

# THE AUXILIARY VERB

## Recognize an auxiliary verb when you see one.

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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 criticism 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**.

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**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*.

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All progressive tenses use a form of *be*.

FORMS OF BE
am, is, are, was, were, being, been

### PRESENT PROGRESSIVE

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* or frequently.

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

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

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 the auxiliary verb **be**.

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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 the auxiliary verb have.

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All perfect tenses use a form of *have*.

FORMS OF HAVE
has, have, had, having

### PRESENT PERFECT

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

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

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**.

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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.

FORMS OF DO
does, do, did, doing

The patterns look like these:

**FORM OF DO** + **MAIN VERB**

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

Read these samples:

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.

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Modal auxiliary verbs never change form. You cannot add an *ed*, *ing*, or *s* ending to these words. They have only *one* form.

### MODAL AUXILIARIES [NEVER CHANGE FORM]

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

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.

