

The Auxiliary Verb

Recognize an *auxiliary verb* when you see one.

Every sentence must have a verb. To depict doable activities, writers use action verbs. To describe conditions, writers choose linking verbs.

Sometimes an action or condition occurs just once—*bang!*—and it's over.

Nate ***stubbed*** his toe.

He ***is*** miserable with pain.

Other times, the activity or condition continues over a long stretch of time, happens predictably, or occurs in relationship to other events. In these instances, a single-word verb like ***stubbed*** or ***is*** cannot accurately describe what happened, so writers use multipart verb phrases to communicate what they mean. As many as four words can comprise a verb phrase.

A main or base verb indicates the type of action or condition, and auxiliary—or *helping*—verbs convey the other nuances that writers want to express.

Read these three examples:

Sherylee ***smacked*** her lips as raspberry jelly ***dripped*** from the donut onto her white shirt.

Sherylee ***is*** always ***dripping*** something.

Since Sherylee is such a klutz, she ***should have been eating*** a cake donut, which ***would not have stained*** her shirt.

In the first sentence, ***smacked*** and ***dripped***, single-word verbs, describe the quick actions of both Sherylee and the raspberry jelly.

Since Sherylee has a pattern of messiness, ***is dripping*** communicates the frequency of her clumsiness. The auxiliary verbs that comprise ***should have been eating*** and ***would have stained*** express not only time relationships but also evaluation of Sherylee's actions.

Below are the auxiliary verbs. You can conjugate ***be***, ***do***, and ***have***; the modal auxiliaries, however, *never* change form.

Be	Do	Have
am	does	has
is	do	have
are	did	had
was		having
were		
being		
been		

Modal Auxiliaries [Never Change Form]

can, could, may, might, must, ought to, shall, should, will, would

Understand the dual nature of *be*, *do*, and *have*.

Be, *do*, and *have* are both stand-alone verbs *and* auxiliary verbs. When these verbs are auxiliary, you will find them teamed with other verbs to complete the verb phrase. Compare these sentences:

Freddy *is* envious of Beatrice's steaming bowl of squid eyeball stew.

Is = linking verb.

Freddy *is studying* Beatrice's steaming bowl of squid eyeball stew with envy in his eyes.

Is = auxiliary verb; *studying* = present participle completing the verb phrase.

We *did* our homework for Mrs. Long.

Did = action verb.

We're not slackers! We *did prepare* our homework for Mrs. Long.

Did = auxiliary verb; *prepare* = main verb completing the verb phrase.

Selena *has* twelve orange goldfish in her aquarium.

Has = action verb.

Selena *has bought* a catfish to help keep the tank clean.

Has = auxiliary verb; *bought* = past participle completing the verb phrase.

Form progressive tenses with the auxiliary verb *be*.

All progressive tenses use a form of *be*. *Present* progressive follows this pattern:

AM, IS, OR ARE + **PRESENT PARTICIPLE**

Use the present progressive tense to convey an action or condition happening *right now*.

I *am baking* chocolate-broccoli muffins today.

Am = auxiliary verb; *baking* = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Alex *is sitting* at the kitchen table, anticipating his first bite.

Is = auxiliary verb; **sitting** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Alex must wait a while longer because the muffins **are cooling** by the window.

Are = auxiliary verb; **cooling** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Impatient Alex **is** always **waiting** to taste whatever I cook.

Is = auxiliary verb; **waiting** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Past progressive follows this pattern:

WAS OR WERE + **PRESENT PARTICIPLE**

Use the past progressive tense to show either 1) an action or condition that continued in the past or 2) an action or condition interrupted by another.

Naomi **was hoping** for an A in her organic chemistry class.

Was = auxiliary verb; **hoping** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Unfortunately, Naomi's lab reports **were missing** the nutritional data on chocolate-broccoli muffins.

Were = auxiliary verb; **missing** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

While Naomi **was obsessing** about her grade, Jason shared the data that she needed.

Was = auxiliary verb; **obsessing** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Future progressive looks like this:

WILL + **BE** + **PRESENT PARTICIPLE**

Use the future progressive tense to indicate an action that will continue in the future.

I **will be growing** broccoli in the backyard this spring.

Will, be = auxiliary verbs; **growing** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Soon, Alex **will be eating** organic chocolate-broccoli muffins!

Will, be = auxiliary verbs; **eating** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Form passive voice with **be**.

You can make any transitive verb—an action verb that can take a direct object—passive with the auxiliary verb **be**.

Active voice looks like this:

SUBJECT + **VERB** + **DIRECT OBJECT**

Here are some samples:

We *licked* our lips.

Frank *devoured* a bacon double cheeseburger.

Everyone *envied* his enjoyment.

Passive voice makes these changes:

DIRECT OBJECT AS SUBJECT + **FORM OF BE** + **PAST**

PARTICIPLE + **BY** + **SUBJECT AS OBJECT OF THE**

PREPOSITION

Now read these revisions:

Our lips *were licked by* us.

The double bacon cheeseburger *was being devoured by* Frank.

His enjoyment *was envied by* everyone.

Notice how wordy and clunky passive voice is! Now you know why English teachers tell you to avoid it!

Form perfect tenses with *have*.

All perfect tenses use a form of *have*. *Present* perfect follows this pattern:

HAS OR HAVE + **PAST PARTICIPLE**

Use the present perfect tense to convey an action or condition that began in the past but continues [or is finished] in the present.

Marge *has bought* earplugs to drown out her husband's snoring.

Has = auxiliary verb; *bought* = past participle completing the verb phrase.

The earplugs *have saved* Marge's marriage to George.

Have = auxiliary verb; *saved* = past participle completing the verb phrase.

Past perfect follows this pattern:

HAD + **PAST PARTICIPLE**

Use the past perfect tense to show that one action in the past occurred before another.

Because Marge *had purchased* the earplugs, she no longer fantasized about smothering George with a pillow.

Had = auxiliary verb; *purchased* = past participle completing the verb phrase.

Future perfect follows this pattern:

WILL + **HAVE** + **PAST PARTICIPLE**

Use the future perfect tense to indicate that an action will be finished in the future.

This Sunday, Marge *will have gotten* an entire week of uninterrupted sleep.

Will, have = auxiliary verbs; *gotten* = past participle completing the verb phrase.

Form emphatic tenses with *do*.

When you use a form of *do* as an auxiliary verb, you form the emphatic tense. This tense is useful for asking questions or emphasizing an action. The patterns look like these:

FORM OF DO + **MAIN VERB**

FORM OF DO + **SUBJECT** + **MAIN VERB** ... ?

I *did* not *eat* your leftover pizza!

Did = auxiliary verb; *eat* = main verb completing the verb phrase.

Do you always *accuse* the first person you see?

Do = auxiliary verb; *accuse* = main verb completing the verb phrase.

Doesn't the evidence *point* to Samuel, who still has a bit of black olive stuck to his front tooth?

Does = auxiliary verb; *point* = main verb completing the verb phrase.

Understand the job of modal auxiliary verbs.

Modal auxiliary verbs never change form. You cannot add an **ed**, **ing**, or **s** ending to these words. **Can**, **could**, **may**, **might**, **must**, **ought to**, **shall**, **should**, **will**, and **would** have only *one* form.

You can use modal auxiliary verbs in these patterns:

MODAL + **MAIN VERB**

MODAL + **BE** + **PRESENT PARTICIPLE**

MODAL + **HAVE** + **PAST PARTICIPLE**

With modal auxiliaries, you can indicate *necessity* or *obligation*:

To lose her orange glow, Yvonne **should eat** fewer carrots.

John **must remember** his wife's birthday this year.

If Cecilia wants a nice lawn, she **ought to be raking** the leaves.

Or you can show *possibility*:

Fred **might share** his calculus homework if you offer him a slice of pizza.

Ann **could have run** the half marathon if she had started to train four months ago.

Modal auxiliaries also show *willingness* or *ability*:

Nicole **will babysit** your pet iguana for a reasonable fee.

Jason **can pass** chemistry this semester if he stops spending his study time at the arcade.



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