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

**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

**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