

The question was:

How do I use *suggest*, *recommend* and *advise*?



*The doctor suggested, recommended and advised*

## Meaning:

These three verbs are related in meaning but with important differences.

1. *suggest* has two meanings:
  - a) to communicate something without stating it openly (insinuate):  
*He suggested she was lying*
  - b) to propose for consideration:  
*He suggested going for a walk*
2. *recommend* has the second sense of suggest but is always positive:  
*She recommended a good hotel*
3. *advise* has two meanings:
  - a) to give counsel or special expert help:  
*We need an expert to advise us about this*
  - b) to suggest a wise course of action:  
*I advise you to stay at The Grand*

## Form:

As we shall see, the meanings sometimes determine the grammar the words take. Colligation is complex: These three verbs cause a good deal of difficulty for learners of English. The reason for it is that the words have different grammatical structures associated with them.

For example, we allow:

*The doctor suggested that I give up smoking*  
*The doctor suggested giving up smoking*  
*The doctor recommended that I give up smoking*  
*The doctor recommended giving up smoking*  
*The doctor advised me to give up smoking*  
*The doctor advised me that I give up smoking*  
*The doctor advised giving up smoking*  
*The doctor advised against smoking*  
*The doctor advised me against smoking*

But we do not allow:

*\*The doctor suggested me that I give up smoking*  
*\*The doctor suggested me giving up smoking*  
*\*The doctor suggested to give up smoking*  
*\*The doctor suggested against smoking*  
*\*The doctor recommended me that I give up smoking*

\*The doctor recommended me giving up smoking

\*The doctor recommended to give up smoking

\*The doctor recommended to give up smoking

\*The doctor recommended against smoking

\*The doctor advised me giving up smoking

The reasons stem from colligational characteristics of the verbs rather than any overarching grammatical or structural rules of the language. It works like this:

### **suggest and recommend**

Both these verbs mean *put forward for consideration* or *propose* but *recommend* is always used with a positive suggestion.

They verbs can only have one object and the object can be:

- a simple noun phrase:
  - *The doctor suggested some tablets*
  - *The doctor recommended some tablets*
- a verbal noun (gerund):
  - *The doctor suggested taking some tablets*
  - *The doctor recommended taking some tablets*
- a nominalised verb phrase (that is a clause acting as a noun):
  - *The doctor suggested that I (should) take some tablets*
  - *The doctor recommended that I (should) take some tablets*
- BUT **not** a *to*-infinitive clause:
  - \**The doctor suggested to take some tablets*
  - \**The doctor recommended to take some tablets*
- these verbs can also take a person as the noun phrase object but **the sense of put forward is retained**
  - *The doctor suggested me (for the job)*
  - *The doctor recommended me (for the job)*

### **advise**

This verb has two connected meanings (it is polysemous) and its colligational features vary with the meanings.

- Meaning #1 = *suggest a course of action*  
*advise* can take one object in the same way as *suggest* and *recommend*. This can be
  - a verbal noun (gerund)  
*The doctor advised taking some tablets*
  - a nominalised verb phrase  
*The doctor advised that I (should) take some tablets*
  - a simple inanimate noun phrase when it is clear that the object of the advice is known and a person:  
*The doctor advised some tablets*  
*The doctor advised more exercise.*
  - But **not** a *to*-infinitive  
\**The doctor advised to take some tablets*
- Meaning #2 = *give advice or counsel*  
*advise* can operate with this meaning with two objects the first indirect and the second direct but the indirect object must be a person. When there is an indirect object like this, the direct object can be
  - a nominalised verb phrase

*The doctor advised me that I should take some tablets*

- a *to*-infinitive clause:  
*The doctor advised me to take some tablets*
- BUT **not** a verbal noun (gerund)  
*\*The doctor advised me taking some tablets*
- and **not** a noun phrase  
*\*The doctor advised me some tablets*
- *advise* can also operate with a single direct object in this meaning:  
*The doctor advised me well*  
and in this case it does not carry the meaning of *put forward* but retains the sense of *counsel*.
- *advise* can also operate intransitively providing there is a prepositional phrase adverbial:  
*The doctor advised against an operation*  
Again, the verb carries the sense of *counsel*, not *put forward*.