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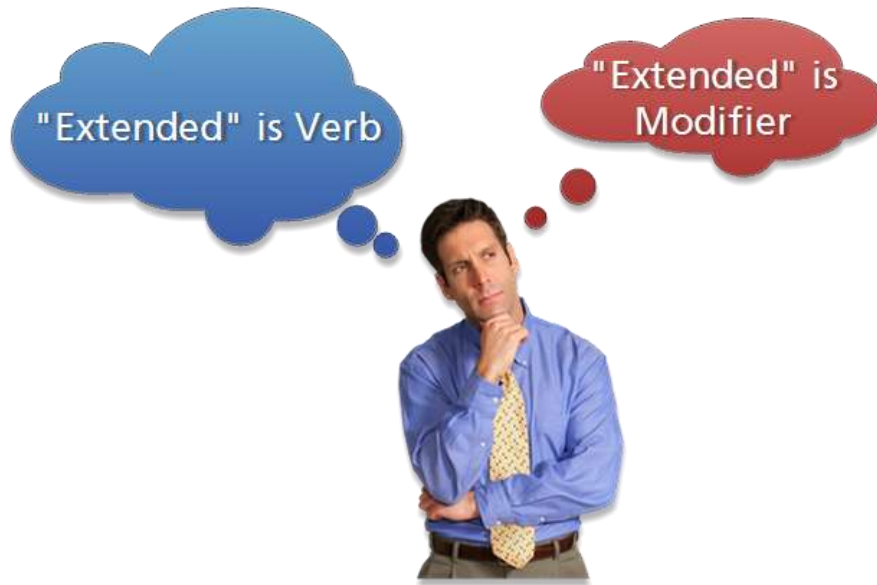
Verb-ed Forms – Verbs or Modifiers?

By e-GMAT Team
E-GMAT LLC

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VERB-ED FORMS – VERBS OR MODIFIERS



Introduction

“Scientists have recently discovered what could be the largest and oldest living organism on Earth, a giant fungus that is an interwoven filigree of mushrooms and root like tentacles spawned by a single fertilized spore some 10,000 years ago and extending for more than 30 acres in the soil of a Michigan forest.”

This is probably one of the most discussed problems in GMAT Verbal SC section. This sentence is a cake walk for those who understand verb-ing and verb-ed modifiers thoroughly, and is confusing to the hilt for those who have just started to learn these concepts. The tactfully crafted answer choices of this problem keep bringing this question on various forums for discussion and detailed explanation. So let's take a look at those interesting answer choices:

1. extending
2. extends
3. extended
4. it extended
5. is extending

In the first glimpse, the sentence looks simple and easy. You scan the sentence, discover the word “spawned”, look at conjunction “and”, think, “Oh! Parallelism dude. How simple!”, mark Choice C. But all the excitement is robbed off by the Answer Key page that says Choice A is the correct answer.

So where did you go wrong? Is not “spawned” and “extended” grammatically parallel? They both have the same structure. The instinct (especially of the non-natives) is to believe that words with “ed” are simple past tense verbs. So if you took “spawned” to be the simple past tense verb, you looked for the same for “extending” and marked “extended”. You got the incorrect answer.

After a few days of GMAT study introduces the concept of “verb-ed” modifiers. So you know that verb-ed words can be verb-ed modifiers as well. So even if you thought that “spawned” is a verb-ed modifier and “extended” should also be the verb-ed modifier because it is absolutely parallel to “spawned”, you selected “extended” just to know that you committed a mistake.

Verb-ed – Can be Simple Past Tense or Modifier

So, what is happening in this sentence? “Extended” fits as simple past tense verb as well as verb-ed modifier and looks parallel to “spawned”. Then how can “extended” be incorrect both ways? Well, confusion is bound to happen when one word can assume more than one role in different sentences, depending on the context in which they are used. “Spawned” and “extended” can be used as simple past tense verb as well as modifiers. The challenge in the question is to determine whether “spawned” and “extended” are verb-ed modifiers or just the verb and then decide in what form should “extended” be used.

Let us study “extended” first. The root word is “extend” the past tense of which is “extended”.

1. The company extended the training period for the interns. – extended = simple past tense
2. The training period extended last year made many interns unhappy. – extended as verb-ed modifier

The same word “extended” works as “verb” in sentence a, and as “modifier” in sentence b. Most of the words can be written as “verb” as well as “modifier” if we add “ed” to them. “Spawned” is also one of them.

If you want to know how to tell whether a verb-ed word is a simple past tense verb or a modifier, read in the following section about this simple test that will never fail you.

Litmus Test

There is a simple test we can perform to find out whether the verb-ed is a verb in simple past tense or the verb-ed modifier. Let's get a sentence here:

1. *The training period extended last year made many interns unhappy.*

Now, the verbs are generally placed near the subjects because the subjects are the doers of the action denoted by the verb. The subject here is "The training period". The next word is "extended". So ask this question: "Did "the training period" do the action of "extending"? The answer is "No". The action of extension was not done the training period. In other word, the Subject-Verb pair does not make sense. This tells you that "extended" is a verb-ed modifier here and not the verb.

You can always ask the question if the action denoted by the verb placed after the noun entity has been performed by that noun entity or not. If the answer is "yes", then it is verb, else it is the modifier.

Now let us apply this test on the "giant fungus". After cutting the flab, this is the core that we get:

...a giant fungus... spawned by a single fertilized pore some 10,000 years ago...

So let's ask, did "a giant fungus" did the action of "spawning"? The answer is "no" because it is clearly mentioned in the sentence that the action of spawning was done by "a single fertilized pore". Hence, it is confirmed that "spawned" is a verb-ed modifier.

Next we need to determine if "extended" will actually be parallel to "spawned". Note that "extended" CAN be a verb-ed modifier. However, we need to find out if this form works in this sentence:

...a giant fungus... extended for more than 30 acres in the soil of a Michigan forest.

Did "a giant fungus" do the job of extension? Yes, it did. It is the giant fungus that extends for more than 30 acres. This means that "extended" will work as simple past tense verb in this sentence. This is the reason why "extended" is incorrect answer because a verb CANNOT be parallel to a verb-ed modifier, even if they have the identical structure.

Exercise 1

Identify whether the underlined words are verbs or verb-ed modifiers.

1. Like birds today, Archaeopteryx had feathers that were fully formed.
2. Our powers of color vision derive from cells in our eyes called cones, three types in all, each triggered by different wavelengths of light.
3. As Joel Bregman hoped, dozens of young stars turned up in each of the three dead galaxies—and as an added surprise, they even appeared in Messier 105.
4. Dark matter might actually be produced at the energies explored by the world's most powerful particle accelerator, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC).

How Verb-ed Modifier is Derived

This section is for those who have the grammarian like quest for knowledge. We will explain here in detail how verb-ed modifiers are derived. This knowledge is not imperative to take the GMAT, but is more for personal understanding as to why verb-ed modifiers work the way they do. So let's bring the sentence with verb-ed modifier back here:

- The training period extended last year made many interns unhappy.

Now this sentence can be written as:

- The training period that was extended last year made many interns unhappy.

So, we have a relative pronoun clause here that is written in simple past tense in passive voice. Per the grammar rules, verb-ed modifiers are derived by removing the relative pronoun modifier that is written in passive voice by removing "the relative pronoun" and "the helping verb" (is/are/am/was/were). Hence we derive:

that was extended last year = was extended last year = extended last year

Let's take another example:

- A good leader who is followed by the mass and is respected for his benevolent qualities is always remembered for several generations.

So here we have two relative clauses with passive verbs "is followed" and "is respected". Let's turn both of them into verb-ed modifiers.

1. Who is followed by the mass = is followed by the mass = followed by the mass
 2. Who is respected for his benevolent qualities = is respected for his benevolent qualities = respected for his benevolent qualities
- A good leader followed by the mass and respected for his benevolent qualities, is always remembered for several generations

Notice that active verbs in relative pronoun clause cannot be turned into verb-ed modifiers. Let's try this:

- A leader who guides his followers honestly earns immense respect from the mass.

If we apply the rule to derive verb-ed modifier here, this is what we will get:

Who guides his followers = guides his followers

Notice the limitation with the sentence having a relative pronoun in active voice and simple present tense. There is no question of getting verb-ed modifier here because originally there is no verb-ed word in this sentence.

This method will not work even if we change the tense of the above sentence:

- A leader who guided his followers honestly earned immense respect from the mass.

Who guided his followers = guided his followers

Now let's put this verb-ed modifier phrase in the sentence:

- A leader guided his followers honestly earned immense respect from the mass.

No need to say that this sentence is a fragment because here "guided" is the simple past tense verb and not a verb-ed modifier. "earned" again is a verb. So this sentence has two verbs that are not connected properly. We landed up this disaster because we tried to make the verb-ed modifier out of the verb in active voice in the relative clause.

How Can This Help You Answer GMAT SC?

People who are fluent in the language do not need to know the basics behind the derivation of the verb-ed modifiers because they intuitively know that sentence 1 is correct but sentence 2 is incorrect. They may not be able to pin point the reason for the same, but they can distinguish right from wrong. But people who are not that fluent in this language may get confused about the above. For example, one of the students asked me the following question about OG12#85:

Can I omit “that” from this sentence or is “that” required?

Salt deposits and moisture threaten to destroy the Mohenjo-Daro excavation in Pakistan, the site of an ancient civilization that flourished at the same time as the civilizations ...

The answer = **“that” is required** because if you omit it, the sentence will be a run-on sentence. But consider another version of this sentence:

*Salt deposits and moisture threaten to destroy the Mohenjo-Daro excavation in Pakistan, the site of an ancient civilization **that** was destroyed multiple times by flooding of Indus river...*

Now in this sentence, **“that” can be omitted** (obviously along with “was”)

Salt deposits and moisture threaten to destroy the Mohenjo-Daro excavation in Pakistan, the site of an ancient civilization destroyed multiple times by flooding of Indus river...

In essence, this information helps build your knowledge about the sentence structure, which in turn results in more solid foundation.

Solutions

Identify whether the underlined words are verbs or verb-ed modifiers.

- Like birds today, Archaeopteryx had feathers that were fully formed.

Formed = simple past tense verb. In the relative pronoun clause, “that” is the subject that stands for “feathers” and the verb for this subject is “were formed”.

- Our powers of color vision are derived from cells in our eyes called cones, three types in all, each triggered by different wavelengths of light.

Called & triggered = verb-ed modifier

Litmus Test: Did the “eyes” do the action of calling? No. Hence, it’s a modifier.

Did “each” do the job of triggering? No. Different wavelengths of light did that job. Hence, “triggered” is the modifier.

- As Joel Bregman hoped, dozens of young stars turned up in each of the three dead galaxies—and as an added surprise, they even appeared in Messier 105.

Hoped, turned & appeared = simple past tense verbs for subjects “Joel Bregman”, “dozens of young stars” and “they” respectively.

Added = modifier that modifies “surprise”.

- Dark matter might actually be produced at the energies explored by the world’s most powerful particle accelerator, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC).

Explored = verb-ed modifier

Litmus Test: Will “the energies” do the job of exploring? No. The world’s most powerful particle accelerator, the Large Hadron Collider might do that action. Hence, “explored” is the modifier.

- A leader guided by sound principles earned immense respect from the masses.

Guided = verb-ed modifier, earned = simple past tense verb for the subject “A leader”.

Litmus Test: Did a leader do the action of guiding? In this context, no. “Sound principles” guided “a leader”. Hence, guided is the modifier.

- A company founded on sound business principles achieves much higher success.

Founded = verb-ed modifier

Litmus Test: Did a company do the action of founding? In this context no. May be the founder of the company did that job. Hence, founded is the verb-ed modifier.

- The lamp decorated with stars filled the child's room with innocent beauty.

Decorated = verb-ed modifier, filled = simple past tense verb for the subject "The lamp".

Litmus Test: Did the lamp do the action of decorating. No. Hence, it is the modifier.

Correct these sentences if you feel they are incorrect.

- The lamp decorated the child's room filled his room with innocent beauty. = Incorrect

Correct = The lamp that decorated the child's room filled his room with innocent beauty.

- A leader guided his followers earned immense respect from the masses. = Incorrect

Correct = A leader who guided his followers earned immense respect from the masses.

Take Away

To ascertain whether a Verb-ed form (in the correct sentence) plays the role of a verb or a modifier, ask the question "Is the subject of the sentence, the doer of the action?" If the answer is no, then the verb-ed form will most likely play the role of a modifier.