The Seven Families of Hebrew Verbs

Each Hebrew verb is based on a three-consonant root (called the *shoresh*). The root encodes the basic meaning or purpose of a given verb. Each consonant of a root is assigned a number (I, II, III). A root's type of action is expressed in a particular binyan (בִּנְיָן) often described as a linguistic "house" or "structure," and by extension, as an offshoot "stem," or "branch" derived from a basic root. There are seven *binyanim* (בִּנְיָנִים), each having its own vowel pattern and characteristic *mode of action*. Some binyanim are *active* (subject does action) while others are *passive* (subject receives action). One is *reflexive* (subject does and is affected by the action). In short a binyan is pattern of vowels (with prefixes and/or suffixes) that determines how the verb's mode of action is expressed. The masculine singular (3ms) pattern is the binyan's *name.*

The most basic form of the verbal root is known as the Pa'al (פָּעַל; based on the 3ms pattern) since it expresses the simple sense of the shoresh ("walk," "stand," "eat," and so on). Because it is the simplest form, it is called Qal (קַל), meaning "light" or "easy." Other forms of the root are learned after we master the simplest form.

Seven Binyanim

Each verb form takes suffixes for person and number with vowel pattern changes for syllables. Roots with guttural letters (or begin with י or נ) are weak.

Name	*form*	*Qualities*	*Sample Root:* כ.ת.ב
pa'al (פָּעַל)	☐☐ַ☐	*simple active;* Qal (קַל) "easy, light" - no pfx	כָּתַב - "he wrote"
nifal (נִפְעַל)	נ☐☐ַ☐	*simple passive;* nun (נ) prefix	נִכְתַּב - "it was written"
piel (פִּעֵל)	☐☐ֵ☐ ☐ִי☐	*intensive active;* (x̪) or (יx) pfx; dagesh II; tsere on II	כִּיתֵב - "he engraved"
pual (פֻּעַל)	☐☐ֻ☐ ☐ּו☐	*intensive passive;* qibbutz (x̪) [shureq] (ו) dagesh II	כּוּתַב - "it was engraved"
hifil (הִפְעִיל)	ה☐☐ִי☐ ה☐☐ַ☐ְתּ	*causative active;* hey (ה) prefix; pos II (יx) or (x)	הִכְתִּיב - "he dictated" הִכְתַּבְתָּ - "you dictated"
hufal (הֻפְעַל) (or hofal [הָפְעַל]	ה☐☐ַ☐ ה☐☐ַ☐	*causative passive;* ה prefix may take (x̪), (ו), or chatuf (x̣)	הוּכְתַב - "was dictated"
hitpael (הִפְעַל)	הִתְ☐ַ☐☐	*intensive reflexive;* (הת) prefix; dagesh II	הִתְכַּתֵב - "wrote himself"