

Stative uses of **feel, hear, see, smell, taste**

When we use the verbs **feel, hear, see, smell, or taste** to talk about the impressions that we receive through our five senses (touch, hearing, sight, smell, taste), they are all non-action verbs and cannot be used in progressive forms.

- You **smell** nice. (NOT **you are smelling**)
- This soup **tastes** fantastic. What did you put in it? (NOT **is tasting**)

Can/can't (**feel, hear, see, smell, taste**)

We normally use **can** or **can't** with these verbs (and NOT present continuous) to talk about something that is happening at the moment.

- I **can see** a beautiful woman next to your sister. (NOT **I am seeing** ✗)
- Sorry, can you speak up? I **can't hear** you. (NOT **I'm not hearing** ✗)
- I **can smell** petrol. Have you just filled up the tank? (NOT **I am smelling** ✗)
- I've burned my tongue, and now I **can't taste** the flavour of the food. (NOT **I am not tasting** ✗)
- I can feel your heartbeat. It is very fast. (NOT **I'm feeling** ✗)

Look and sound

Look and **sound** are also stative (or non-action) verbs when they mean 'seem' or 'appear'.

- She **looks** old.
- You **sound** very happy.

Dynamic uses of **feel, hear, look, see, smell, taste**

The verbs **feel, look, smell, and taste** can be used in continuous forms when they are **voluntary actions**.

- Why **are you smelling** the milk? Isn't it good? (=Put your nose near something to see how it smells)

- *He's **tasting** the food to see if it needs more salt. (=Put something into your mouth to see how it tastes)*
- *I'm **feeling** the fabric to see if it's soft or not. (=Touch something to see how it feels)*
- *Why **are** you **looking** in that direction? (=direct your eyes in order to see)*

We can also use **feel** in progressive tenses to talk about how we feel physically or emotionally.

- *'How **are** you **feeling**?' 'I'm **not feeling** very well.'*
- *I **was feeling** very weak after the operation.*

The verbs **see** and **hear** can also be used as action verbs with different meanings.

- *I'm **seeing** Jerry for lunch. (=Meet someone)*
- *We've **been seeing** each other for months. (=Date someone)*
- *I've **been hearing** really strange things about him recently. (=receive information)*

Sense verbs + infinitive or gerund?

After **feel, hear, listen, notice, see, watch**, we can use a gerund to express an incomplete action, an action in progress, or a repeated action:

- *I **saw** them **kissing** in the park. (=The action was in progress. I didn't see it finish.)*
- *They **watched** the man **hitting** a police officer. (=The action was in progress; the man hit the police officer repeatedly.)*

After **feel, hear, listen, notice, see, watch** we can use an infinitive to talk about an action we heard or saw from beginning to end; usually a short action, and not a repeated action.

- *I **saw** them **kiss** in the park. (=I saw the action from start to end. It was probably a short kiss)*
- *They **watched** the man **hit** a police officer. (=They saw the action from start to end; the man hit the police officer once)*

Look, smell, taste, sound, feel + adjective

We can use **feel, smell, taste, sound**, and **feel** before an adjective to talk about how something feels, tastes, etc.

- *When you use that cream, your skin **feels** really **smooth**.*
- *When he talked to us, he **sounded nervous**.*

Look, smell, taste, sound, feel + like + noun

We can also use **feel, smell, taste, sound**, and **feel + like** before a noun.

- *You **sound like your mother**.*
- *This **tastes like chicken**.*

□ **Note** that we say **smell/taste of** to talk about the smell or flavour of the real thing, and we say **smell/taste like** when it's a smell or flavour similar to the real thing. Compare:

- *The soup **smells of** cheese. (=There is cheese in it.)*
- *The soup **smells like** cheese. (=The smell is similar to the smell of cheese.)*

Look, smell, taste, sound, feel + as if/as though + clause

- *You **sound as if you had a long party last night**.*
- *You **look as though you've just seen a ghost**.*

□ **Note** that in informal English, we often use **feel, smell, taste, sound**, and **feel + like** + clause.

- *You sound **like** you had a long party last night.*
- *You look **like** you've just seen a ghost.*

Seem, appear and look

Seem + adjective, **seem like** + noun, **seem as if/though** + clause

- *You **seem** tired.*
- *He **seems** clever.*
- *The final five minutes **seemed like** five hours.*
- *It **seems as if** they aren't going to help us.*

□ **Note** that in informal English, we also use **like** before a clause.

- *It **seems like** we'll never find out the truth.*

Seem, appear + to + infinitive

After **seem** and **appear**, we often use **to + infinitive** (present events), or a **to + have + past participle** (past events).

- *She **appears to be** in very good shape.*
- *It **seems to be** some kind of insect.*
- *He **seems to have lost** his moral compass.*

It seems/appears + that-clause

We can also use **It seems/appears + that-clause**.

- *It **appears that** he might be telling the truth after all.*
- *It **seems that** they have improved a lot since the end of the season.*

Seem vs look

When we use **seem** and **look** as non-action verbs, there is some difference in meaning.

- *You **look** tired.* (=I get the impression from seeing your face)
- *You **seem** tired.* (=I get the impression from the way you behave –your voice, movements, etc.)

Sometimes, we can use one verb but not the other and vice versa.

- *She **looks** beautiful.* (NOT **seems** ✗, because I get the impression from looking at her physique)
- *She **seems** nice.* (NOT **looks** ✗, because I get the impression by her behaviour)

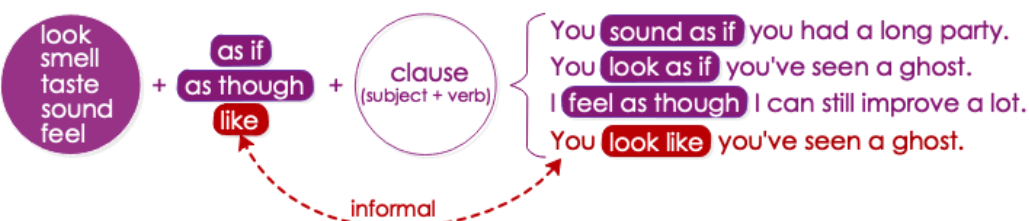
Sense verbs, followed by adjectives or adverbs?

When the verbs of senses are used as non-action verbs, they are copular verbs and copular verbs (like **be**) are followed by adjectives and not by adverbs.

- You **look tired**. (NOT **tiredly** ✗)
- She **felt bad** after saying that. (NOT **badly** ✗)

VERBS OF THE SENSES

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VERBS OF THE SENSES

STATIVE OR DYNAMIC USES

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STATIVE

IMPRESSIONS THROUGH
OUR FIVE SENSES

CONTINUOUS FORMS NOT POSSIBLE

SENSORY IMPRESSIONS

You **smell** nice. ~~are smelling~~
This soup **tastes** fantastic.
She **looks** old.
You **sound** happy.

USE CAN/CAN'T TO TALK ABOUT 'NOW'

I **can't hear** you. ~~'m not hearing~~
I **can see** someone in the distance.
I **can smell** petrol.
I **can feel** your heartbeat.

DYNAMIC

VOLUNTARY ACTIONS AND
DIFFERENT MEANINGS

CONTINUOUS FORMS POSSIBLE

VOLUNTARY ACTIONS

Why **are** you **smelling** the milk? ~~=putting your nose~~
He **is tasting** the food to see if it's OK.
Why **are** you **looking** in that direction?
I **am feeling** the fabric to see if it's soft.

DIFFERENT MEANINGS

I **am not feeling** OK. ~~=physically/emotionally~~
I **am seeing** Jerry for lunch. ~~=meet someone~~
We **have been seeing** each other. ~~=date someone~~
I **have been hearing** bad things about him. ~~=get information~~

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