

‘Triggers’ for Presupposition and Entailment

1. Definite Descriptions (presuppose existence)
*John saw/didn't see **the man with two heads**.*
 → [presupposes] There exists a man with two heads
2. Factive verbs (factive verbs presuppose their complement)
*Martha **regrets/doesn't regret** drinking John's home brew.*
 → Martha drank John's home brew.
*Frankenstein was/wasn't **aware** that Dracula was there*
 → Dracula was there
*John **realized/didn't realize** that he was in debt.*
 → John was in debt.
3. Implicative verbs (implicative verbs entail their complement)
*John **managed/didn't manage** to open the door.*
 → John tried to open the door.
*John **forgot/didn't forget** to lock the door.*
 → John ought to have locked, or intended to lock, the door.
 Others: *X **happened** to V* → X didn't plan or intend to V
*X **avoided** Ving* → X was expected to, or usually did, or ought to V
4. Change of State verbs (COS (inchoative) verbs refer to two successive states)
*Bill **stopped/didn't stop** smoking kreteks.*
 → Bill had been smoking kreteks.
*Joan **began/didn't begin** to enjoy herself.*
 → Joan hadn't been enjoying herself.
*Kissinger **continued/didn't continue** to rule the world.*
 → Kissinger had been ruling the world.
 Others: *start, finish, carry on, cease, leave, enter, come, go, arrive, etc.*
5. Iteratives (iterative verbs refer to repetitions of the same event)
*The flying saucer landed/didn't land **again**.*
 → The flying saucer landed before.
*You can't get gobstoppers **anymore**.*
 → You once could get gobstoppers.
*You **used to be able** to get gobstoppers.*
 → You can't get gobstoppers now.
*Carter **returned** to power.*
 → Carter was once in power.
 Others: *another time, to come back, restore, repeat, for the nth time, etc.*
6. Verbs of Judging (judging verbs refer to participants, events and their evaluation)
*Agatha **accused/didn't accuse** Ian of running away.*
 → (Agatha thinks) running away is wrong.
*Agatha **criticized/didn't criticize** Ian for running away.*
 → (Agatha thinks) Ian ran away.

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7. Temporal clauses (subordinate clauses introduced by temporal conjunctions)

Before he died, Frege had/hadn't written about presuppositions.
 → Frege died.

While Bill was looking for the receipt, Mary continued work on the form.
 → Bill was looking for the receipt for some period of time.

Since Carter left office, the White House menu hasn't had peanuts on it.
 → Carter left office.

Others: *after, during, whenever, as* (as in *As he was getting up, he slipped*), etc.
8. Cleft sentences (*It be NP that VP*) / Pseudo-Cleft sentences (*Wh- VP be NP*)

It was/wasn't Rosie that kissed Henry.
 → Someone kissed Henry.

What John lost/didn't lose was his wallet.
 → John lost something.
9. Comparison and contrast (presuppose baseline propositions;

as...as: equative; *more/-er*: comparative; *most/-est*: superlative)

Barbara is/isn't a better singer than Carol.
 → Carol is a singer.

That idea is/isn't as ridiculous as Bill's suggestion.
 → Bill's suggestion is ridiculous.
10. Relative clauses (presuppose identificational baseline propositions)

The man that you want to see is/isn't too busy.
 → You want to see some man. [restrictive]

The Harrappans, who flourished 2800-2650 BCE, were/weren't great architects.
 → The Harrappans flourished 2800-2650 BCE. [non-restrictive]
11. Counterfactual conditionals (presuppose negation of baseline propositions)

If Hannibal had only had twelve more elephants, the Romance Languages would not exist today.
 → Hannibal didn't have twelve more elephants.

If the notice had only said 'Mine Field' in English as well as Welsh, we wouldn't have lost poor Llewellyn.
 → The notice didn't say 'Mine Field' in English
 (though it **did** say 'Mine Field' in Welsh).
12. Questions (presuppose baseline propositions)

Is Newcastle in England or is it in Australia?
 → Newcastle is in England or Newcastle is in Australia.

Who is the Chair of Linguistics at MIT?
 → Someone is the Chair of Linguistics at MIT.

When does the fat lady sing?
 → The fat lady sings at some time.