In English grammar, verbs can generally be categorised into two types – dynamic and stative.

**Dynamic verbs** represent actions. An action is a process that the subject of the sentence can perform. An action can be either physical or mental. Physical actions include verbs like *walk, write* and *eat*. Mental actions include verbs like *calculate, consider* and *learn*. **Stative verbs**, on the other hand, represent states. States are situations or conditions that the subject experiences or is subjected to, rather than an activity that can be performed. States often refer to possession and measurements, thoughts and opinions, senses and perceptions, or preferences and feelings.

Knowing the difference between a dynamic (action) verb and a stative (state) verb is important because only dynamic verbs are generally used with continuous tenses. Stative verbs are not generally used with continuous tenses (although there are always exceptions to the rule).

Here are some of the most commonly used stative verbs:
Verbs that have both stative and dynamic meanings

Some verbs can be both dynamic and stative, depending on how they are used. If the verb represents a process that can be performed by the subject (often affecting an object), then they will be dynamic. If the verb refers to the qualities of the subject, then they will be stative. When these verbs are used in the dynamic sense, they can be used with continuous tenses. If these verbs are being used in the stative sense, they cannot generally be used with continuous tenses. Here are a few examples to help you understand the difference...

Think can be used to show that the subject is considering something (dynamic), or that the subject has an opinion on something (stative).

- I am thinking about buying a new house. (dynamic)
- I think (that) my house is too small. (stative)
- My dad was thinking about visiting France. (dynamic)
- My dad thinks that France is a great place to visit. (stative)

Verbs of the senses are dynamic when they refer to detecting something with the senses. They are stative when they refer to the appearance of the subject.

- I was tasting the food when I burnt my tongue. (dynamic)
- The soup tastes delicious. (stative)
- Your cat is looking at that bird. (dynamic)
- Your cat looks friendly. (stative)

When have represents possession, it is a stative verb. But have can be used in many other phrases with a dynamic meaning, such as have (throw/host) a party, have (eat) breakfast or have (take) a shower.

- My cats are having (eating) their breakfast. (dynamic)
- I have two cats. (stative)
- My neighbour was having a party last night. (dynamic)
- My neighbour has a strange taste in music. (stative)

When be describes the quality or characteristic of something, it is a stative verb. However, be can also be used as a synonym for act or behave, in which case it is used as a dynamic verb.

- He is being (acting/behaving) really stupid. (dynamic)
- He is really stupid. (stative)
- Why were you being so strange yesterday? (dynamic)
- Your behaviour was so strange yesterday. (stative)
Verbs of measurement are stative when the measurement refers to the quality, characteristic or specification of the subject, but when they represent the activity that the subject is performing on an object, they are dynamic.

- Tony is measuring the space we need for the new wardrobe. (dynamic)
- The wardrobe measures 2 metres from top to bottom. (stative)
- My dog bit the vet when he was weighing him. (dynamic)
- The vet said my dog weighs too much. (stative)

Exceptions

While grammar puritans will always try to tell you that every grammar rule must be followed exactly as is taught, this is rarely true (at least for native speakers). Whether you can use a stative verb with continuous tenses or not is one such case. Yes, in general, we would avoid using stative verbs with continuous tenses, but there are some exceptions when native speakers don’t follow this rule...

Many people use verbs of preference in the continuous when it refers to a preference at a specific point in time, rather than a preference that is necessarily always true.

- I’m loving Taylor Swift’s new album. (this suggests the subject is currently listening to Taylor Swift’s album and is experiencing this preference as they listen)
- My wife was really enjoying her meal until she found a hair in it. (this suggests that the emotion was experienced at a particular time)
- We are all hoping that the economy recovers. (this suggests that the desire is experienced at that current time)

Many people also use stative verbs in a continuous form to emphasise that a state exists at the moment is believed to be temporary, rather than generally true.

- Your mistakes are costing this company a lot of money.
- I don’t think you are quite understanding what I am saying.
- It’s looking like we won’t meet the deadline.