was seeing a tall, dark-haired man outside in the garden. **right**
3. He is enjoying the new Harry Potter. **wrong**
4. I am hating tomatoes. I have never liked them. **wrong**
5. And now the Prime Minister is picking up her spoon. The Prime Minister is tasting her soup. **right**
   Yes, she is smiling! The soup is okay. **right**
6. I am thinking we should go to a movie. Do you agree? **right**
7. He is owning four cars. **wrong**
8. I am not knowing her very well. She is not a close friend. **wrong**
9. I am really liking your new haircut. **right**
10. Your hair is looking fantastic tonight. **right**

Exercise 2:

Choose the correct answer from the choices in the sentences below.

1. At the airport I **was recognizing/am recognizing/recognized** the man I had to pick up from the photo the company had given me.
2. He **has been deserving/is deserving/deserves** a raise because he is such a good employee.
3. I **was seeing/am seeing/see** what you mean. And I agree with you.
4. I **will be thinking/’m thinking/think** of going to Boston for my vacation next month.
5. Every morning when I wake up I **had smell/am smelling/can smell** wonderful cooking smells from the hotel kitchen.