

Empty or delexicalised verbs

These verbs take their meaning from the nouns or noun phrases which follow them.

In some cases, with verbs such as *make* or *do*, the choice of verb is idiomatic and the verb does not contribute its meaning to the clause as a whole.

In other cases, with verbs such as *take*, *break*, *set* and *give*, some sense of the verb's meaning is retained in the clause.

break

This verb often means something like *interrupt*.

She broke her promise to marry him

I broke my journey in London

It broke my heart to see him so unhappy

catch

This verb often means *get*.

I caught a cold at school

The house caught fire

I caught sight of her outside the house

I didn't catch that – can you say it again?

do

This verb often goes with nouns which are about work or jobs but not always.

She did her best

We did very little business in the shop

I did not do the damage

She did her job very well

We did history at my school

I did the food for the party

It did me no harm

We did our homework on the train

I did him a favour

You did wrong to say that to her

Can you do the shopping?

I'll do the washing up, if you like

earn

This verb often means *get something good*.

She earns my thanks

He earns a good living

They earned respect for their honesty

give

This verb often has the sense of something passed from one person to another.

She gave no answer

You gave me your promise

lose

This verb keeps its usual meaning in the clause.

I have lost confidence in his ability

Don't lose heart. It will all be OK in the end

I have lost touch with my old friends

make

This verb often means something like *produce* or *manufacture* but not always.

I must make my apologies and leave now

Can I make an appointment?

We will make all the arrangements

I will make certain she is there

You have to make a choice now

I want to make a complaint

She made her confession to her mother

Have you made a decision?

I have made a new discovery

I will make enquiries for you

They made their escape through a tunnel

She made a good excuse

I have made some good friends in my job

Don't make fun of me. I'm serious

They made a fuss about the food

Can you make a guess?

They made a long journey into the forest

I have made a terrible mistake

I'll make another offer

They made peace at last after the fighting

I make some repairs to the house

Make a little room for me at your table

She made a funny speech

I made my way to the harbour

pay

This verb often has the meaning of *give*.

Please pay close attention

He paid me a very nice compliment

I must pay my respects to your mother

She gave notice and left her job the following month
I'll give it some thought
She gave the idea no consideration
It gave rise to a lot of problems

go

This verb often has the sense of changing state. It is often followed by an adjective or adverb, not a noun phrase.

The food went bad
The machine went wrong
The dog went mad
The scissors went missing
The sun went in
The lights went off / on
We went hungry on our walk

hold

This verb often means *arrange*.

We must hold a new election
They held a conversation about it
The university is holding a conference
They are holding a festival on the saint's day

keep

This verb often means *retain*.

She didn't keep her promise
Are you keeping count of the money we are spending?
Can you keep a secret?
He always keeps his word

put

I must put a stop to the noise
They will put an end to the business soon
Can I put a question to you?

run

She ran a terrible risk
He ran the business very badly

set

This verb often has the meaning of *establish*.

They set a good example of hard work
The children set fire to the old building
The ship set sail on the 14th October

take

This verb often has the meaning of *acquire*.

Please take charge of the luggage and make sure it is safe
She took hold of the wrong idea about the boss
John takes an interest in history
Take no notice. She's joking
Please don't take offence
They took great pains to get the figures right
We took pity on him and bought him dinner
Where does the festival take place?
They moved to Spain and took root there
We will take steps to see it doesn't happen

throw

This verb is very idiomatic

They threw a party for him
She threw a fit when she saw the bill
The child threw a tantrum when I took it away