

# THE AUXILIARY VERB

## Recognize an auxiliary verb when you find 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 is 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 doughnut, 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 words 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 Professor Long.

*Did* = **action verb**.

We are not slackers! We **did prepare** our homework for Professor 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 follows this pattern:

**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**—that is, an **action verb** that can take a **direct object**—passive with the auxiliary verb **be**.

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

Active voice follows this pattern:

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

Here are examples:

We **licked** our lips.

Frank **devoured** a bacon double cheeseburger.

Everyone **envied** his enjoyment.

Passive voice makes these changes:

**DIRECT OBJECT AS THE SUBJECT** + **FORM OF BE** + **PAST PARTICIPLE** + **BY**  
+ **SUBJECT AS THE 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 the auxiliary verb *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

These are the patterns:

**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.

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.

