

Auxiliary verbs

Auxiliary verbs are sometimes called *helping verbs* because they are needed to form many of the tenses. The most used auxiliary verbs are the verbs *to be*, *to do* and *to have*. For example: the auxiliary *to do* is needed to ask questions in the present and past simple tenses. **To be** is needed for the present and past continuous, and all the passive forms. The auxiliary *to have* is used in the present and past perfect tenses. Here are some examples of the common auxiliary verbs in action:

Do you like German food?
Does your mother speak English?
Did you come to school yesterday?
Why are you talking?
You should *be* listening to me!
I *was* having a bath when you called!
A new road *is being* built behind the school.
Have you done your homework?
My father *has* never visited the USA.
How long *have* you *been* living in Germany?
By this time next year I *will have been* learning English for 35 years!

Auxiliary Verbs are the verbs *be*, *do*, *have*, *will* when they are followed by another verb (the *full verb*) in order to form a question, a negative sentence, a compound tense or the passive.

The verb “be”

The verb *be* can be used as an auxiliary and a full verb. As an auxiliary we use this verb for compound tenses and the passive voice. Note that *be* is an irregular verb:

Simple Present:

I *am*, he/she/it *is*, we/you/they *are*

Simple Past:

I/he/she/it *was*, we/you/they *were*

Past Participle:

been

You can tell that in the following sentences *be* is an auxiliary because it is followed by another verb (the *full verb*). (For progressive forms use the “-ing” form of the full verb; for passive voice, use the past participle of the full verb.)

Progressive Forms

Present Progressive:

He *is playing* football.

Past Progressive:

He *was playing* football.

Present Perfect Progressive:

He *has been playing* football.

Past Perfect Progressive:

He *had been playing* football.

Passive

Simple Present/Past:

The house *is/was* built.

Present/Past Perfect:

The house *has/had* *been* built.

Future I:

The house *will be* built.

“be” as a full verb

The verb *be* can also be a *full verb*. In this case, it's not followed by another verb. If *be* is used as a full verb, we do not need an auxiliary in negative sentences or questions.

positive sentence: They are fifteen years old.

negative sentence: They are not fifteen years old.

question: Are they fifteen years old?

The verb “have”

The verb *have*, too, can be used both as an auxiliary and as a full verb. As an auxiliary we use this verb to form compound tenses in active and passive voice. (Use the past participle of the full verb.)

Compound Tenses - Active Voice

Present Perfect Simple: He *has* played football.

Past Perfect Simple: He *had* played football.

Present Perfect Progressive:

He *has been* playing football.

Past Perfect Progressive:

He *had been* playing football.

Compound Tenses - Passive Voice

Present/Past Perfect:

The house *has/had* *been* built.

Note that *have* is an irregular verb, too:

Simple Present: I/we/you/they *have*, he/she/it *has*

Simple Past: I/he/she/it/we/you/they *had*

Past Participle: *had*

“have” in positive sentences

As a *full verb* *have* indicates possession. In British English, however, we usually use *have got* (*have* being the auxiliary, *got* the full verb).

full verb:

I have a car.

auxiliary verb:

I *have* got a car.

“have” in negative sentences and questions

When we use *have* as a *full verb*, we must use the auxiliary *do* in negative sentences and questions. If we use *have got*, however, we do not need another auxiliary.

have as a full verb:

I *do not* have a car.

Do I have a car?

have as an auxiliary verb:

I *have* not got a car.

Have I got a car?

The verb “will”

The verb *will* can only be used as an auxiliary. We use it to form the future tenses.

The auxiliary verb “will”

Future I:

He *will* not play football.

Future II:

He *will* have played football.

The verb *will* remains the same for all forms (no “s” for 3rd person singular). The short form for negative sentences is

The

won't.

eg; I will, he will
I will not = I won't

The verb "do"

The verb *do* can be both an auxiliary and a full verb. As an auxiliary we use *do* in negative sentences and questions for most verbs (except not for *be, will, have got* and modal verbs) in Simple Present and Simple Past. (Use the infinitive of the full verb.)

The auxiliary "do" in negative sentences

Simple Present: He *does* not play football.

Past: He *did* not play football.

The auxiliary "do" in questions

Simple Present: *Does* he play football?

Simple Past: *Did* he play football?

The verb *do* is irregular:

Simple Present: I/we/you/they *do*, he/she/it *does*

Simple Past: I/he/she/it/we/you/they *did*

The full verb "do"

As a full verb we use *do* in certain expressions. If we want to form negative sentences or questions using *do* as a full verb, we need another *do* as an auxiliary.

positive sentence: She does her homework every day.

negative sentence: She *doesn't* do her homework every day.

question: *Does* she do her homework every day?

Sentences without the auxiliary "do"

In the following cases, the auxiliary *do* is not used in negative sentences/questions:

the full verb is "be"

eg; I *am* not angry. / *Are* you okay?

the sentence already contains another auxiliary (e.g. have, be, will)

eg; They *are* not sleeping. / *Have* you heard that?

the sentence contains a modal verb (can, may, must, need, ought to, shall, should)

eg; We *need* not wait. / *Can* you repeat that, please?

the question asks for the subject of the sentence

eg; Who *sings* that song?

Other common auxiliary verbs are: will, should, would, can, must, might, may, could (These verbs are often called *modal verbs*).

Modal verbs

The modal verbs include *can, must, may, might, will, would, should*. They are used with other verbs to express ability, obligation, possibility, and so on. Below is a list showing the most useful modals and their most common meanings:

Modal	Meaning	Example
can	to express ability	I <i>can</i> speak a little Russian.
can	to request permission	<i>Can</i> I open the window?
may	to express possibility	I <i>may</i> be home late.
may	to request permission	<i>May</i> I sit down, please?
must	to express obligation	I <i>must</i> go now.
must	to express strong belief	She <i>must</i> be over 90 years old.
should	to give advice	You <i>should</i> stop smoking.
would	to request or offer	<i>Would</i> you like a cup of tea?

would in *if-sentences* If I were you, I *would* say sorry.

Modal verbs are unlike other verbs. They do not change their form (spelling) and they have no infinitive or participle (past/present). The modals *must* and *can* need substitute verbs to express obligation or ability in the different tenses. Here are some examples:

Past simple Sorry I'm late. I had to finish my math test.

Present perfect She's had to return to Korea at short notice.

Future You'll have to work hard if you want to pass the exams.

Infinitive I don't want to have to go.

Past simple I couldn't/wasn't able to walk until I was 3 years old.

Present perfect I haven't been able to solve this problem. Can you help?

Future I'm not sure if I will be able to come to your party.

Infinitive I would love to be able to play the piano.

Modals are auxiliary verbs. They do not need an additional auxiliary in negatives or questions.

For example:

Must I come? , or: *He shouldn't smoke*

Contracted auxiliaries

The auxiliary verbs are very often contracted. For example, you can say *I'm playing tennis tomorrow*, instead of *I am playing tennis tomorrow*. The contracted form (which needs an apostrophe) is more likely to be used in spoken language.

The short form itself often has two alternatives, which are equally usual and correct.

For example:

She's not going to the dance.

She isn't going to the dance.

I haven't seen him for ages.

I've not seen him for ages.

* The full form is common in spoken language when the speaker wants to emphasize what she is saying. For example:

Why don't you call him?

I *have* called him.

I *do not* want to see him again.