

Make a cake! All about imperative verbs.

Posted by Peter on 5 January 2010



Making a cake. Photo by [lil miss priss/flickr](#).

Today we will meet the imperative form of English verbs, and learn how to bake a cake.

English verbs are difficult. There are so many verb forms, and so many irregular verbs. But let's not worry about complicated verbs today. Let's think about the simplest verb form of all - the [imperative](#). The imperative is the form of the verb which we use when we want to tell someone to do something. Imagine a teacher talking to a class at school. "Stop talking. Open your books. Write your name and the date at the top of the page. Then start exercise number 1."

'Stop', 'open', 'write' and 'start' are all imperative verbs. They give orders or instructions. The great thing about imperative verbs is that there is only one imperative form. You don't have to worry about past tense or future tense, you don't have to think "Am I talking to one person or to lots of people?" Imperative verbs do not change.

Sometimes, of course, imperative verbs are too direct and can sound impolite. So we can use words like "please" with imperative verbs - "Please stop talking. Please open your books." Or we can use indirect ways of telling people what to do, such as "Perhaps you could give me your report tomorrow morning".

However, there is one place where you will always find lots of imperative verbs - a recipe book. A recipe is a set of instructions about how to cook something. In English we always write recipes using imperative verbs. Here is my recipe for lemon cake. How many imperative verbs can you find?

- >> Put 175 grammes of self-raising flour, 125 grammes of sugar, 125 grammes of butter and one-and-a half teaspoons of baking powder into a bowl.
- >> Take two lemons. Grate the rind from the lemons and add it to the flour.
- >> Break two eggs into the mixture.
- >> Add three tablespoons of milk.
- >> Beat the mixture with an electric mixer for 2 minutes.
- >> Pour the mixture into a baking tray.
- >> Bake the cake in the oven for about 20 minutes.
- >> Take the cake out of the oven and put it on a wire rack to cool.
- >> Squeeze the lemons and add about 50 grammes of sugar to the juice.

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- >> Put the juice into a pan and heat it until it boils.
- >> Prick the top of the cake with a fork.
- >> Pour the lemon juice over the cake.
- >> Serve the cake while it is still warm.

I counted 18 imperative verbs. How many did you find?

Here is something to practice. Write your favourite recipe in English, using only imperative verbs. Or write instructions on how to do something, like how to recharge your mobile phone. There is a quiz about instructions and imperative verbs on the Listen to English website, and there is also a vocabulary note with some words about cooking and baking which you may find useful.

This is the text of the podcast at <http://www.listen-to-english.com/index.php?id=500>.