Verbs are words that express that an action takes place or that a state of being exists (to run, to eat, to see, to want, to be, etc.). The verb is the most important element of a sentence.

The infinitive form of a verb is a form that expresses the meaning of the verb (what the action or state is); it does not tell us who is doing the action or when it's happening.

- In Spanish, the infinitive form of the verbs end in the following letter combinations: -ar, -er, -ir.

Here are, then, the infinitive forms of three common verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Infinitive Ending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hablar</td>
<td>habl-</td>
<td>-ar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comer</td>
<td>com-</td>
<td>-er</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>escribir</td>
<td>escrib-</td>
<td>-ir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each verb above, the part that comes before the -ar, -er or -ir ending is called the stem (or root). This is the part that contains the actual meaning of the verb. Thus:

- habl- has to do with speech
- com- has to do with food
- escrib- has to do with writing

Note that these stems can also be found in other words that are not verbs; thus, una persona habladora is a person who speaks a lot; la comida is food, and un escritor is a person who writes.

The other part of the verb is the infinitive ending (-ar, -er, -ir). This part doesn't so much express meaning as give instructions: if we want to express that a specific person (I, you, the students, the man, etc.) does the action at a specific time (in the past, now, in the future), we have to modify the infinitive form (since it only expresses what, not who or when). In Spanish, we generally do this by removing the ending (-ar, -er, -ir) from the infinitive and then adding certain endings to the stem that's left.

There are different groups of endings depending on the time frame. So, the endings that we use to express that an action happens or is happening in the present are different from those that express a past or future action. There are also different endings depending on who is doing the action (the person or thing doing the action is called the subject).

Within any time frame (past, present, future), there is generally one set of endings for those verbs that end in -ar, and a different set for those that end in -er or -ir (sometimes the -er and -ir endings look exactly the same; sometimes there are minor differences). Here are some example sets:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past*</th>
<th>Past*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>-ar</td>
<td>-er</td>
<td>-ir</td>
<td>-ar</td>
<td>-er &amp; -ir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo</td>
<td>-o</td>
<td>-o</td>
<td>-o</td>
<td>-é</td>
<td>-í</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú</td>
<td>-as</td>
<td>-es</td>
<td>-es</td>
<td>-aste</td>
<td>-iste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Él/ella/usted</td>
<td>-a</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-ó</td>
<td>-ió</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nosotros/as</td>
<td>-amos</td>
<td>-emos</td>
<td>-imos</td>
<td>-amos</td>
<td>-imos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellos/ellas/ustedes</td>
<td>-an</td>
<td>-en</td>
<td>-en</td>
<td>-aron</td>
<td>-ieron</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The past tense is presented in the second semester of Spanish; for those who haven't yet studied it, don't worry: it's presented here only to help illustrate certain concepts.

So, if I want to use the verb hablar, I begin with the knowledge that it ends in -ar:
- First, I decide what time frame I’m dealing with; to talk about the present (now), I know that I need to choose an ending from the 2nd column (-o, -as, -a, -amos, -an); if I want to talk about the past (last night, for example), I’m going to need to choose from the 5th column (-é, -aste, ó, -amos, -aron).
- Next, I determine who is going to be the subject (the person or thing doing the action) in my sentence; if “I” will be the subject, I’ll pick the -o ending from the 2nd column (if I’ve decided to talk about now) or the -é ending from the 5th column (to talk about last night).
- If my brothers (= ellos) were the subject, I would be choosing between -an and -aron.

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If I want to use the verb *comer*, I don't even look at the 2nd or 5th columns; this verb ends with *-er*, so I know right away that I'll be choosing from different sets of endings (3rd or 6th columns).
- Again, I choose my time frame first: present (= 3rd column)
- Next, I determine who the subject is: my brothers (= *ellos, ellas, ustedes* form)

In the examples above, we've used the verbs *hablar, comer* and *escribir* as representative of all regular verbs in each group. **Regular** just means that the verb follows the rules of formation for that tense. Note that the rules of formation for the present tense are:

1- remove the infinitive ending (*-ar, -er, -ir*)
2- add the appropriate ending (from the appropriate group) to the remaining stem

Most verbs are regular. As you learn new verbs, in addition to remembering what they mean and whether they end in *-ar, -er* or *-ir* (so you know what set of endings to choose from when the time comes to modify the verb), you also need to know whether the verb is regular or not. If it is, you will modify it in the exact same way that you did with the "model" verbs (*hablar, comer, escribir*).

So, imagine that you learn three new verbs: *mirar, beber* and *vivir*.
1. You learn what each stem means (*mir-* has to do with looking; *beb-* with beverages; *viv-* with life).
2. You learn how each verb ends (in other words, that the first verb is *mirar*, not *mirir*).
3. You also learn that all three are regular.

Now, when you want to modify them to express that someone is doing the action at a given time, you know what set of endings to choose from, as well as what process to follow when modifying (= the same process that you followed with the "model" verbs).

As luck would have it, not all verbs are regular. Since you can’t predict how you’ll manipulate these “nonconformist” verbs (as you can with the regular, which you know follow certain patterns), you’ll generally have to learn the process of modification and the sets of endings for each verb individually. On the positive side, sometimes the irregularities occur with a group of verbs, not just one, so you can at least learn what the irregularity is and then apply it to more than one case.

We’ve seen above that, to express that a certain action occurs or is occurring in the present tense, we follow the following process of modification:

1- remove the infinitive ending (*-ar, -er, -ir*)
2- add the appropriate ending (from the appropriate group) to the remaining stem

Sometimes, we want to talk about an action, but we don’t want to express that it occurs (or is occurring); rather, we want to express that it’s something that we *want* or *need* or *plan* or *like* to occur. In these situations, we'll actually use the verb in its infinitive form (the one that ends in *-ar, -er, -ir*), but we’ll combine it with another verb that we will modify. Here are some common combinations:

To express a **desire** to do the action:
*desear* + infinitive

*Mi amigo quiere comer una manzana.*

To express a **preference** to do the action:
*preferir* + infinitive

*Tú prefieres dormir en el sofá.*
HOW VERBS WORK IN SPANISH (3/3)

To express the necessity of doing or an obligation to do the action:

- necesitar + infinitive
  - Los estudiantes necesitan estudiar más.
- tener que + infinitive
  - La profesora tiene que dormir más.
- deber + infinitive
  - Debo ir a la biblioteca hoy.

Notice that the phrases above express a specific person's or persons' responsibilities (yo necesito, ella tiene que, nosotros debemos, etc.) We can also express a general or impersonal obligation; in this case, the focus is on the action, not on the person who has to do it:

- Hay que + infinitive
  - Hay que tener amigos para ser feliz.
- Es necesario + infinitive
  - Es necesario dormir bien todas las noches.

To express an intention or plan to do the action:

- ir a + infinitive
  - Mañana vamos a visitar el museo de arte.
- pensar + infinitive
  - Piensas preparar flan el viernes.

To express the ability (based on knowledge, or knowing how) to do an action:

- saber + infinitive
  - Yo sé tocar el piano, pero mi amigo sabe tocar el violín

To express the ability or possibility (no obstacles) to do an action:

- poder + infinitive
  - Sé esquiar pero hoy no puedo esquiar porque tengo clase.

To express a positive or negative opinion about the action:

- (no) [me/te/le/nos/les] gusta + infinitive
  - Me gusta correr pero no me gusta jugar al béisbol.

Remember that we also have a special combination to express that the action is happening right now. This is called the present progressive tense. Here, we combine the present tense of the verb estar (modified to the appropriate person, of course) with the gerund form of the verb. Whereas the infinitive form of the verb ends in -ar, -er, -ir, the gerund form ends in -ando or -iendo. See p.207-8 of Dos mundos:En breve, 3a ed. for more on this.

- estar + gerund
  - Ahora mi mamá está hablando con mi hermano y yo estoy leyendo el periódico.

After reading the above, you should know what the following terms mean: verb, stem, infinitive form, infinitive ending, conjugation, subject, regular.