

Making English Grammar Meaningful and Useful
Mini Lesson #8
Control Verbs and Control Adjectives: Difficult to Remember

The **purpose** of this lesson is to learn about verb plus verb combinations, a topic that is very difficult for ELLs to master, but one that will help them use **Verb Forms** correctly.

Many English sentences contain two verbs used in such a way that the first verb is part of the **Subject-Verb Combination**, and the second verb conveys additional information but is not part of the **Subject-Verb Combination**. In such sentences, the first verb must be used in one of twelve tenses. The second verb is not used as a tense or as part of a tense. Instead, the second verb is used in one of three **Verb Forms**: the **To Form**, the **ING Form** or the **Simple Form**. It is the first verb which controls which form the second verb takes. Therefore, these first verbs are called **Control Verbs**. The following sentences illustrate three kinds of **Control Verbs**.

The instructor **asked** the student **to give** the right answer.

The instructor **watched** the student **giving** the right answer.

The instructor **helped** the student **give** the right answer.

In these three sentences, the first verbs, ‘ask’, ‘watch’, and ‘help’ are **Control Verbs**. They control the form of the second verb, ‘give’. Notice that the first verbs are all in the **Simple Past Tense**. They could be used in any **tense**, depending upon the time that the sentence communicates. However, the second verbs are not in past tense. They are used as **Verb Forms** and their forms will always be the same, regardless of the tense of the first verbs as illustrated in these three sentences.

The instructor **will ask** the student **to give** the right answer.

The instructor **is watching** the student **giving** the right answer.

The instructor **has helped** the student **give** the right answer.

Control Verbs are difficult for ELLs because no apparent explanation can be given for why some **Control Verbs** are followed by the **TO Form** of the second verb, why others are followed by the **ING Form** of the second verb, and why still others are followed by the **Simple Form** of the verb. Some **Control Verbs** can be followed by two forms. ‘Watch’, for example, can be followed by both the **ING Form** (I watched her dancing.) and the **Simple Form** (I watched her dance.). ‘Like’ can be followed by both the **To Form** (I like to dance.) and the **ING Form** (I like dancing.).

English has dozens of **Control Verbs**. They are found in sentences where the first verb is immediately followed by the second verb (I **want to go**.). They are found in sentences where the first verb is followed by an object which becomes the doer of the second verb (I **want him to go**.).

Control Verbs which are followed by the **To Form** include ‘ask’, ‘tell’, ‘like’, and ‘want’. **Control Verbs** followed by the **ING Form** include ‘admit’, ‘avoid’, ‘enjoy’ and ‘report’. **Control Verbs** followed by the **Simple Form** include ‘make’, ‘help’, ‘let’, and ‘have’. However, there are many **Control Verbs**. ELLs need to be aware of why **Control Verbs** are important, and then they need to learn which ones are followed by which forms as they encounter them.

English also has certain adjectives which function in the same way that **Control Verbs** function. These are called **Control Adjectives**. They are usually followed by a preposition followed by the **ING Form** of the verb. These sentences are examples of **Control Adjectives**:

The professor is **opposed to dismissing** the class early.
The professor is **concerned about dismissing** the class early.
The students are **interested in dismissing** the class early.

Control Verbs and **Control Adjectives** are difficult to master, but for ELLs who are interested in making their English productions accurate, they are very useful to know.