

Verbs with little meaning: **delexical verbs**

There are a number of very common verbs which are used with nouns as their object to indicate simply that someone performs an action, not that someone affects or creates something. These verbs have very little meaning when they are used in this way.

For example, '**had**' in '*She had a shower*', has very little meaning in itself. Most of the meaning of the sentence is carried by the noun '**shower**'.

A DELEXICAL VERB + A NOUN GROUP = A DELEXICAL STRUCTURE

- Delexical structures are very common in current English. Although the total number of delexical verbs is small, they include some of the very commonest words in the language (**give / have / take / make / do / hold / keep / set...**) Delexical structures contribute to the impression of fluency in English given by a foreign user.

- In many cases, there is a verb which has a similar meaning to the meaning of the delexical structure. For example, the verb '*look*' means almost the same as '*have a look*'.

When the word is a verb, as in '*I looked round the room*', you are focusing on the **action** of looking.

When you use the word as a noun in a delexical structure, you are naming an **event**, something which is complete. This structure often seems to be preferred to a structure in which the verb has greater prominence.

- One difference in meaning between using a delexical structure and a verb with a similar meaning is that the delexical structure can give the impression that the event you are describing is brief. For example, '*She gave a giggle*' suggests that there was only one quick giggle, whereas '*She giggled*' does not suggest that the event was brief.

- Another reason for choosing a delexical structure is that you can add further details about the event by using adjectives in front of the noun, rather than by using adverbs.

It is more common, for example, to say '*He gave a quick furtive glance round the room*' than to say '*He glanced quickly and furtively round the room*', which is felt to be rather clumsy and unnatural.

Here's another example: '*He made a sincere personal appeal to the Committee.*'

TASK: Read the text carefully and replace the underlined verbs with **delexical structures** to make it more vivid and descriptive. You will have to change other words in the passage.

Holmes didn't comment on the story he had just heard. He sighed deeply,

then stood up and went to the window. He glanced quickly at the man who

was waiting by the lamp-post. Evidently he had decided to risk and he

knew that I believed him and would help whenever he needed me.

A minute passed. Then, suddenly, he turned back to us and laughed loudly

and nervously. I looked at him in surprise and anxiety. What did his reaction

mean? Was he again in this state of mind which suggested another sleepless

night? I kept silent because I had promised not to ask any questions.

Moreover, I respected deeply his analytical mind and knew that sooner or later

he would explain his behaviour to me in details.