

The following is a list of some of the most common verb forms and their uses:

Dictionary or Short form: 見る、書く、いらっしゃる

- a. Forms are listed this way in the dictionary.
- b. In spoken language, at the end of a sentence it denotes a familiar speaker-addressee relationship.
- c. In writing, at end of sentence it denotes a 'null' (impersonal) relation to speaker.  
related: short negative form: 見ない、書かない、いらっしゃらない  
related: short past forms and short past negative forms: 見た、見なかった

～ます forms: 見ます、書きます、いらっしゃいます、etc.

- a. In spoken language, it denotes a somewhat deferential speaker-addressee relationship.
- b. In written language, it denotes a highly personal speaker-addressee relation (e.g., story-telling).
- c. Tends to be used only at ends of sentences (otherwise risking "honorific overkill").  
related: 見ました、見ません、見ませんでした

～て form: 見て、書いて、etc.

- a. With states of completion: 食べている。[I am in a state of having eaten. = I have eaten.]
- b. With states of completion: 食べて行く。[I will go when I have eaten.]
- c. With states of completion: 食堂で食べて、勉強する。[I will eat at the cafeteria, then study.]
- d. With verbs of giving and receiving: 書いてもらう。[I will get him to write it for me.]
- e. 食べておく。[I will eat it for now, so I don't have to do it later.]
- f. 食べてみる。[Eat it and see {whether you want more}.]
- g. 食べてある。[It has been eaten.]
- h. 食べてしまう。[Eat it completely; irrevocably; unintentionally.]
- i. 食べてから行く。[I will go after having eaten.]
- j. With contrastive particles は、も、さえ: 食べてはいない、見てもいい?

Volitional forms: 行こう、食べよう、行きましょう、etc.

- a. Usually close to English "Let's xxx." May refer to self-only or self-plus-addressee.
- b. With distant forms (see honorifics), always used with speaker-affiliation verbs (まいりましょう).
- c. Occasionally seen as equivalent for ～だろう:  
thus なおりましたよ＝なおるだろう (I'm sure you'll get better).
- d. With ～とする: 飲もうとする [attempt to drink it]

Imperative form: 見ろ、見よ、行け、いらっしゃい、etc.

- a. As a basic command form: "Do this!"
- b. Embedded within sentences: 書けと言われた [I was told to write it.]

Conditional form: ～たら

- a. "If and when": 日本に行ったら、日本語を勉強したい。[If I go to Japan, I want to study Japanese.]
- b. As an open-ended suggestion: 勉強したら (どう)? [Why don't you just study?]

Provisional form: ～えば

- a. "If and only if": 日本に行けば、いい携帯が買える。[If you go to Japan, you can get good cell phones.]  
Note the implication is that if you *don't* do xxx, then yyy *won't* happen.
- b. As an open-ended suggestion: 勉強すれば... [Why don't you just study?]  
= [If only you would study! (because if you did that, your boredom would stop bothering me)]

Representative form: ～たりする:

- a. "Doing things such as...": 夏休みに本を読んだり、テレビを見たりしていた。

Potential form: 行ける、買える、勉強できる

- a. "Can do xxx": 車を買えます。[I can buy a car {with this much money}.]  
note: verb objects are (in 'proper' style) changed into subjects.  
note: some verbs have 'built in' potential form: できる、ある、わかる、etc.  
note: some verbs have split forms: 見える／見られる、聞こえる／聞ける  
見える [I can see it because I cleaned my glasses] {intrinsic ability}  
見られる [I can see it because I paid my cable bill] {extrinsic ability}  
note: common shortening of form: 見られる→見れる、食べられる→食べれる

Causative form: 行かせる、買わせる、見させる、教えさせる

- a. "Force" or "allow" someone to do something: 先生が生徒に本を読ませた。  
note particle shifting, depending on verb: お母さんが息子を学校に行かせた。  
note some verbs have 'built in' causative form: 見せる、寝かせる

Passive forms: 行かれる、食べられる、勉強される、etc.

- a. regular passive: この本は日本で出版された。[This book was published in Japan.]  
b. suffering passive: 母に日記を読まれた。[I had my diary read 'on me' by my mother.]  
Unlike English passive, this retains transitivity.  
c. scientific narration: 不可能だと考えられている。['We' consider it to be impossible.]  
d. honorific passive: いつ日本に来られたんですか。[When did you come to Japan?]

Passive-Causative form: 食べさせられる、勉強させられる、etc.

- a. Someone is "made" or "permitted" to do something.

Stem alone plus ~suru: 見はしない、見もしない、見やしない、見さえしない、etc.

Verb-Adjective Combinations (taking 連用形):

note case shifts from object to subject: テレビが見たい、etc.

- ～たい: 見たい、行きたい、帰りたい、etc.  
～やすい: 食べやすい、分かりやすい  
～にくい: 食べにくい、分かりにくい (分かり難い)、聞こえにくい、etc.  
～がたい: 見がたい、分りがたい (分かり難い) [hard to understand]  
～づらい: 見づらい (見辛い)、食べづらい [excruciating to eat]

Verb-Verb Combinations (taking 連用形):

- ～かける: 走りかける、食べかける [engage in {= begin} eating]  
～おわる: 食べ終わる、読み終わる [finish reading]  
～すぎる: 食べ過ぎる、飲み過ぎる、行き過ぎる [go too far]  
～たがる: 食べたがっている [they are expressing a desire to eat]: = 3<sup>rd</sup> person form for ～たい  
～もどす: 払い戻す [refund], 取り戻す [take back]  
～なさい: 起きなさい [Wake up!], 寝なさい [Go to sleep!]: Used with command form.  
～はじめる: 食べ始める [begin eating]  
～つづける: 話し続ける [resume/continue speaking], 歌い続ける [resume/continue singing]  
\*～だす: 歩き出す [set out upon {= begin} walking], 追い出す [chase someone out.]  
\*～かねる: 言い兼ねます [in court: I refrain/hesitate to say...], 待ち兼ねる [wait impatiently for...]  
\*～こがれる: 待ち焦がれる [wait impatiently for...], 思い焦がれる [burn with love for...]  
\*～こむ: 見込む [see into... = understand], 投げ込む [throw into...], 駆け込む [run onto {a subway}]  
\*～きる: 窓を閉め切る [close a window shut], 思い切ってうちあける [take the plunge and confess]  
\* = the ultimate meanings of these are highly contingent on the verbs with which they combine

Verb-Noun Combinations (taking 連用形):

- ～もの: 食べ物、飲み物、読み物 [reading matter]  
～が<sup>い</sup>: 生き甲斐 [a reason to live], 働きが<sup>い</sup> [good reason to work]  
～がち: 有り勝ち [having a tendency to occur frequently], 忘れがち [having a tendency to forget]  
～ゆき: 成り行き [the process/direction/course things take],  
売れ行き [the propensity by which something sells; i.e., whether it is selling well or not]  
～そう: 食べそうだ [It seems that she will eat it.]  
～つつ+ある: 行きつつある [He is currently in a state of going-going-going...]:  
= esp. used instead of ～ている with verbs that involve instantaneous change-of-state:  
ドアを開けている。 [= I have opened the door. NOT "I am opening the door."]  
ドアを開けつつある。 [= I am opening the door (See? One centimeter, two centimeters....)]