

“ED FORMS” – VERBS OR MODIFIERS

Scientists have recently discovered what could be the largest and oldest living organism on Earth, a giant fungus that is an interwoven filigree of mushrooms and root like tentacles spawned by a single fertilized spore some 10,000 years ago and extending for more than 30 acres in the soil of a Michigan forest.

This is probably one of the most discussed problems in GMAT Verbal SC section. This sentence is a cake walk for those who understand verb-ing and verb-ed modifiers thoroughly, and is confusing to the hilt for those who have just started to learn these concepts. The tactfully crafted answer choices of this problem keep bringing this question on various forums for discussion and detailed explanation. So let's take a look at those interesting answer choices:

- A. extending
- B. extends
- C. extended
- D. it extended
- E. is extending



In the first glimpse, the sentence looks simple and easy. You scan the sentence, discover the word “spawned”, look at conjunction “and”, think, “Oh! Parallelism dude. How simple!”, mark Choice C. But all the excitement is robbed off by the Answer Key page that says Choice A is the correct answer.

So where did you go wrong? Is not “spawned” and “extended” grammatically parallel? They both have the same structure. The instinct (especially of the non-natives) is to believe that words with “ed” are simple past tense verbs. So if you took “spawned” to be the simple past tense verb, you looked for the same for “extending” and marked “extended”. You got the incorrect answer.

VERB-ED – CAN BE SIMPLE PAST TENSE OR MODIFIER

So, what is happening in this sentence? “Extended” fits as simple past tense verb and looks parallel to “spawned”. Then how can “extended” be incorrect? Well, the answer is that Verb-ed forms can be used in two ways –One as verb in simple past tense and the other as modifier (also

called Verb-ed modifiers) and in this case it is used as the latter (explained later). In essence, the same word, for example **extended**, can assume the role of a verb in simple past form or that of a modifier. **The challenge in the question is to determine whether “spawned” and extended” are verb-ed modifiers or just the verbs** and then decide in what form should “extended” be used.

To determine that, let’s examine two simple examples:

- a. The company extended the training period for the interns. – extended = simple past tense
- b. The training period extended last year made many interns unhappy. – extended as verb-ed modifier.

Let's analyze the meaning of sentence a. The sentence clearly conveys that that the company did the job of extending the training period for the interns. The word “extended” works as “verb” in this sentence.

Sentence b means that many interns became unhappy because the training period was extended. In this sentence, the verb is “made”. “Extended” is the verb-ed modifier that is giving additional information about "the training period".

So, here we see that the same word “extended” can work as a verb and as a modifier, depending upon how it has used in the sentence. In fact, most of the words can be written as “verb” as well as “modifier” if we add “ed” to them. “Spawned” is also one of them.

If you want to know how to tell whether a verb-ed word is a simple past tense verb or a modifier, read in the following section about this simple test that will never fail you.

LITMUS TEST

There is a simple test we can perform to find out whether the verb-ed is a verb in simple past tense or the verb-ed modifier. Here is the test:

If the Subject of the sentence is the “doer” of the Verb-ed form, then the Verb-ed form is used as a verb in the simple past tense.

Let’s have another look at both the examples above:

- a. The company **extended** the training period for the interns.

The subject of the sentence above is “The Company” . Now ask yourself, **“Is the subject the doer of the verb?”** In other words, did the company extend the training. The answer is yes it did.

The Subject Verb pair makes sense. Hence, in this sentence, extended is used as a verb in simple past.

b. The training period extended last year made many interns unhappy.

The subject here is “The training period”. The next word is the verb-ed “extended”. Is it a verb or a modifier? Ask this question: “Did “the training period” do the action of “extending”? The answer is “No”. The action of extension was not done by the training period. In other words, the Subject-Verb pair does not make sense. This tells you that “extended” is a verb-ed modifier here and not the verb.

OG EXAMPLE

Scientists have recently discovered what could be the largest and oldest living organism on Earth, a giant fungus that is an interwoven filigree of mushrooms and root like tentacles spawned by a single fertilized spore some 10,000 years ago and extending for more than 30 acres in the soil of a Michigan forest.

Now let us apply this test on the “giant fungus”. After cutting the flab, this is the core that we get:

...a giant fungus... spawned by a single fertilized pore some 10,000 years ago...

So let’s ask, did “a giant fungus” do the action of “spawning”? The answer is “no” because it is clearly mentioned in the sentence that the action of spawning was done by “a single fertilized pore”. Hence, the litmus test confirms that “spawned” is a verb-ed modifier.

Therefore, to maintain parallelism we need to use a form of “extend” that is used as a modifier. Note that “extended” CAN be a verb-ed modifier. However, we need to find out if this form works in this sentence as a modifier:

...a giant fungus... extended for more than 30 acres in the soil of a Michigan forest.

Did “a giant fungus” do the job of extension? Yes, it did. It is the giant fungus that extends for more than 30 acres. This means that “extended” will work as simple past tense verb in this sentence and **not as a modifier**. This is the reason why “extended” cannot be used since a verb CANNOT be parallel to a verb-ed modifier.

Let’s once again quickly look at the answer choices:

- A. extending
- B. extends
- C. extended

- D. it extended
- E. is extending

Quick scan of these choices will tell you that all the answer choices B, C and E are verbs in different forms while Choice A is a clause. Choice A “extending” is the only modifier that describes one of the characteristics of “a giant fungus”. Hence, verb-ed modifier “spawned” and verb-ing modifier “extending” are parallel entities because they both perform the same function, although they differ structurally.

EXERCISE

Identify whether the underlined words are verbs or verb-ed modifiers.

1. Like birds today, Archaeopteryx had feathers that were fully formed.
2. Our powers of color vision derive from cells in our eyes called cones, three types in all, each triggered by different wavelengths of light.
3. As Joel Bregman hoped, dozens of young stars turned up in each of the three dead galaxies—and as an added surprise, they even appeared in Messier 105.
4. Dark matter might actually be produced at the energies explored by the world’s most powerful particle accelerator, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC).
5. A leader guided by sound principles earned immense respect from the masses.
6. A company founded on sound business principles achieves much higher success.
7. The lamp decorated with stars filled the child’s room with innocent beauty.

Correct these sentences if you feel they are incorrect.

1. The lamp decorated the child’s room filled his room with innocent beauty.
2. A leader guided his followers earned immense respect from the masses.

TAKEAWAY

Whenever you see a verb-ed word, first identify if it's a verb or a modifier. Then ascertain its role in the sentence so that it conveys logical meaning. Make changes if the verb-ed is playing some the role other than it should so that the sentence conveys the logical intended meaning.