

Verb Forms

English verbs come in several **forms**. For example, the verb **sing** can be: *sing, sang, sung, singing* or *sings*. This is a total of 5 forms. Not many, considering that some languages (French, for example) have more than 30 forms for an individual verb. English **tenses** may be quite complicated, but the forms that we use to make the tenses are actually very simple! With the exception of the verb **be**, English main verbs have only 3, 4 or 5 forms. *Be* has 8 forms. Helping verbs have even fewer forms as most of them never change.

In this lesson we look at the forms of **main verbs** and **helping verbs** followed by a quiz to check your understanding.

Forms of Main Verbs

Main verbs (except the verb "be") have 3, 4 or 5 **forms**. The verb "be" has 8 forms. In the table below, the # column shows the actual number of forms for the given verb.

We use these forms to make **all** the tenses and other verb structures, in all moods, aspects and voices.

	base V1	past simple V2	past participle V3	present participle	3rd person singular present simple	#
Reg	work	worked		working	works	4
irreg.	cut			cutting	cuts	3
	make	made		making	makes	4
	sing	sang	sung	singing	sings	5
	have	had		having	has	4
	do	did	done	doing	does	5

	base V1	past simple V2	past participle V3	present participle	3rd person singular present simple	#
	base	past simple (2 forms)	past participle	present participle	present simple (3 forms)	#
	be	was were	been	being	am are is	8

In the above examples:

- **cut** has **3 forms**: cut, cutting, cuts
- **work** has **4 forms**: work, worked, working, works
- **sing** has **5 forms**: sing, sang, sung, singing, sings
- **be** has **8 forms**: be, was, were, been, being, am, is, are

Note that in dictionaries the headword for any given verb entry is always in the base form.

Infinitive

There are two possibilities for the infinitive:

1. **base form** (the "bare infinitive")
2. **to + base form** (the "to-infinitive")

For example, **sing** and **to sing** are both infinitives. As they are identical in form to the base form, and "to" is not part of the verb, we do not list the infinitive as a separate form.

Note that the "to" is **NOT** a preposition. It is an "infinity marker" or "particle".

At school, students often learn by heart the **base**, **past simple** and **past participle** (sometimes called V1, V2, V3, meaning Verb 1, Verb 2, Verb 3) for irregular verbs. They may spend many hours chanting: *sing, sang, sung; go, went, gone; have, had, had; etc.* They do not learn these for

regular verbs for one very simple reason - the past simple and past participle are always the same: they are formed by adding "-ed" to the base.

They do not learn the **present participle** and **3rd person singular present simple** for regular or irregular verbs for another very simple reason - they never change. The present participle is always made by adding "-ing" to the base, and the 3rd person singular present simple is always made by adding "s" to the base (though there are some variations in spelling).

Note that "have", "do" and "be" also function as helping or auxiliary verbs, with exactly the same forms.

Example Sentences

These example sentences use main verbs in different forms.

Base - Infinitive

- She helped him **work** on his homework.
- We heard them **sing** their national anthem.
- I want **to have** a drink.
- **To be**, or not **to be**, that is the question:

Base - Imperative

- **Work** well!
- **Make** this.
- **Have** a nice day.
- **Be** quiet!

Base - Present simple (except 3rd person singular)

- I **work** in London.
- You **sing** well.
- They **have** a lot of money.

Base - After modal auxiliary verbs

- I can **work** tomorrow.
- You must **sing** louder.
- They might **do** it.

- You could **be** right.

Past simple

- I **worked** yesterday.
- She **cut** his hair last week.
- They **had** a good time.
- They **were** surprised, but I **was** not.

Past participle

- I have **worked** here for five years.
- He needs a folder **made** of plastic.
- It is **done** like this.
- I have never **been** so happy.

Present participle

- I am **working**.
- **Singing** well is not easy.
- **Having** finished, he went home.
- You are **being** silly!

3rd person singular present simple

- He **works** in London.
- She **sings** well.
- She **has** a lot of money.
- It **is** Vietnamese.

Forms of Helping Verbs

We use helping verbs (auxiliary verbs) with main verbs. The tables on this page show the forms of all helping verbs.

There are 2 groups of helping verbs:

1. Primary helping verbs

We use **primary helping verbs** to change the tense or voice of the main verb, and to make questions and negatives. There are only three primary helping verbs: **do**, **have**, **be**. These verbs can also function as main verbs. When we use them as helping verbs, here are the forms that we use:

base	3rd person singular present simple	past simple		
do	does	did		
have	has	had		
base	present simple (3 forms)	past simple (2 forms)	present participle	past participle
be	am are is	was were	being	been

Look at these example sentences using **primary helping verbs** with main verbs:

- **Do** you like him?
- He **does** go home sometimes.
- I **did** not see her.
- They **have** finished their homework.
- **Has** he arrived yet?
- John **had** not called for three weeks.
- They will **be** eating when we arrive.
- I **am** feeling sick.
- **Are** you working at the moment?
- Jo **is** not watching TV.
- Tara **was** cooking when I phoned.
- **Were** you expecting me?
- My car **is being** repaired.
- I **have been** working all day.

2. Modal helping verbs

We use **modal helping verbs** to change the "mood" of the main verb. As you see, modal verbs have only one form each. They never change.

	invariable
modal verbs	can could
	may might
	will would
	shall should
	must
	ought to
semi-modal verbs	need
	dare

	invariable
	used to

REGULAR VS IRREGULAR VERBS

REGULAR VERBS	IRREGULAR VERBS
<p>Base Form / Past Simple / Past Participle Verb / Verb + ed / Verb + ed</p> <p>work / worked / worked</p> <p>Verbs ending in 'Y' Verb / Verb + ied / Verb + ied</p> <p>study / studied / studied</p>	<p>These are ALL different! Please see below and memorize them!</p>

V1 Base Form of Verb	V2 Past Simple	V3 Past Participle
be (is, am, are)	was, were	been
beat	beat	beaten
become	became	become
begin	began	begun
bend	bent	bent
bet	bet	bet
bid	bid	bid
bite	bit	bitten
blow	blew	blown
break	broke	broken
bring	brought	brought
build	built	built
burn	burned/ burnt	burned/ burnt
buy	bought	bought

V1 Base Form of Verb	V2 Past Simple	V3 Past Participle
catch	caught	caught
choose	chose	chosen
come	came	come
cost	cost	Cost
cut	cut	Cut
dig	dug	Dug
dive	dove	dived
do	did	done
draw	drew	drawn
dream	dreamed/ dreamt	dreamed/ dreamt
drive	drove	driven
drink	drank	drunk
eat	ate	eaten
fall	fell	fallen
feel	felt	Felt
fight	fought	fought
find	found	found
fly	flew	flown
forget	forgot	forgotten
forgive	forgave	forgiven
freeze	froze	frozen
get	got	gotten
give	gave	given

V1 Base Form of Verb	V2 Past Simple	V3 Past Participle
go	went	gone
grow	grew	grown
hang	hung	hung
have	had	Had
hear	heard	heard
hide	hid	hidden
hit	hit	Hit
hold	held	Held
hurt	hurt	Hurt
keep	kept	Kept
know	knew	known
lay	laid	Laid
lead	led	Led
leave	left	Left
lend	lent	Lent
let	let	Let
lie	lay	Lain
lose	lost	Lost
make	made	made
mean	meant	meant
meet	met	Met
pay	paid	Paid
put	put	Put

V1 Base Form of Verb	V2 Past Simple	V3 Past Participle
read	read	Read
ride	rode	ridden
ring	rang	rung
rise	rose	risen
run	ran	Run
say	said	Said
see	saw	seen
sell	sold	Sold
send	sent	sent
show	showed	shown
shut	shut	shut
sing	sang	sung
sit	sat	Sat
sleep	slept	slept
speak	spoke	spoken
spend	spent	spent
stand	stood	stood
swim	swam	swum
take	took	taken
teach	taught	taught
tear	tore	Torn
tell	told	Told
think	thought	thought

V1 Base Form of Verb	V2 Past Simple	V3 Past Participle
throw	threw	thrown
understand	understood	understood
wake	woke	woken
wear	wore	worn
win	won	Won
write	wrote	written