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## Analyzing English grammar /

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# 7

## Phrases

### CHAPTER PREVIEW

Chapter 7 introduces the kinds of phrases that are combined to create sentences, including noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, and adverb phrases. We conclude with the main verb phrase, the verb combined with whatever helping verbs are used with it to form complex verb forms.

### CHAPTER GOALS

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

- Identify and diagram the most important constituents of sentences: noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, and adverb phrases.
- Understand and use the *Main Verb Formula*.
- Understand the differences among *time*, *tense*, and *aspect*.
- Recognize the difference between *main verbs* and *auxiliary verbs*.
- Recognize the meaning of *modal auxiliaries*.

### SUBJECTS AND PREDICATES

Sentences are spoken one word at a time, and they are heard that way as well. Listeners do not, however, understand the meaning of sentences by interpreting one word after another. In fact, processing language word by word would put such a strain on short-term memory that we would be unable to comprehend long, complex sentences. We would lose our place, as we do when we hear a long string of unrelated numbers. To account for this, we simplify the understanding process as we listen or read by dividing information into meaningful chunks.

At the sentence level, the largest segments into which we divide the material are **subject** and **predicate**, a division that reflects what may be a universal trait of human perception. We tend to see two aspects of events—things and actions—and in describing them, we usually name first the thing most prominently involved (the *topic* or *subject* of the sentence) and then the event that involved it or what is said about it (the *comment* about the topic, or the *predicate* of the sentence).

Users of any language share expectations about the way information will be organized in discourse, and the speaker who wishes to be understood will arrange information according to those expectations. Language structure provides a pattern that helps the speaker to present information in predictable patterns and the listener to process that information efficiently.

To begin with, the listener assumes (1) that there is a topic the speaker wants to talk about and (2) that the speaker has something to say about it. An English speaker usually names the thing to be talked about first, before making a comment about it. If the topic is something the listener knows nothing about, then the speaker must introduce it, often by using a question such as “Do you know that store down the street?” to focus the listener’s attention on what is to be the topic of a conversation. Unless there is special preparation, listeners expect that the topic will be identified at the beginning of a sentence and that it will be old information, something they have already heard of (information they share with the speaker); they expect that the second part of the communication will provide *new* information—a comment—about the topic.

To see how much we assume that this will be the pattern, suppose the speaker violates it by commenting on a topic that has not been introduced to the listener; the result is likely to be something like the following:

- (1) *Eleanor:* My new officemate is rather unpleasant.  
*Darrell:* What new officemate? What happened to William?

In this example, Eleanor assumes that Darrell already knows that she has a new officemate. Darrell’s response shows that Eleanor was mistaken.

Identifying the subject is crucial to our understanding of what is said or written because only when we have oriented ourselves to that aspect of the discourse is our attention free to turn to the understanding of the new information presented about it: the *predication* of the sentence (the expression of what something *does* or *is like*). The conventional placement of subject and predicate in conversation helps with the identification.

Our experience as speakers of the English language has taught us to assume that, once the verb appears in a sentence, we have heard the entire subject. Because of our intuitive awareness of the structure of English, we can even divide nonsense sentences into subjects and predicates. Given the following nonsense sentence—

- (2) The glaggety woodgies climmed brudgingly to the weegster.

and told to divide it into two parts, most speakers of English will interpret *The glaggety woodgies* as the subject (even identifying it as a plural subject) and *climmed brudgingly to the weegster* as the predicate containing a past-tense verb (*climmed*).

As a speaker of English, you have a tacit knowledge of the two-part division of sentences into subjects and predicates. Before reading on, do the following exercise, in which you are asked first to divide sentences into two parts intuitively and then to test your intuition by substituting a single pronoun for the segment you have identified as the subject.

### EXERCISE 7.1

1. How would you divide the following sentences into two parts, subjects and predicates? Underline the subjects. (Note that some words that appear at the beginning of the sentence may not be part of the subject.)
  - a. Edward grows tomatoes as large as grapefruit.
  - b. The students in Math 101 have always disliked taking exams.
  - c. Usually, people find Chris Rock funny.
  - d. The house that we own sits on a small lot.
2. Test your intuition by trying to substitute a single pronoun (he, she, or it) for the subject you have underlined.

Most speakers of English would agree intuitively that the division between the subject and predicate of the first sentence should be as follows:

- (3) Edward      grows tomatoes as large as grapefruit.

*Edward* names a topic (the *who* of the sentence, presumably known by both speaker and hearer). *Grows tomatoes as large as grapefruit* gives new information about Edward, telling something that he *does*. Other possible divisions of the sentence won't work. For example, *as large as grapefruit* belongs with *tomatoes*, so no division is possible after *tomatoes*:

- (4) ?Edward grows tomatoes      as large as grapefruit.

Because no single noun or verb will substitute for either part that has been divided here, we have not cut the sentence into subject and predicate. The entire phrase *tomatoes as large as grapefruit* belongs with *grows*, so you can't make the main division of the sentence after *grows*, either. A noun cannot be substituted for *Edward grows* nor a verb for *tomatoes as large as grapefruit*.

- (5) ?Edward grows                tomatoes as large as grapefruit.

The second sentence in Exercise 7.1 is just a bit more difficult to process. Understanding what others say or write is, in part, a guessing game. As we listen, we make rapid calculations about relationships and categories. Once we have heard *The students*, we may guess that it is the entire subject, thus being led momentarily into dividing the sentence into a subject and a predicate as follows:

- (6) ?The students                in Math 101 have always disliked taking exams.

Although the first part, *the students*, is like a subject (it names *who* or *what* performs the action in this sentence), the second part, *in Math 101 have always disliked taking exams*, is not a logical unit acting as a predicate: It does not tell what the students *are* or *do*. In fact, the appearance of the preposition *in* rather than the expected verb warns us that more of the subject is being presented. Thus, we quickly reanalyze the sentence into the following two parts, the first identifying the subject and the second providing new information about it.

- (7) The students in Math 101                have always disliked taking exams.

Although we expect the subject to constitute the first segment of an English sentence, for variety or emphasis a speaker may move some part of the predicate into that position. As long as the fragment from the predicate is not too long or too complex, we do not become confused about what belongs to the subject and what belongs to the predicate. Look again at the third sentence. Adverbs may appear between the subject and the verb (*People usually find Chris Rock funny*) or even before the subject (**Usually**, *people find Chris Rock funny*). We have little trouble in recognizing derived adverbs like *usually* as belonging to the predicate, no matter where they appear in the sentence:

- (8) Usually, people                find Chris Rock funny usually.

The fourth sentence (*The house that we own sits on a small lot*) contains two verbs: *own* and *sits*. We can differentiate the main verb of the sentence (*sits*) from others by signals like the relative pronoun *that*, which warns us to interpret the following verb as part of a relative clause *that we own* and not as the main verb in the sentence.

- (9) The house that we own                sits on a small lot.

*That we own* is a relative clause identifying which house is being discussed; as such, it is part of the subject, not part of the predicate.

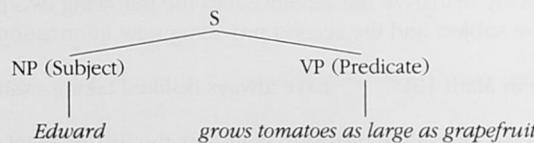
One way to represent the two-part, subject/predicate pattern of sentences graphically is by means of a phrase structure tree, or phrase marker, one of

numerous methods available for displaying the constituent structure of sentences (the parts that make up the sentence). As you may recall, the tree is drawn by following phrase structure rules that specify the constituents of the sentence or phrase. Because the subject is always a noun phrase, and the predicate is always a verb phrase, the linguistic rule describing the structure of an English sentence could most clearly be stated as follows:

- (10) S (Sentence) = NP (Subject) + VP (Predicate)

This rule says that a sentence of English is made up of a noun phrase (NP) subject followed by a **verb phrase (VP)** predicate. To draw the tree, whatever occurs to the left of the equals sign becomes the top node, and the structures on the right branch from it. Thus, if we begin with the rule in (10) and then fill in the two parts of the sentence, we get:

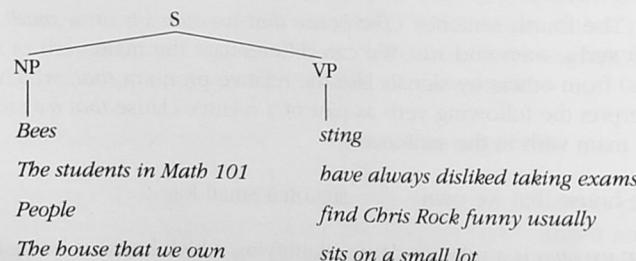
(11)



The phrase structure tree shows that the noun phrase, *Edward*, is functioning as what has traditionally been called the subject of the sentence, and the verb phrase, *grows tomatoes as large as grapefruit*, is functioning as its predicate.

This simple phrase marker describes equally well the underlying structure of all four of our example sentences. It shows how they are alike in structure. Notice in each case that the subject noun phrase tells *who* or *what* the sentence is about, and the verb phrase tells what the noun phrase *does* or *is like*. All that needs to be changed in the tree is the specific noun phrase functioning as subject or the verb phrase functioning as predicate. In the interests of simplicity, linguists omit the parenthetical explanations (*sentence*, *subject*, and *predicate*) in drawing phrase structure trees, leaving just the nodes *S*, *NP*, and *VP*.

(12)



An alternative way of representing the same information visually is available with the Reed-Kellogg diagram, in which the subject and predicate appear on a horizontal line, divided by an intersecting vertical line:

(13) Bees | sting

In such a diagram, all of the words that are part of the subject appear to the left of the vertical, and all of the predicate appears on the right. We go into more detail about drawing trees and diagrams at places in the text where we think they help clarify grammatical concepts.

### EXERCISE 7.2

We have been using simple examples to illustrate the two-part nature of English sentences. If you have ever had difficulty in recognizing the subject of a complicated sentence, the kind of personal pronoun substitution we have used in the previous examples can help you. We suggest here two other tools that can help verify your intuition of what constitutes the subject of a sentence.

- Tag question test.** The tag question comes at the end of a statement and seeks the listener's agreement with the statement. (*Arnold is rollerblading./Arnold is rollerblading, isn't he?*) As Exercise 1.1 showed, speakers of English have a tacit knowledge of how to form tag questions. Because forming the tag requires that the entire subject be replaced by a pronoun, speakers also have a tacit knowledge of subjects. Therefore, creating a tag question with a suspect sentence can verify your identification of the subject.
- Yes/no question test.** Speakers of English also have a tacit knowledge of how to turn a statement into a question (*Arnold is rollerblading./Is Arnold rollerblading?*). In creating the question, the speaker moves a modal, an inflected auxiliary verb, or *be* around the subject.  
A comparison of the two versions shows what constitutes the subject.

### EXAMPLE

Leaving before the lecture ended yesterday was a big mistake.

1. Tag question: . . . **wasn't it?**
2. Yes/no question: **Wasn't leaving before the lecture ended yesterday a big mistake?**

After studying the examples, identify the subjects in the following sentences.

1. *The Lightning Field* is an artwork made by Walter De Maria in 1977.
2. De Maria has placed 400 stainless steel poles in a field in the high desert of New Mexico.
3. The poles, which measure more than 20 feet in height, are arranged in a rectangular grid pattern 220 feet apart.

4. The entire field of poles measures one mile by one kilometer, with each pole equidistant from every other one.
5. The pointed tips of the poles, all at exactly the same height, form a horizontal plane above the field.
6. The best time for viewing *The Lighting Field* is during an electrical storm.
7. The foundation that owns the field allows a small group of visitors to stay for just one night at the site.
8. The most popular times for visiting have been the stormy months from late June to September.
9. Watching lightning play on the shining rods is an exciting and dramatic experience.
10. Just walking through the field on a beautiful day can be enjoyable, too.

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## FORM AND FUNCTION

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In our discussion thus far, we have been careful to distinguish **form** from **function**. Let's review the distinction we've been making.

One of the first form/function contrasts we made in this chapter was in describing the basic structure of sentences. We said that a noun phrase (*form*) served as the subject (*function*), and that a verb phrase (*form*) served as the predicate (*function*) of a sentence. A sentence is thus made up of a noun phrase subject and a verb phrase predicate. These two phrases, we said, determine the *form* of a sentence. But what exactly do we mean by *form*?

Earlier, in Chapter 4, we used *form* as one of the ways of recognizing different parts of speech, or word classes. When we used the term *form* in connection with classes of words, we meant the specific prefixes and suffixes that attach to and change the form of each kind of word. For example, the past-tense suffix {-ed} occurs with verbs, and its presence enables us to recognize a member of the verb class, even when the specific "word" is a sequence of nonsense syllables, like *fibbled*. Similarly, the derivational suffix {-tion} enables us to recognize nouns like *addition* and *concentration*, and the suffix {-al} helps us to identify members of the adjective class like *additional* and *functional*.

Not all words can be identified on the basis of form. Some words are not capable of accepting affixes (*after, that*), and others can take the inflections of more than one word class (*She is cutting out a dress; He has three cuts on his arm*). In such cases, its position in a phrase or sentence is what helps us in identifying the class to which a word belongs. That is why we used sentence frames to help identify nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in Chapter 4. If a word can occupy a slot in a frame sentence, we can demonstrate its ability to *function* as the part of speech identified by that slot. In testing for adjectives, for instance, we substitute one word after another in the adjective slots; if a word fits, we have demonstrated that English treats it as an adjective.

In identifying phrases, we continue to use *form* with the same meaning: It refers to the physical shape or the internal structure that enables us to classify a phrase.

When we break down a sentence into its constituent parts, we break it into **phrases**: sequences of words that form a syntactic unit but are less than a sentence. Every phrase has a **headword** that determines the kind of phrase it is and gives the phrase its name (*noun phrase*, *verb phrase*, or *prepositional phrase*, for example). We begin our discussion of phrases by showing how a noun phrase may consist of (1) just a single noun:

- (14) honey                    *Honey* tastes sweet.

(2) a determiner plus a noun:

- (15) the milk                    *The milk* tastes sweet.

Or (3) a determiner plus one or more adjectives plus a noun:

- (16) that cold drink            *That cold drink* tastes sweet.

The pattern of a noun preceded by a possible determiner and one or more possible adjective modifiers provides us with a prototypical *form* for all noun phrases. The noun is the headword of the noun phrase, the word that other words modify.

The principle of *substitution* is essential in analyzing phrases. We cannot possibly hope to characterize all of the possible noun phrases of English on the basis of form. Just thinking about the possible structures that can serve as subjects of sentences should convince you that an exhaustive catalog of noun phrases would be, if at all possible, incredibly long and complex. Consider, as a single example, the subject of the preceding sentence: *Just thinking about the possible structures that can serve as subjects of sentences*. In form, this string of words is nothing like the prototypical noun phrases described previously, yet a pronoun can substitute for it (*It should convince you*), and it functions quite naturally in a noun phrase slot. In fact, remembering that parentheses indicate optional items, you will find that the entire sequence fits in the noun slot of the frame sentence (*The*) \_\_\_\_\_ seem(s) all right/silly:

- (17) *Just thinking about the possible structures that can serve as subjects of sentences*  
seems all right/silly.

It is reasonable to argue, then, that a noun phrase in English is any of the prototypical forms that we previously identified or any sequence of words that can be substituted for those forms. If we define a phrase on the basis of its structure, we are using its *form* as our basis. If we define a phrase on the basis of its ability to substitute for an equivalent phrase (or to occupy a position in a sentence slot), we are using its *function* as our basis. Analyzing the structure of sentences requires us to use both form and function to define noun, verb, adjective, and adverb phrases.

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**RECOGNIZING PHRASE TYPES**

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Subjects and predicates can become quite long and complex in writing and, indeed, in the most ordinary conversation. To facilitate understanding as we read or listen to someone speak, we divide what can be large chunks of meaning into the phrases that are the chief **constituents** of sentences—that is, the parts or components from which sentences are constructed. Because those phrases have predictable patterns, we are able to understand rapid conversation, even though, at any given time, we are probably hearing one sentence after another that we have never heard before. As we listen, we divide the material into familiar patterns—structures that make the information easier to store and remember than it would be if every word had a novel relationship to every other word.

We have seen two phrases combine to create sentences: noun and verb phrases. In the rest of this chapter, we look at the four kinds of phrases that combine to create predicates in English: noun phrases (NP), main verb phrases (MVP), adjective phrases (ADJP), and adverb phrases (ADVP). As sentence and predicate constituents, they can be defined functionally as follows:

- A **noun phrase** is a noun or any group of words that can substitute for a noun. The simplest prototypical noun phrase consists of a single noun, like *Edward* or *people*. Equally basic is a phrase consisting of a noun headword preceded by a determiner: *the lamp*, *a cup*, *her boyfriend*. However, the headword of a noun phrase can also be modified by other words (*the blue car*), phrases (*the students in Math 101*), or clauses (*the house that we own*). In Chapters 11 and 12, we discuss other forms (phrases and clauses) that can function as noun phrases.
- A **main verb phrase** is the main verb of the sentence plus its auxiliary or helping verbs. The main verb phrase may consist of a single **main verb**, such as *fell* in *That tree fell*. When there are auxiliary (or helping) verbs, like *might* and *have* in *That tree might have fallen*, they are also part of the main verb phrase. The main verb is the headword of the phrase.
- An **adjective phrase** is an adjective or any group of words that can substitute for an adjective. The prototypical adjective phrase consists of a single adjective, such as *tall* in *Sally is tall*, or an adjective headword and a qualifier, such as *very tall*. Even *taller than the woman who coaches her volleyball team* is more elaborate, but because it can substitute for the single adjective *tall* (*Sally is even taller than the woman who coaches her volleyball team*), you can recognize it as an adjective phrase.
- An **adverb phrase** is an adverb or any group of words that can substitute for an adverb. The prototype of an adverb phrase consists of a single adverb (*strongly* in *The wind blew strongly*), or an adverb headword accompanied by a qualifier (*very strongly*). Because you can substitute the subordinate clause *as if we were in the midst of a hurricane* for the adverb *strongly*, you can recognize the larger constituent as an adverb phrase (*The wind blew as if we were in the midst of a hurricane*).

<b>RULES OF THUMB</b>	
<b>Substitution Tests Useful in Identifying Phrase Types</b>	
<b>Noun Phrase</b>	Try to substitute a single noun or pronoun (like <i>someone</i> or <i>something</i> ) for it.
<b>Main Verb Phrase</b>	We will discuss these in detail below.
<b>Adjective Phrase</b>	Try to substitute a related single adjective for it.
<b>Adverb Phrase</b>	Try to substitute a related single adverb (like <i>there</i> , <i>then</i> , or <i>somehow</i> ) for it. Then move it to a position following the verb.

**Figure 7.1**

Figure 7.1 sums up substitution tests that are useful in identifying phrase types. You cannot hope to memorize all of the combinations that can function as noun, adjective, or adverb phrases. Learn the tests for identifying them, instead. The main verb phrase is different. Because it contains a small and fixed number of words, its constituents can be memorized.

Let's return to the previous sentences and see if we can analyze their *constituent structure*, the arrangement of their parts. Remember that the constituents of the sentence are a noun phrase functioning as the subject and a verb phrase functioning as the predicate. Predicates must include a main verb phrase, but they may also include noun phrases, adjective phrases, and adverb phrases as constituents. *If you find a phrase for which there is no single word substitute, it is not a constituent of the sentence or of the predicate. It must be part of another, larger phrase.*

- (18) Edward grows tomatoes as large as grapefruit.
- *Edward*, the subject, is a single noun and is, according to our definition, a noun phrase as well.
  - The main verb *grows* stands alone without any auxiliaries and is the entire main verb phrase.
  - Although *tomatoes*, by itself, could be a noun phrase, in identifying constituents of the sentence, we are looking for the largest sequences of words that can be replaced by a single part of speech: a noun, a verb, an adjective, or an adverb. Two facts suggest that *tomatoes as large as grapefruit* should be considered as a single unit. First, in this sentence, the entire phrase can be replaced either by the single word *tomatoes* (or by a pronoun like *something*), yielding a complete sentence: *Edward grows tomatoes* or *Edward*

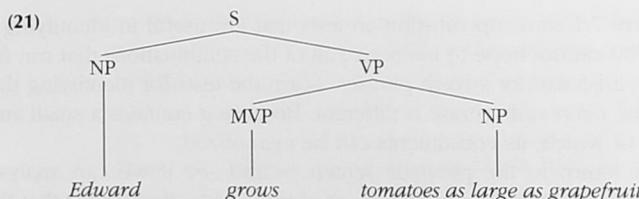
*grows something*. Second, if you divide this structure, no single word can replace *as large as grapefruit* in this structure, while supplying similar information about the tomatoes. If, for example, you try to substitute a simple adjective like *big* for the phrase, you get *\*Edward grows tomatoes big*. Thus, the complete sequence *tomatoes as large as grapefruit* is a noun phrase constituting part of the predicate, and we identify the sentence constituents as follows:

- (19) A noun phrase subject: *Edward*  
 A verb phrase predicate: *grows tomatoes as large as grapefruit*

The predicate has two constituents consisting of

- (20) A main verb phrase: *grows*  
 A second noun phrase: *tomatoes as large as grapefruit*

A phrase structure tree of the sentence looks like this:



The constituents in the next sentence are a bit more difficult to identify.

- (22) The students in Math 101 have always disliked taking exams.

- *The students* is a noun phrase; it can be replaced by a single word (such as *they* or *students*). However, we can demonstrate that it is part of another, larger noun phrase, *The students in Math 101*. In the first place, the same pronoun (*they*) or single noun (*students*) can be substituted for the larger phrase to which it belongs. In the second place, *in Math 101* is not a constituent of the sentence. No single word can substitute for it. In fact, as a modifier telling which students are being referred to, it is part of the subject noun phrase it helps to identify.
- Although *always* comes in the middle of the main verb phrase (*have disliked*), it is an adverb that could appear either at the beginning or end of the predicate; therefore, it is an adverb phrase.
- The main verb phrase contains the present-tense form of the helping verb *have* followed by the past-participle form of the main verb *dislike*.
- We are left with the words *taking exams*. Because the phrase forms a unit for which we can substitute a single noun (*exams*) or a pronoun (*some-thing*), it is a noun phrase telling *what* students dislike.

Thus, we can identify the following constituents:

**(23) Sentence Constituents**

A noun phrase subject:

*The students in Math 101*

A verb phrase predicate:

*have always disliked taking exams.*

**Predicate Constituents**

A main verb phrase:

*have disliked*

A second noun phrase:

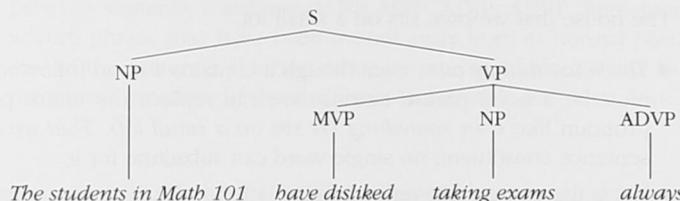
*taking exams*

An adverb phrase:

*always*

Example (24) shows a phrase structure tree of (22).

**(24)**



The third sentence is fairly straightforward.

**(25) Sentence Constituents**

The only question arising in this sentence is what to do with the sequence *Chris Rock funny*. Your intuition will probably suggest to you that this is not a single unit. You can replace it with *him* or *Rock*, but some of the sense is lost because two kinds of information are supplied in the predicate of (25): the person (*Chris Rock*) and a word that describes him (*funny*). The first phrase, because it is the name of a person, is easily identified as a noun phrase, and the second, a simple adjective, is an adjective phrase. Thus, the constituents of the sentence can be identified as follows:

**(26) Sentence Constituents**

A noun phrase subject:

*people*

A verb phrase predicate:

*find Chris Rock funny usually*

**Predicate Constituents**

A main verb phrase:

*find*

A second noun phrase:

*Chris Rock*

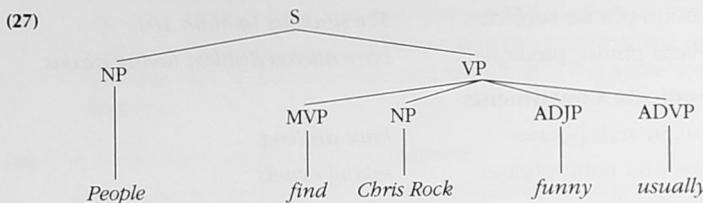
An adjective phrase:

*funny*

An adverb phrase:

*usually*

The constituent structure of (25) can be analyzed with the following phrase structure tree:



The last sentence in our examples presents an additional difficulty: It contains a relative clause, *that we own*:

- (28) The house that we own sits on a small lot.

- *The house that we own*, even though it contains a noun followed by a clause, must be a noun phrase because we can replace the entire phrase with a pronoun like *it* or *something* (*It sits on a small lot*). *That we own* is not a sentence constituent; no single word can substitute for it.
- *Sits* is the entire main verb phrase.
- *On a small lot* is a prepositional phrase. Because it tells *where* and can be replaced by a simple adverb *there*, it is functioning as an adverb phrase in this sentence. Remember that *on a small lot* is a prepositional phrase in *form*, but it is an adverb phrase in *function*. Prepositional phrases can function as adjectivals (*a house of our own*, in which *of our own* modifies *house*), and as adverbials (*sits on a small lot*, in which *on a small lot* modifies *sits*). We cannot tell the function of a prepositional phrase until we see its place in a sentence. Notice that although the adverbial prepositional phrase contains a noun phrase (*a small lot*), we do not, at this stage of our analysis, divide the prepositional phrase into smaller constituents. If we did, we would be left with the preposition *on*, for which we could not substitute any single noun, verb, adjective, or adverb. Because we cannot, *on* is not a constituent of the predicate.

The constituents of this sentence are as follows:

(29) **Sentence Constituents**

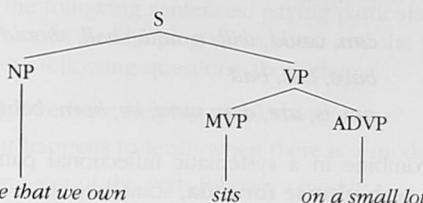
- A noun phrase subject:      *The house that we own*  
 A verb phrase predicate:      *sits on a small lot*

**Predicate Constituents**

- A main verb phrase:      *sits*  
 An adverb phrase:      *on a small lot*

The phrase structure tree for (28) is

(30)



### EXERCISE 7.3

Divide each of the following sentences into its subject and predicate. Label its sentence constituents: NP, MVP, ADJP, ADVP. Remember that an adverb phrase may have been moved away from its normal position at the end of the sentence. If it has, move it to the end before trying to analyze the phrase structure of the sentence. An example has been done for you.

#### EXAMPLE

Our youngest son probably hit that ball into the neighbor's yard.

<i>Our youngest son</i>	<i>bit</i>	<i>that ball</i>	<i>into the neighbor's yard</i>	<i>probably</i>
NP	MVP	NP	ADVP	ADVP

1. Readers usually feel sorry for King Lear.
2. He foolishly offers his entire kingdom to his daughters.
3. Only his youngest daughter, Cordelia, refuses her share of his estate.
4. The other two daughters become antagonistic to Lear after the power shift.
5. During his visits both sisters mistreat Lear's loyal companions.
6. Critics have called Goneril and Regan "unnatural daughters."
7. However, not everyone sides with Cordelia against her sisters.
8. Some directors and actresses sympathize with Cordelia's sisters.
9. For example, Lear's rowdy followers seriously disrupt life in Goneril's castle.
10. Some actresses portray the two sisters as sympathetically as possible.

## THE MAIN VERB PHRASE

The most important constituent of the predicate is the main verb phrase. Its headword is the main verb, which tells what the subject *does* or *is like*. English requires that the main verb of a sentence be a **finite verb**—that is, that it be

inflected for tense, either in itself (*eat/ate*) or else by way of helping verbs (*is eating/had eaten*). Helping verbs include:

<b>Modals</b>	<i>can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might, must</i>
<b>Have</b>	<i>have, has, had</i>
<b>Be</b>	<i>am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being</i>

These forms combine in a systematic inflectional pattern that we describe with the **main verb phrase formula**, sometimes also referred to as the **verb expansion rule**.

Before analyzing that formula, recall the five principal forms in which English verbs occur. They are each listed in Figure 7.2, along with frame sentences for which each form of the finite (or inflected) verb is appropriate. Following the slot in each test frame sentence are the optional words (in parentheses), *something* and *good*, for verbs that require a following noun or adjective, respectively.

The **base form** is uninflected; this is the version of the verb that is listed in a dictionary and that occurs with the infinitive marker *to*. The **simple present-tense form** ends in allomorphs of {-s} if the subject is a third-person singular noun phrase (one for which *he*, *she*, or *it* can be substituted). The **simple past-tense form** of regular verbs is formed by adding allomorphs of {-d} to the base form, with a number of irregular verbs, as we have seen, indicating past tense by a change of vowel (for example, *ride/rode*). The **past-participle form** is usually created with an inflection identical with that of the past tense (*walked/have walked*), but many irregular verbs have *-en* as the past-participle marker (for example, *ridden*). The **present-participle form** is always formed with *-ing* (see Figure 3.3).

<b>SUMMARY</b>	
<b>Principal Parts of English Verbs</b>	
<b>Base Form</b>	It might _____ (something/good). She wants to _____ (something/good).
<b>Simple Present-Tense Form {-s}</b>	He _____ {-s} (something/good) sometimes.
<b>Simple Past-Tense Form {-d}</b>	You _____ {-d} (something/good) then.
<b>Past-Participle Form {-en}</b>	We have _____ {-en} (something/good) always.
<b>Present-Participle Form {-ing}</b>	They are _____ {-ing} (something/good) now.

Figure 7.2

**EXERCISE 7.4**

Look at the following sentences, paying particular attention to the order in which verbs and helping verbs occur and the forms they take. Then answer the following questions about them:

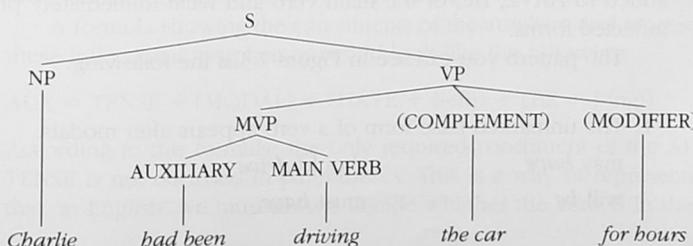
- a. Which verb (or helping verb) shows tense?
  - b. What happens to tense when there is a modal?
  - c. What form of the verb follows a modal?
  - d. What form of the verb follows HAVE?
  - e. What form of the verb follows BE?
- 
1. Charlie had been driving for hours.
  2. Charlie may have driven the car for them.
  3. Charlie will be driving us tomorrow.
  4. Charlie should always drive the car.
  5. Charlie was driving the car yesterday.
  6. Charlie has driven for a long time.
  7. Charlie must have been driving the car today.
  8. Charlie drove the car last.

You will have noticed in doing Exercise 7.4 that the three kinds of auxiliaries illustrated in the eight sentences always precede the main verb. They may be absent entirely (as in #8), or they may appear in any combination. However, they always occur in the same order:

- First comes the modal, if there is one.
- Next comes a form of *have*, if it occurs.
- Then comes a form of *be*, if there is any.
- Finally, following any or all of the above, comes the headword, the main verb.

If we categorize all the auxiliary verbs as members of a single component of the main verb phrase, the **auxiliary (AUX)**, it is possible to represent this information about English verbs by extending the tree diagram as follows:

(31)



As you will recall, this tree diagram begins with a sentence (S) node and says that a sentence consists of a noun phrase subject (NP) followed by a verb phrase predicate (VP). To this is added a new branching, based on the following rule:

$$(32) \quad VP = MVP + (COMPLEMENTS)$$

According to (32), the verb phrase consists of a main verb phrase (MVP), which may be followed by one or more **complements**: the noun phrases, adjective phrases, or adverb phrases that complete the meaning of the main verb and that are part of the predicate. In Chapter 8, we analyze the phrases that can occur as complements of the verb. For the remainder of this chapter, we discuss just the main verb phrase.

The main verb phrase formula is as follows:

$$(33) \quad MVP = AUX + MV$$

This says that a main verb phrase in English is created by combining the helping verbs that constitute the auxiliary with the main verb itself.

We have already seen some of the elements that occur as auxiliaries (the modals, *have*, and *be*). Using parentheses to indicate items that are optionally present (that is, that may or may not occur in a sentence) and capital letters to indicate that *have* and *be* are functioning as auxiliaries (**HAVE auxiliary** and **BE auxiliary**), we may create a formula that captures the order in which the helping verbs must occur and indicates that each is optional:

$$(34) \quad AUX = (MODAL) + (HAVE) + (BE)$$

Such a formula puts the helping verbs into the proper order, but notice that parts of the main verb phrase are not accounted for. Inflectional affixes—either verb tense or participle endings—occur on some of the verbs in the sentences we previously examined.

Look again at the verb sequences in the sentences of Exercise 7.4, as they are summarized in Figure 7.3, noticing especially what inflections are added to HAVE, BE, or the main verb and what immediately precedes those inflected forms.

The pattern you can see in Figure 7.3 is the following:

1. The unmarked base form of a verb appears after modals:

may *have*

should *drive*

will *be*

must *have*

Main Verb Phrases of Exercise 7.4			
may	had have	been	driving driven
will		be	driving drive
should		was	driving driven
must	has have	been	driving driven drove

Figure 7.3

2. The past-participle morpheme occurs on the verb immediately following the helping verb HAVE:

had <b>been</b>	has <b>driven</b>
have <b>driven</b>	have <b>been</b>

3. The present-participle morpheme occurs on the verb immediately following the helping verb BE:

been <b>driving</b>	was <b>driving</b>
be <b>driving</b>	been <b>driving</b>

Another way of expressing this would be to say that the first element of the main verb phrase is a modal, if it is present, and that it causes no change in the verb form that follows; the second is HAVE, which must be followed by the *past-participle* form of a verb; and the third is BE, which must be followed by the *present-participle* form of a verb. Notice, too, that, except for modals (which do not inflect), whatever comes first in the main verb phrase will be inflected for past or present tense.

<i>bad</i> been driving	<b>has</b> <b>driven</b>
<i>was</i> driving	<i>drove</i>

We must include a provision for verb **tense** in our formula as well.

A formula showing the constituents of the auxiliary and representing all of these inflectional morphemes would look like the following:

- (35) AUX = TENSE + (MODAL) + (HAVE + {-en}) + (BE + {-ing})

According to this formula, the only required constituent of the AUX is tense. TENSE is not enclosed in parentheses. This is a way of representing the fact that, in English, we must always decide whether the verb is in the present or

past tense. (The choice of “future” is not available for the TENSE aspect of the English main verb phrase, but is built separately with other constituents. This process is described later in the chapter.) Tense is not always visible, but it is an identifiable part of the main verb phrase.

MODAL stands for any of the nine **modal auxiliary** verbs; HAVE stands for a form of the auxiliary verb *have*; {-en} symbolizes the past-participle inflection that occurs on verbs following the auxiliary *have*; BE represents the auxiliary verb *be*; and {-ing} stands for the present-participle inflection required on the verb following the auxiliary *be*.

This formula underscores the relationship between the auxiliaries *have* and *be* and the participle forms that must follow them. If the auxiliary verb *have* is present in a sentence, then the verb phrase will also contain a past-participle morpheme; both parts, *have* + {-en}, will be present (for example, ***have written***). If the auxiliary verb *be* is present in a sentence, then the verb phrase will contain a present-participle morpheme; both parts, *be* + {-ing}, will be present (for example, ***is writing***). If the auxiliaries *have* and *be* are both present, then the verb phrase will include both a past participle following the *have* and a present participle following the *be* (for example, ***has been writing***, in which *has* is followed by *been*, the past-participle form of *be*, and *been* is followed by *writing*, the present-participle form of *write*).

English has two tense inflections: present {-s<sub>3</sub>}, marked when the subject is a third-person singular noun phrase, and past {-ed}, which, as you learned in Chapter 3, occurs in a variety of allomorphs. Thus, an additional step is needed in our formulaic description of English main verb phrases:

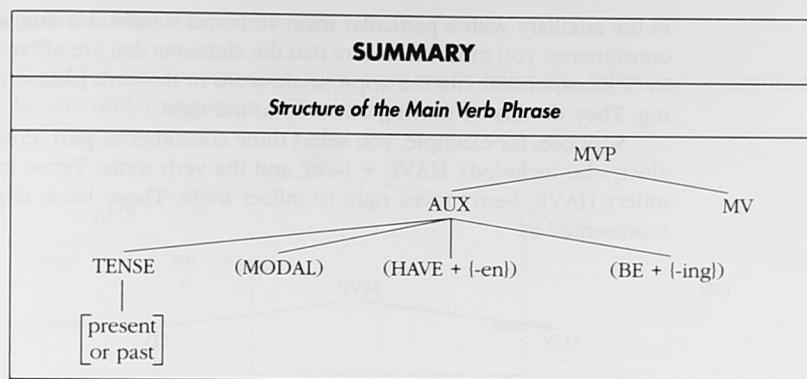
$$(36) \quad \text{TENSE} = \begin{cases} \text{present} \\ \text{or past} \end{cases}$$

Finally, we have used MODAL to represent any of the nine modal auxiliaries, and that information can also be summarized in a formula:

$$(37) \quad \text{MODAL} = \textit{can, could, shall, should, will, would, may, might, must}$$

Figure 7.4 contains a tree diagram representing all of this information about the main verb phrase.

According to the formula in (35), the main verb phrase of a sentence must always contain two items—the aspect of tense and a finite verb; all other aspects are optional. Whether there is a tense marker (as in, *Tod runs every day*, which has an {s<sub>3</sub>} inflection) or not (*I run every day*, *I should run every day*), the tense of a finite verb can be identified and accounted for by the MVP formula. All three of the previous sentences are in the present tense. It is not possible to identify the tense of a nonfinite verb in isolation because part of the MVP is missing. The clearest example of a nonfinite form of a verb is the infinitive, which means “not finite,” and the prototypical example is *be* (or *to be*). Participles, too, are nonfinite unless they are accompanied by tense and

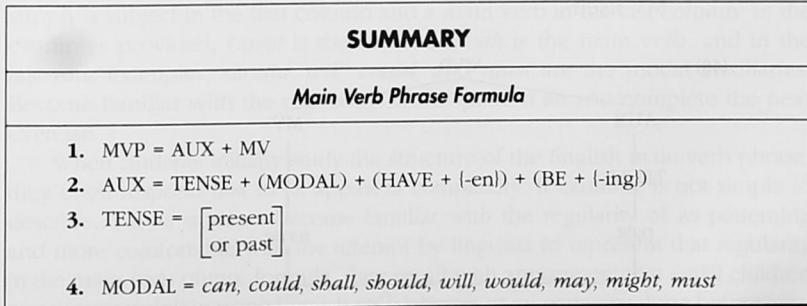
**Figure 7.4**

appropriate auxiliary verbs. Thus, *has eaten* and *had eaten* or *is eating* and *was eating* are preceded by auxiliaries that show tense (present and past) and fit into the MVP formula. They are finite verbs. When used as noun substitutes (**Sleeping** can be difficult) or as modifiers (a **completed** project) and not preceded by auxiliaries, participles are fragments of main verb phrases and are nonfinite.

### **Creating Verb Phrases**

The information contained in the tree diagram in Figure 7.4 can be expressed as the main verb phrase formula, given in Figure 7.5.

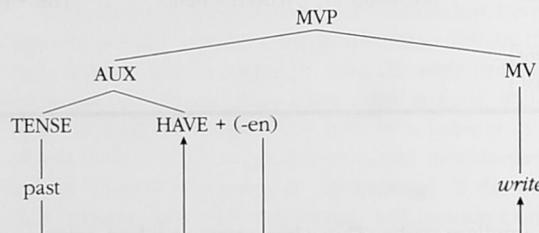
Both the tree diagram in Figure 7.4 and the main verb phrase formula in Figure 7.5 suggest how it is possible for you to create a vast number of English main verb phrases simply by selecting combinations of constituents to include

**Figure 7.5**

in the auxiliary with a particular main verb and subject. Having selected those constituents, you must make sure that the elements that are affixes get attached to or incorporated into the appropriate word in the verb phrase you are creating. They do this by moving one step to the right.

Suppose, for example, you select three constituents: past tense (tense must always be included), HAVE + {-en}, and the verb *write*. Tense moves right to inflect HAVE; {-en} moves right to inflect *write*. Those basic changes can be represented as:

(38)

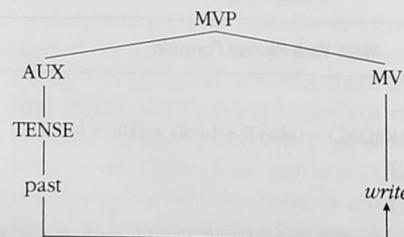


This abstract representation of the underlying structure becomes an actual main verb phrase by incorporating inflections into the verb forms that follow them. The horizontal arrow means “becomes” or “is transformed into” whatever follows. We use the horizontal arrow here so that the two items can appear side by side:

- (39)    past + HAVE + {-en} + *write*    →    *bad written*  
           past + HAVE                                 →    *bad*  
           {-en} + *write*                               →    *written*

The past tense attaches to and inflects HAVE, creating the form *bad*. The past participle marker {-en} becomes part of the verb *write*, converting it to *written*. If, on the other hand, the underlying structure had included only two elements, past + *write*, then the inflection would combine with the MV itself:

(40)

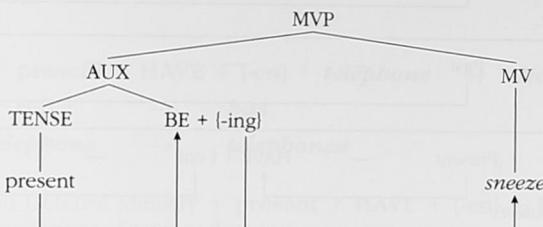


The result would be the simple past-tense main verb phrase *wrote*:

- (41) past + *write* → *wrote*

Consider another example. First, you might select the following constituents for the underlying main verb phrase structure:

- (42)



In order to know what form of a verb will result with present tense, you need to know the grammatical **person** and **number** of the subject. Suppose, for this example, that the subject is a third-person singular subject (*he*, *she*, *it*, or an equivalent noun). In this case, the following will result:

- (43) present + BE + {-ing} + *sneeze* → *is sneezing*  
 present + BE → *is*  
 {-ing} + *sneeze* → *sneezing*

Present tense will convert BE to *is*. Then {-ing}, the present-participle marker, will become part of *sneeze*, producing the verb phrase *is sneezing*, as in the sentence *He is sneezing*. If the subject is first-person singular (*I*), then BE will become *am* when present tense is incorporated into it, resulting in *I am sneezing*. A second-person subject (*you*) or a plural subject (*we*, *they*) will mean that present tense followed by BE will result in *are*, as in the sentences *You/We/They are sneezing*.

Notice how the arrows in Figure 7.6 show the pattern of incorporating into the following verb form the grammatical information normally signaled by affixes (tense, past participle, present participle). To use this chart, you supply a subject in the first column and a main verb in the last column. In the examples provided, *Carol* is the subject, *speak* is the main verb, and in the last four examples, *should*, *will*, *could*, and *must* are the modal auxiliaries. Become familiar with the regularity of this pattern as you complete the next exercise.

When students initially study the structure of the English main verb phrase, they often respond first to its apparent complexity. It certainly is not simple to describe. Yet as students become familiar with the regularity of its patterning and more comfortable with the attempt by linguists to represent that regularity in the main verb phrase formula, they recall with amazement that small children acquire great skill in using English verb phrases at an early age, long before anyone even considers requiring them to take a formal course in English grammar.

## SUMMARY

### Creating Verb Phrases from Underlying Structures

Subject	Tense	(Modal)	(Have + {-en})	(BE + {-ing})	Main Verb
(Carol)	Present	—	—	—	(speak)
					↑
<i>Carol speaks.</i>					
(Carol)	Past	—	—	—	(speak)
					↑
<i>Carol spoke.</i>					
(Carol)	Present	—	HAVE + {-en}	—	(speak)
			↑		↑
<i>Carol has spoken.</i>					
(Carol)	Past	—	HAVE + {-en}	—	(speak)
			↑		↑
<i>Carol had spoken.</i>					
(Carol)	Present	—	—	BE + {-ing}	(speak)
				↑	↑
<i>Carol is speaking.</i>					
(Carol)	Past	—	—	BE + {-ing}	(speak)
				↑	↑
<i>Carol was speaking.</i>					
(Carol)	Present	—	HAVE + {-en}	BE + {-ing}	(speak)
			↑	↑	↑
<i>Carol has been speaking.</i>					
(Carol)	Past	—	HAVE + {-en}	BE + {-ing}	(speak)
			↑	↑	↑
<i>Carol had been speaking.</i>					
(Carol)	Present	should	—	—	(speak)
<i>Carol should speak.</i>					
(Carol)	Present	will	HAVE + {-en}	—	(speak)
					↑
<i>Carol will have spoken.</i>					
(Carol)	Present	could	—	BE + {-ing}	(speak)
					↑
<i>Carol could be speaking.</i>					
(Carol)	Present	must	HAVE + {-en}	BE + {-ing}	(speak)
				↑	↑
<i>Carol must have been speaking.</i>					

**Figure 7.6**

**■ EXERCISE 7.5**

Referring as necessary to Figure 7.6, convert each of the following into a sentence by converting the abstract representation of its verb phrase into an actual verb phrase. An example has been done for you.

**EXAMPLE**

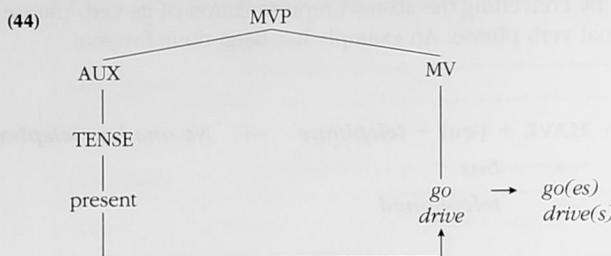
No one + **present** + **HAVE** + {-en} + **telephone** → **No one has telephoned**  
*Present* + **HAVE** → **has**  
{-en} + **telephone** → **telephoned**

1. The British Defense Ministry + **present** + **HAVE** + {-en} + **BE** + {-ing} + **assemble** + a file of UFO sightings for years.
2. The AGENCY + **present** + **HAVE** + {-en} + **make** + their records public just recently.
3. One person + **past** + **HAVE** + {-en} + **describe** + a vulcan-shaped object that + **past** + **hover** + in the sky.
4. Another + **past** + **say** + **she** + **past** + **BE** + {-ing} + **sleep** + when a brilliant light + **past** + **wake** + her.
5. The light + **past** + **BE** + {-ing} + **come** + from a UFO “the size of a milk-bottle base.”
6. According to another report, two beings about four feet tall, dressed in green and wearing large helmets, + **past** + **lead** + a 78-year-old man to their space ship where they + **past** + **discuss** + whether to conduct experiments on him.
7. After they + **past** + **HAVE** + {-en} + **agree** + that he + **past** + **be** + too old, they + **past** + **release** + him.
8. One UFO researcher + **past** + **complain** + that the government + **past** + **HAVE** + {-en} + **fail** + to investigate the sightings properly.
9. A newspaper + **past** + **report** + that Prince Philip + **present** + **HAVE** + {-en} + **be** + **interested** in UFOs for years.
10. The U.S. government + **present** + **BE** + {-ing} + **collect** + data on UFO sightings no longer.

Without associating the tree diagram in Figure 7.4 with actual main verb phrases, it can be difficult to remember what each part represents. The following paragraphs present and explain each possibility represented by the diagram.

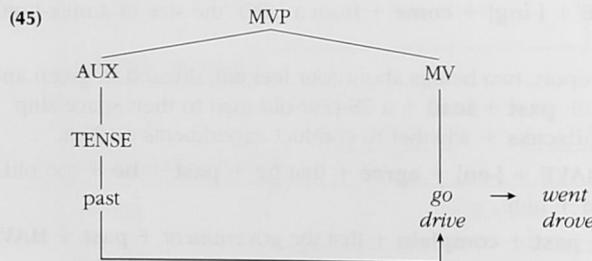
Remember that TENSE is not optional in either the formula or the tree. All main verb phrases in English sentences are presumed to signal past or present tense. The unmarked base form signals present tense (*I usually walk*), unless the subject is the third-person singular (*He usually walks*).

Consider what happens when the auxiliary includes only TENSE and no auxiliary verbs:

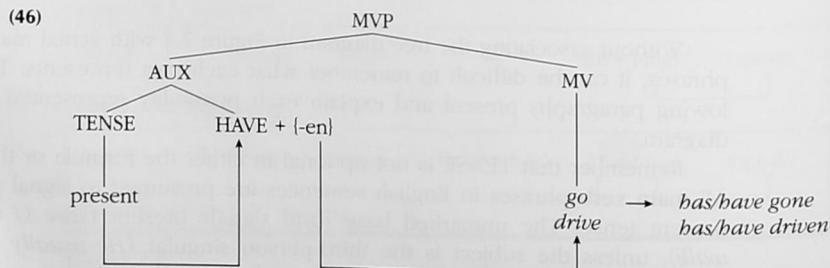


TENSE can be either present or past. If it is present, the verb will occur either in the base form or with an allomorph of the {-s<sub>3</sub>} verb inflection—for example, *I go*, *you go*, *we go*, *they go*, but *Sue goes*. We indicate this following our trees by including the arrow (→), which means “is transformed into” whatever follows. In this tree, the main verb takes on appropriate allomorphs of the present tense.

If TENSE is past, the main verb will acquire an allomorph of {-ed}:

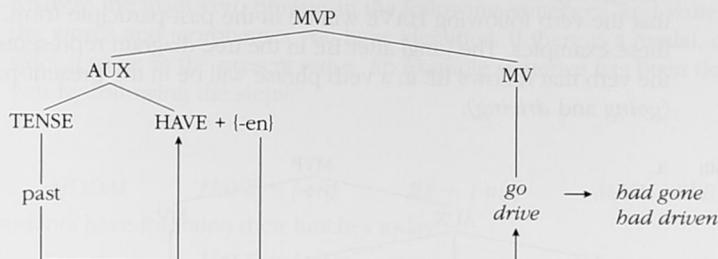


Let's consider main verb phrases with the helping verb HAVE as a constituent of the auxiliary. Because HAVE comes immediately after TENSE, it will inflect for past or present, becoming *has* or *have* if the tense is present. The {-en} attaches to the verb that follows, turning it into a past-participle form—*gone* and *driven* in examples (46) and (47).



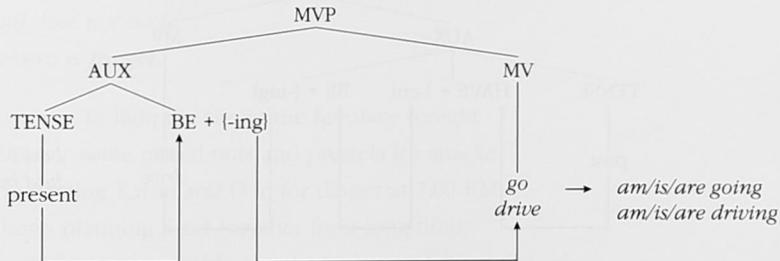
If TENSE is past, the inflection will create *bad*:

(47)



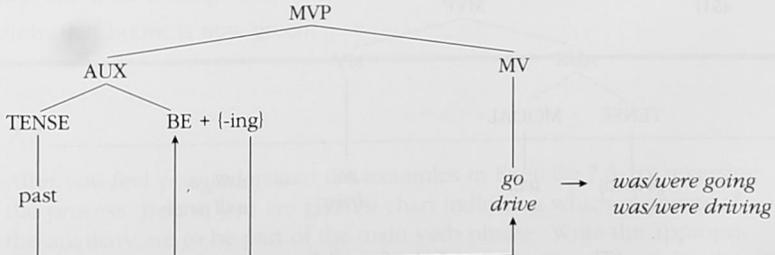
Another option included among the possible main verb phrase structures represented in Figure 7.4 is one that includes TENSE and the auxiliary verb BE. When BE immediately follows TENSE, it inflects to show the present or past tense, becoming *am*, *is*, or *are* if the tense is present. The {-ing} morpheme attaches to the main verb, which follows, as in examples (48) and (49):

(48)



If TENSE is past, BE will become *was* or *were*, depending on whether the subject was singular or plural, and again the {-ing} in the tree diagram converts the following verb into a present participle form (*going* and *driving*) in these examples.

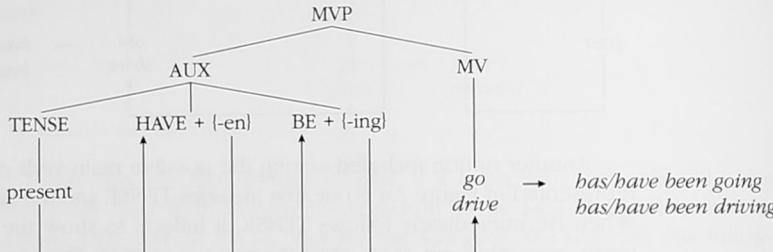
(49)



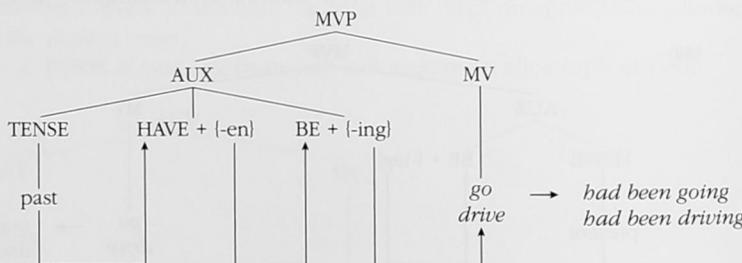
The auxiliary can include both HAVE and BE as helping verbs, as in examples (50a) and (50b). If both are present, HAVE, which comes first,

signals tense, either present (*has been going, have been driving*) or past (*had been going, had been driving*). The presence of {-en} following HAVE tells us that the verb following HAVE will be in the past-participle form, as *been* is in these examples. The {-ing} after BE in the tree diagram represents the fact that the verb that follows BE in a verb phrase will be in the present-participle form (*going* and *driving*):

(50) a.

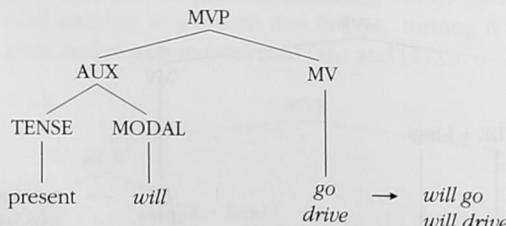


b.



If the AUX includes a modal as a helping verb, TENSE is not signaled by an inflection, as modals constitute a set of verbs that do not take any inflections. We will assume that all modals are present tense. Verbs that follow modals are always in the base form: *will go, might drive*. Example (51) illustrates a main verb phrase with *will* as a modal auxiliary:

(51)



(The exact meaning of modals in combination with other verbs is complex, as we discuss a bit later.)

**■ EXERCISE 7.6**

Analyze the main verb phrases in the following sentences, and write out the words and morphemes you have identified. If there is a modal, consider it to be in the present tense. An example sentence has been done for you by following the steps:

**EXAMPLE**

TENSE	MODAL	HAVE + {-en}	BE + {-ing}	MAIN VERB
present	—	HAVE + {-en}	—	forget

1. Main verb phrase is **have forgotten**.
  2. TENSE is present (as can be seen from **have**).
  3. MODAL does not occur.
  4. HAVE + {-en} occurs (**have forgotten** is made up of HAVE followed by a verb ending in a past-participle morpheme).
  5. BE + {-ing} does not occur.
  6. The main verb is **forget**.
- 
1. It was too warm to light the fire in the fireplace tonight.
  2. We had put out some mixed nuts and pretzels for snacks.
  3. We were expecting Karen and Don for dinner at 7:00 P.M.
  4. We have been planning a get-together for a long time.
  5. They have always been reliable about arriving on time.
  6. Probably we should have sent them a map showing how to find our house.
  7. By 7:30 we had eaten all of the nuts and pretzels.
  8. By 7:45 they had been driving up and down the streets of our neighborhood for 45 minutes.
  9. They were looking for the big yellow house at the corner of our street.
  10. Unfortunately, that house is now green.

**■ EXERCISE 7.7**

After you feel you understand the examples in Exercise 7.6, try reversing the process. Below, you are given a chart indicating which elements of the auxiliary are to be part of the main verb phrase. Write the appropriate form of the verb *sleep* in the space that follows. An example has been done for you.

**EXAMPLE**

	TENSE	MODAL	HAVE + {-en}	BE + {-ing}	<i>sleep</i>
John	present	—	HAVE + {-en}	BE + {-ing}	= has been <i>sleeping</i>
1. John	present	—	—	—	= _____
2. John	present	should	—	—	= _____
3. John	past	—	—	BE + {-ing}	= _____
4. John	present	—	HAVE + {-en}	—	= _____
5. John	present	could	HAVE + {-en}	—	= _____
6. John	present	might	—	BE + {-ing}	= _____
7. John	past	—	HAVE + {-en}	BE + {ing}	= _____
8. John	past	might	HAVE + {-en}	BE + {ing}	= _____

**Time, Tense, and Aspect**

It may be helpful to keep in mind the distinction between form and function to explain how English verbs signal *time*, *tense*, and *aspect*. Remember that the term *form* refers to the physical shape or configuration of a grammatical unit, and the term *function* indicates the role it plays in a larger grammatical structure.

Main verb phrases contain tense morphemes that help to signal the time when an action took place. Unfortunately for students of English, time and tense do not always match. To begin with, we have only two tense markers—past and present—but we think of time as being divided at least three ways—into past, present, and future. The inflection of the verb identifies its tense, but the time referred to is often determined by other elements in the sentence, especially by adverbs. The identification of the meaning of tense is complicated by our need to specify special aspects of the verb, depending upon whether an action represents a single occurrence or a repeated one, whether it is or was an action that went on for some time (*progressive*), and whether it has been completed (*perfect*).

**Simple Tenses**

When neither HAVE + {-en} nor BE + {-ing} occurs in the AUX, we have *simple tenses*, and only two inflections are possible: past or present.

***The Simple Present Tense Form (present + MV)***

The simple present tense can express a variety of actual times:

- (52) I *feel* good today. (present time)  
 Ed *swims* every afternoon. (repeated action: past, present,  
     future implied)  
 She *leaves* for Chicago tomorrow. (future time)

Notice how important the adverb phrases *today*, *every afternoon*, and *tomorrow* are for signaling the meaning of the present tense.

### *The Simple Past Tense Form (past + MV)*

The simple past tense expresses past time:

- (53) We *saw* a good movie last night.  
 I *devoured* six pieces of pizza for dinner.

There is no future-tense morpheme in English, no affix that can be attached to a verb to indicate that the action will take place in the future. Simple **future time** must be expressed by other words in the sentence:

(54) **Modals**

I *shall* be out of town all week.  
 Larry definitely *will* be at the party.

### **Present Tense + Adverbial Modifiers**

This class *ends at 11:00*.

*Leave* a message *when you call*.

Susan *is leaving* for New York *on Thursday*.

### **Finite and Nonfinite Verb Forms**

The main verb phrase must include a verb inflected for tense. That inflected verb is said to be a finite verb:

- (55) a. He *eats*. Finite verb *eat*, present tense  
 b. He *ate*. Finite verb *eat*, past tense  
 c. He *is eating*. Finite auxiliary verb *be*, present tense  
 d. He *was eating*. Finite auxiliary verb *be*, past tense  
 e. He *has eaten*. Finite auxiliary verb *have*, present tense  
 f. He *had eaten*. Finite auxiliary verb *have*, past tense

Our description of grammatical sentences of English, based upon these examples using third-person singular subjects, assumes that tense is a required part of the main verb phrase, even when there is no visible marker present.

- (56) a. I eat.  
b. He *might* eat less.

Finite verb *eat*, present tense  
Finite modal verb *might*, present tense

There is no visible morpheme to justify our calling the verb *eat* or the modal *might* in (56) examples of the past or present. As you may recall, we used the concept of the zero allomorph of a morpheme to account for instances where we intuitively believe something to be indicative of a plural:



or of a past or present tense:

- (58) Watch while I *bit* the ball.  
I just *bit* three home runs in a row.

Present tense (unmarked)  
Past tense (unmarked)

Linguists have assumed, on the basis of analogy, that if the noun in *one dog* is singular and in *three dogs* is plural, then in *one sheep* the noun is singular and in *three sheep* it is plural. Still using analogy as their basis, they infer the present and past tense forms of the verb *bit* in (58) after comparing them with the sentences in (59):

- (59) Watch while he *bats* the ball. Present tense (marked)  
He just *batted* three home runs in a row. Past tense (marked)

Alternative explanations for the sentences in examples (55) through (59) exist. One can explain (56b), for instance, by arguing that main verb phrases of English can contain *either* TENSE or MODAL. We prefer an explanation that assumes that TENSE is the defining element of the finite verb in the predicate of a sentence. That is, while the presence of a modal auxiliary may prevent visible inflections of other words in the MVP, the property of TENSE always applies; every English MVP inheres a sense of present or past.

However these sentences are explained, speakers of English generally agree that all of the sentences in (55) through (59) contain finite main verb phrases. Nonfinite verbs also play an important role in English sentences. Notice the present and past participles *eating* and *eaten* in the sentences of (55c) through (55f). The participles are inflected verbs, but they are not finite: they do not indicate tense. Rather, they indicate whether an action is thought of as in progress (present participle) or as completed (past participle). Consequently, for most speakers of English, participles cannot serve as the predicate of a sentence:

- (60) \*They *eating*.  
      \*They *eaten*.

As we have previously seen, present and past participles occur following inflected auxiliaries in finite main verb phrases. They also serve as headwords in nonfinite verb phrases like the following:

- (61) While *eating* dinner, he sometimes read. Present participle  
Having *eaten* dinner, he watched TV. Past participle

and as noun modifiers:

- (62) Do you see that dog *eating* from the table? Present participle  
What happened to the *half-eaten* pie? Past participle

Nonfinite verbs function in a variety of ways in English sentences. They are so important, in fact, that we devote three chapters (Chapters 10 through 12) to contrasting the differences between finite and nonfinite verbs and verb phrases. Meanwhile, you will encounter nonfinite verbs in our exercises and examples because they are so common in English that it is difficult to write sentences without them. Remember that the finite verb is the one inflected for tense.

### WHAT'S THE USAGE? *Verb Tense and Aspect in AAVE*

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has its own syntactical structure, one that differs from that of Standard American English (SAE). AAVE speakers may use the inflectional past-tense morpheme {-ed} in many contexts, but in others they may convey the past tense through the present tense plus adverbial expressions of past time, such as *last night*, *yesterday*, or *on Sunday*. Because AAVE pronunciation rules call for the simplification of clusters of two or more consonants in succession, words like *fact* may be pronounced *fac*. In a sentence like *He pass the exam*, for example, it is hard to decide whether the speaker intended to use the past tense but dropped the *t* between the consonant at the end of *pass* and the consonant at the beginning of *the*, or whether the past tense has been omitted altogether. Some speakers of English as a second language also omit the {-ed} marker of the past tense if their native language is uninflected for tense.

AAVE has a complex tense-aspect system that differs markedly from SAE. In *He be readin' all day*, the use of *be* marks habitual, continuative aspect. The addition of *all day* intensifies the continuative aspect. SAE would require something like *He spends all of his days reading*. In *He bin readin' to her*, the form *been* has perfect progressive meaning, similar to SAE *has been reading*. Finally, *He done did it* emphasizes the perfect aspect of an action, as expressed in SAE by *He already did it*.

### Compound Verb Forms—Perfect and Progressive

Compound verb forms are those containing participles. Traditionally, these forms have been said to express **aspects** of the action: whether ongoing

(progressive aspect) or completed (perfect aspect). Remember that the terms *present* and *past* name the tense of the finite verb (its form), and they also refer to time. The terms *perfect* and *progressive* indicate whether a particular state or action has been completed or is in progress. When tense and perfect are combined, the function of tense changes. Instead of signaling simple time, it indicates whether an action has been completed before the present time (present perfect) or before some past time (past perfect). As we have previously seen, participles occur in the following patterns:

- (63) The presence of HAVE + {-en} always means that the following verb will be in a *perfect* form.

The presence of BE + {-ing} always means that the following verb will be in a *progressive* form.

This reliable correlation allows us to simplify our symbolic representation of the auxiliary portion of the main verb phrase. Instead of:

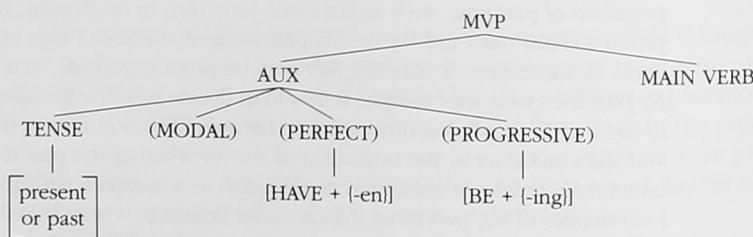
- (64) AUX = TENSE + (MODAL) + (HAVE + {-en}) + (BE + {-ing})

we can abbreviate the formula to:

- (65) AUX = TENSE + (MODAL) + (PERFECT) + (PROGRESSIVE)

We can also revise the tree diagram in Figure 7.4 to incorporate these terms:

- (66)



If you recall that HAVE + {-en} equals the *perfect* and BE + {-ing} equals the *progressive*, you need not memorize the names of compound verb forms. You can “read” them by decomposing the main verb phrase. Their labels are derived from their tense (past or present) or else from the presence of the modals *will* or *shall* (future) in combination with HAVE + {-en} (perfect) and BE + {-ing} (progressive).

**Perfect verb forms**, created by using the auxiliary verb HAVE followed by a past-participle form of a verb (written as HAVE + {-en}) in the main verb phrase, emphasize the beginning or the completion of an action. Because of the inclusion of the past participle, students tend to think of all of these as past tenses, but often they are not; in addition to the past perfect, it is possible to

have both a present perfect and a future perfect, all formed by combining the helping verb HAVE with a past participle form of the verb that follows.

### *The Present Perfect (present + Perfect + MV)*

The present perfect (present + HAVE + {-en} + MV) refers to an action that was completed in the immediate past or one that began in the past and continues in the present:

- (67) I *have finished* the book you lent me. (immediate past)  
He *has taught* at Harvard for 20 years. (past, into the present)

Students sometimes find the present perfect confusing because it exhibits a mismatch between time (past) and tense (present). Remember, however, that tense is marked by the form of the first verb in the main verb phrase. The perfect aspect always involves *past time*: Some action has been completed in the past. Its *tense* gives a point of reference relative to the present time. If the completion occurred at an indeterminate time before now, the tense used is present, and it means “before the present moment.” If the completion occurred before some definite time in the past, the tense used is past, forming a past perfect, and it means “before a specific time or action in the past.”

### *The Past Perfect (past + Perfect + MV)*

The past perfect (past + HAVE + {-en} + MV), which always expresses past time, expresses an action that took place before another one or before a point in the past:

- (68) After he *had shoveled* the walk, it began to snow again.

Past action                           *it began to snow again*

Previous past action               *he had shoveled the walk*

By the time he arrived, the play *had already ended*.

Past action                           *he arrived*

Previous past action               *the play had already ended*

### *The Future Perfect (present + will/shall + Perfect + MV)*

The future perfect (present + *will/shall* + HAVE + {-en} + MV) signals an action that will occur before some time or event in the future:

- (69) On August 30, Jan *will have owned* the same car for 20 years.

Future time                           *On August 30*

Future action complete             *Jan will have owned the same car for 20 years*

The airplane *will have left* before we reach the airport.

First future action

*The airplane will have left  
we reach the airport*

Second future action

**Progressive verb forms**, formed by using the auxiliary BE followed by the present participle (BE + {-ing}) in the main verb phrase, are used to stress that an action or state is or was ongoing; the time referred to may be past, present, or future.

#### *The Present Progressive (present + Progressive + MV)*

The present progressive (present + BE + {-ing} + MV) is used to express an ongoing action or state in the present time or, as is true of the simple present tense, either a habitual or a future action:

- (70) A dog *is barking* in the yard next door. (present time)
- Edward *is leaving* for South America tonight. (future time)
- John *is always snarling* at someone. (habitual action)

#### *The Past Progressive (past + Progressive + MV)*

The past progressive (past + BE + {-ing} + MV) signifies an action that was ongoing in the past. Although the past progressive can occur in a simple sentence,

- (71) A hearty soup *was simmering* on the back of the stove. (past time)

this verb form is most often paired with another verb to express an action that was occurring at some time in the past when something else was going on, as well:

- (72) The telephone *was ringing* when I opened the front door.

Ongoing past action

*The telephone was ringing*

Other past action

*I opened the front door*

#### *The Future Progressive (present + will/shall + Progressive + MV)*

The future progressive (present + *will/shall* BE + {-ing} + MV) signals that an action will take place in the future:

- (73) I *shall be seeing* him tomorrow afternoon. (future time)

or that an action will occur in the future while something else is going on:

- (74) It *will be snowing* by the time we get to the mountains.

Ongoing future action

*It will be snowing*

Other future action

*we get to the mountains*

**Perfect progressive verb forms** result when both the auxiliary HAVE followed by a past participle (HAVE + {-en}) and the auxiliary BE followed by a present participle (BE + {-ing}) occur in the same main verb phrase. These forms combine the emphasis of the perfect on the beginning or ending of an event with the expression by the progressive of its ongoing nature.

#### *The Present-Perfect Progressive (present + Perfect + Progressive + MV)*

The present-perfect progressive (present + HAVE + {-en} + BE + {-ing} + MV) signifies an action that began in the past and is still ongoing in the present:

- (75) They *have been testing* our phone for the last hour.

#### *The Past-Perfect Progressive (past + Perfect + Progressive + MV)*

The past-perfect progressive (past + HAVE + {-en} + BE + {-ing} + MV) identifies an action that began before a time or another action in the past:

- (76) By 11:00, she *had been singing* for three hours.

Past time

*11:00*

Past action

*she had been singing for three hours*

They *had been waiting* for 25 minutes when we arrived.

Past action

*we arrived*

Previous past action

*They had been waiting for 25 minutes*

#### *The Future-Perfect Progressive*

#### *(present + will/shall + Perfect + Progressive + MV)*

The future-perfect progressive (present + *will/shall* + HAVE + {-en} + BE + {-ing}) expresses an action that began at some unspecified time before another time or event in the future and that continues into the future:

- (77) By Friday, that cup *will have been sitting* there for ten days.

Future time

*Friday*

Future action

*that cup will have been sitting there for ten days*

When you get this card, I *will have been traveling* for three weeks.

Future action	<i>you get this card</i>
Previous future action	<i>I will have been traveling for three weeks</i>

Figure 7.7 recapitulates the information on time, tense, and verb form given above.

### ■ EXERCISE 7.8

Identify by name the form of each of the italicized main verb phrases in the following sentences. Break each into its underlying structure. An example has been done for you.

#### EXAMPLE

Woody Allen *will be appearing* at the film festival next spring.

***will be appearing:*** future progressive form; present + *will* + *BE* + {-ing} + ***appear***

1. EcoVillages, ecologically friendly communities, *are spreading* throughout the country.
2. People usually *will assume* that EcoVillages are twenty-first-century communes.
3. The residents *govern* themselves, *agree* to obey the rules of the village, and *share* several communal meals every week.
4. However, the communities *are* simply *trying* to be as environmentally friendly as possible.
5. The village *does not offer* any financial support to residents.
6. Wage-earners in EcoVillages *find* it necessary to commute to their jobs elsewhere.
7. In order to save energy, they *have been building* all homes as duplexes.
8. Home builders *must provide* heavy insulation, multiple windowpanes, and passive solar energy devices.
9. The village land *includes* an organic farm serving as a produce source for residents.
10. The EcoVillage in Ithaca, New York, *has succeeded* so well that it *will be offering* itself as a living laboratory for Cornell University environmental classes.

### The Meaning of Modals

Modals, as we saw earlier, do not inflect to show tense like ordinary verbs. Although they were more like other verbs at an earlier stage in the history of English, through centuries of linguistic change, they have become a unique group of auxiliary verbs that affect the meaning of other verbs in special ways.

<b>SUMMARY</b>	
<b>Traditional Names of English Verb Forms</b>	
<b>Simple Present</b> [present]	<i>Our dog barks.</i>
<b>Simple Past (Preterite)</b> [past]	<i>Our dog barked.</i>
<b>Future Time</b> [present + MODAL]	<i>Our dog will bark.</i>
<b>Present Progressive</b> [present + BE + {-ing}]	<i>Our dog is barking.</i>
<b>Past Progressive</b> [past + BE + {-ing}]	<i>Our dog was barking.</i>
<b>Future Progressive</b> [present + MODAL + BE + {-ing}]	<i>Our dog will be barking.</i>
<b>Present Perfect</b> [present + HAVE + {-en}]	<i>Our dog has barked.</i>
<b>Past Perfect (Pluperfect)</b> [past + HAVE + {-en}]	<i>Our dog had barked.</i>
<b>Future Perfect</b> [present + MODAL + HAVE + {-en}]	<i>Our dog will have barked.</i>
<b>Present-Perfect Progressive</b> [present + HAVE + {-en} + BE + {-ing}]	<i>Our dog has been barking.</i>
<b>Past-Perfect Progressive</b> [past + HAVE + {-en} + BE + {-ing}]	<i>Our dog had been barking.</i>
<b>Future-Perfect Progressive</b> [present + MODAL + HAVE + {-en} + BE + {-ing}]	<i>Our dog will have been barking.</i>

**Figure 7.7**

Sometimes, the multiple meanings of the same modal seem to be related to one another. For example, *can* often refers to “the ability to do something,” as in the sentence, *Sharon can pilot jet aircraft*. A somewhat related meaning of *can* indicates a potentiality to do something: *Winds near the eye of a hurricane can reach speeds close to 200 miles per hour*. A third common meaning of *can*, “having the permission to do something,” also seems related to the other two: *Professor Brown says we can turn in our papers late*.

However, other meanings of modals seem only distantly related, if at all. *Might*, for instance, sometimes refers to “a rather weak potentiality,” as in *It might rain*. But at other times, it seems to indicate (through sarcasm) “an unfulfilled obligation to do something”: *You might show some gratitude*.

Without pretending to exhaust all of the more subtle meanings of modals, in Figure 7.8 we list some of the more important ways in which modals contribute to the meanings of verb phrases.

### WHAT'S THE USAGE? Can and May

In Figure 7.8 we list “permission” as one of the meanings of both *can* and *may*. At one time, *can* referred to the ability to do something (*We can swim across the lake*) and *may* expressed permission (*You may swim here if you wish*). Because speakers of English have failed to maintain the distinction between the two, most handbooks and dictionaries no longer prescribe that the difference between them be preserved. For most speakers of American English, *can* is now used interchangeably with *may* in sentences like *You can/may swim here if you wish*. Observe your own usage and that of your friends, teachers, and others. What patterns, if any, do you find in the use of *can* and *may*?

### Other Auxiliaries

The modal auxiliaries form a special class because of their function in the sentence and because of their inability to inflect for tense. Other verbs and verb phrases perform similar functions as helping verbs in the main verb phrase, but are excluded from the MVP formula because of idiosyncrasies in their behavior. In the following examples, the word(s) functioning as helping verbs are shown in contrast with modal auxiliaries:

(78)	Modal	Other
	They <i>must</i> leave.	They <i>have</i> to leave.
	It <i>will</i> rain soon.	They <i>have got</i> to leave.
	They <i>should</i> be on the table.	It <i>is going</i> to rain soon.
	Sometimes, we <i>would</i> disagree.	They <i>ought</i> to be on the table.
		Sometimes, we <i>used</i> to disagree.

<b>SUMMARY</b>		
<b>Meanings of Modal Auxiliaries</b>		
Modal	Meaning	Example
<i>can</i>	ability permission potentiality	<i>Mike can play tennis.</i> <i>Yes, you can go to the movies.</i> <i>A redwood can grow to be extremely tall.</i>
<i>could</i>	ability permission potentiality	<i>I could ride a bike when I was seven.</i> <i>He said I could go with you.</i> <i>It could rain.</i>
<i>may</i>	potentiality permission	<i>It may rain.</i> <i>Yes, you may go to the movies.</i>
<i>might</i>	potentiality obligation	<i>It might rain.</i> <i>You might show some gratitude.</i>
<i>will</i>	promise certainty command future time	<i>I will be there.</i> <i>The sun will rise tomorrow.</i> <i>Sophomores will report at 10 a.m.</i> <i>They will probably be late.</i>
<i>would</i>	past habit obstinacy	<i>Sometimes he would sing for us.</i> <i>You would do that, wouldn't you?</i>
<i>shall</i>	promise legal command future	<i>I shall be there.</i> <i>The Vice President shall preside.</i> <i>We shall have to redo this report.</i>
<i>should</i>	weak obligation possibility	<i>You should study for the test.</i> <i>If he should come, tell him I called.</i>
<i>must</i>	strong obligation deduction	<i>You must pay your taxes.</i> <i>The streets are wet. It must have rained.</i>

**Figure 7.8**

All of the auxiliary verbs in (78) are followed by the unmarked infinitive form of the verb. A few others, however, are followed by verbs in the -ing or -ed form, as in *keep talking, start working, get finished*.

Some dialects of American English have helping verbs that are not included in our discussion. Some African American dialects, for instance, have available

to their speakers an invariant form of *be* that can be used to indicate future time. Speakers of standard English, lacking that form, express the equivalent meaning by using a modal:

- (79) Our teacher *be* in class tomorrow. (some African American dialects)<sup>1</sup>  
Our teacher will be in class tomorrow. (Standard English dialect)

Some dialects of Chicano English express the progressive simply by using the helping verb BE without the morpheme {-ing}.

- (80) They're *play*. (some Chicano English dialects)<sup>2</sup>  
They're playing. (Standard English dialect)

Speakers of both dialects may omit BE in creating the progressive form:

- (81) He sleeping with a bear. (some Chicano English dialects)  
That kid messing up right now. (some African American dialects)

Many speakers of Appalachian English have an auxiliary verb not included in our discussion: *done* + {-en}, used as an emphatic present perfect. Speakers of standard English would express the same information using *completely* or—more informally—*totally*:

- (82) He *done wiped* them out. (some Appalachian English dialects)  
He completely wiped them out. (Standard English dialect)

We discuss two other constituents of the auxiliary when we discuss transformational rules in Chapter 9. One is BE + {-en} as a component used in forming passive sentences, such as *The book was written by a young author*. The other is *do*, which we use to form interrogative and negative sentences in English.

### **Have and Be as Main Verbs**

In all of the examples in this chapter, *have* and *be* have appeared only as auxiliary verbs. However, unlike modals, which occur only as auxiliaries, *have* and *be* can be used as main verbs, auxiliaries, or both:

1. The dinner is already on the table.

[TENSE (present) + *be*]

*Be* is a main verb.

2. Those children are being noisy.

[TENSE (present) + BE + {-ing} + *be*]

The first *be* is an auxiliary verb, and the second one is the main verb.

3. They have three automobiles in their garage.

[TENSE (present) + *have*]

*Have* is the main verb.

4. He has had three colds this winter.

[TENSE (present) + HAVE + {-en} + *have*]

The first *have* is an auxiliary verb, and the second one is the main verb.

As a main verb, *be* has little or no meaning; it simply links the subject with some noun, adjective, or adverb phrase in the predicate. It seems to be used in standard English because our rules for forming sentences require that we have a verb inflected for tense. Some languages (Russian, for example) express the same information without a verb, simply by placing the subject and its complement side by side. In informal speech, perhaps many speakers occasionally omit the linking verb in sentences where it has contracted (*You're doing well* alternating with *You doing well*). In some dialects of American English, the omission of the relatively meaningless contracted form of *be* is a regular feature:

- (83) This a school. (some dialects of Chicano English)  
Our bus late today. (some African American dialects)

### ■ EXERCISE 7.9

In each of the following sentences, draw a line under the subject and put parentheses around the main verb phrase of all the finite verbs. Then break each main verb phrase into its underlying structure and indicate whether *have* and/or *be* are auxiliary verbs or main verbs. Ignore the rest of the predicate. An example has been done for you.

#### EXAMPLE

Don (will be having) surgery next Monday if his doctor (is) available.

[*will be having*] = TENSE (Present) + MODAL + BE + {-ing} + **have**

**BE** is an auxiliary and **have** is the main verb.

[*is*] = TENSE (Present) + **be**

**Be** is the main verb.

1. Some European airlines have decided to allow passengers to use cell phones once the plane has reached its cruising altitude.
2. Not all flyers were pleased when they heard about this decision.
3. Many people had hoped that the current prohibition against cell phones in flight would remain in force.

4. Airlines that are willing to provide in-flight cellular service will have a new source of revenue.
5. The technology for providing service without interfering with aircraft systems has been available for some time.
6. Airlines are arguing that planes are already very noisy places; people talking on cell phones will not add much to that noise.
7. Some people have been complaining that overheard cell-phone conversations are as toxic as secondhand smoke.
8. It may be possible for airlines to block cell-phone conversations while allowing text messaging on flights.
9. The use of cell phones at 30,000 feet has not yet begun on flights in the United States.
10. Recently, the airline industry decided that Americans who encounter cell-phone use on flights in Europe and the Middle East were going to want cell phones to be permitted on flights at home.

### WHAT'S THE USAGE? *Shall and Will*

Many grammar handbooks suggest a rule for the use of *shall* and *will*. *Shall*, according to this rule, should be used with first-person subjects (*I* and *we*) and *will* with second- and third-person subjects (*you* and all others) to express statements about the future:

- (84) *I shall* probably graduate in June.  
*They will* repair your car this afternoon.

For emphasis, as in expressing a demand, a threat, or a promise, the pattern should be reversed, according to these handbooks:

- (85) *I will* sue him no matter what he does.  
*You shall* turn in every assignment or fail this class.

### ■ USAGE EXERCISE 7.10

The “rule” for distinguishing between *shall* and *will* illustrates how usage changes. Fifty years ago, students were routinely drilled on observing the distinction described here between *shall* and *will*. Drill was necessary because the difference was disappearing, even though grammar handbooks and dictionaries continued to prescribe that the two should be kept separate. You will probably find in your classroom that some students know the rule and try to follow it, some know there is a rule but are uncertain about how to apply it, and some do not know that such a rule has ever existed. To which group do you belong?

## The Subjunctive Mood

The four verb inflections that we have discussed in the chapter express tense (present and past) and aspect (perfect and progressive) in verbs that are in the **indicative mood**. The indicative, used in ordinary statements and questions, is the mood of almost every utterance in English. Two other moods survive, but they occur less frequently. One is the **imperative**, used for commands (**Be still!**), and the other is the **subjunctive**, used to express statements that are contrary to the facts or that follow certain verbs expressing wishes or commands. The subjunctive is characterized by the lack of the expected tense inflection (*The committee demands that the chairman **clear** the room before the vote was taken*), or by the use of **be** (singular) or **were** (plural) rather than an inflected form of the verb *be* (*If I **were** you, I wouldn't eat that chocolate*).

The imperative is still widely used, and we discuss it at some length in Chapter 9. The subjunctive, on the other hand, is dying out. Exercise 7.11 gives you an opportunity to test how much the subjunctive survives in your own speech.

### EXERCISE 7.11

Which form of the verb would you use in the following sentences? In each case, the bolded term is the subjunctive.

1. His mother insists that Grumby (**eat**/eats) his broccoli.
2. Unless I (**be**/am) mistaken, that is not my car.
3. I wish I (**were**/was) an Oscar Mayer wiener.
4. Billy ran as if he (**were**/was) being chased by monsters.
5. Suppose the election (**were**/was) being held this week.
6. It is important that all candidates (**be**/are) given equal chances to speak.
7. The powers that (**be**/are) have decreed that the library (**close**/closes) early today.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have discussed the phrases that function as the most important constituents of sentences: noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, and adverb phrases. Understanding how the main verb phrase functions is useful in identifying and (as you will find in later chapters) classifying the main verbs of sentences and understanding a variety of sentence structures, including passives, questions, commands, exclamations, negatives, and others. In the grammar of English, the systematic patterning of the main verb phrase auxiliary is unique. The main verb phrase formula represents the regularity of its underlying structure (see Figure 7.9).

## SUMMARY

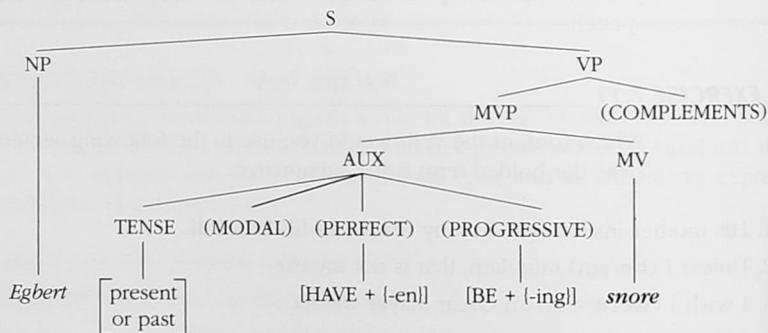
### Main Verb Phrase Formula (Revised)

1. MVP = AUX + MV
2. AUX = TENSE + (MODAL) + (PERFECT) + (PROGRESSIVE)
3. TENSE = past or present
4. MODAL = *can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might, must*
5. PERFECT = [HAVE + {-en}]
6. PROGRESSIVE = [BE + {-ing}]

Figure 7.9

## SUMMARY

### Main Verb Phrase in English Sentence Structure



Options under AUX	Resulting Sentences
Present	Egbert snores.
Past	Egbert snored.
Present + Modal	Egbert will ( <i>can, may, etc.</i> ) snore.
Present + Perfect	Egbert has snored.
Past + Perfect	Egbert had snored.
Present + Progressive	Egbert is snoring.
Past + Progressive	Egbert was snoring.
Present + Perfect + Progressive	Egbert has been snoring.
Past + Perfect + Progressive	Egbert had been snoring.
Present + Modal + Perfect	Egbert will ( <i>can, etc.</i> ) have snored.
Present + Modal + Progressive	Egbert will ( <i>can, etc.</i> ) be snoring.
Present + Modal + Perfect + Progressive	Egbert will ( <i>can, may, etc.</i> ) have been snoring.

Figure 7.10

We have seen that the subject of a sentence is always a noun phrase, and the predicate is always a verb phrase. The verb phrase functioning as predicate must include at least a main verb phrase, but it may also include other phrases—noun phrases, adjective phrases, and adverb phrases—that function as complements (completers) of the verb. Chapter 8 includes discussion of the complements that can be important constituents of the verb phrase.

Figure 7.10 summarizes graphically this chapter's discussion of the phrase structure of sentences, with special emphasis on the importance of the main verb phrase.

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## REVIEW EXERCISES

### Sentence Constituents

The ability to identify sentence constituents remains important throughout the remainder of the text, as we analyze ever more complex sentences and attempt to see how these can be reduced to simple patterns based on the four phrase types studied in this chapter. Divide each of the following sentences into its subject and predicate. Then label its sentence constituents: NP, MVP, ADJP, ADVP. The first one has been done for you.

#### EXAMPLE

The radio announcer	will probably give the composer's name.
<i>The radio announcer</i>	<i>will give the composer's name probably</i>
NP	MVP      NP                            ADVP

1. The first ice cream truck appeared on the streets of Youngstown, Ohio, in 1920.
2. An Ohio candy maker named Harry Burt was the first man to put a chocolate-coated ice cream bar on a stick.
3. The ringing of bells on his ice cream truck launched the Good Humor truck.
4. Generations of children have stopped their games at the sound of the jingling bells of the ice cream truck.
5. Some adventurous children would run after trucks, jumping on the bumpers of the moving truck.
6. Ninety years later, ice cream trucks are still driving through urban and suburban neighborhoods in some parts of the country.
7. However, most ice cream trucks are available only as party rentals.
8. Supermarket ice cream bar sales have made the roving ice cream truck obsolete.
9. Recently Dearborn, Michigan, city officials passed an ordinance forbidding street vending trucks from making any noise to attract customers.
10. Officials revised the ordinance to exempt ice cream trucks after receiving messages from dozens of angry parents.

**Main Verb Phrase**

Break each of the italicized main verb phrases in the following sentences into its underlying structure. Then give the name of the verb form. Notice that the main verb is always last in the main verb phrase. An example has been done for you.

**EXAMPLE**

Arnaud *has been telling* us about his new motorcycle.

***has been telling:*** present + HAVE + {-en} + BE + {-ing} + tell; present perfect progressive form

1. Eight Belles, the runner-up in the 2008 Kentucky Derby, collapsed one quarter-mile past the finishing line.
2. Two front ankles must have fractured during her slowdown at the end of the race.
3. The break on one ankle had opened a dangerous wound on Eight Belles's leg.
4. According to some breeders, the pressure of the Triple Crown competition was too much for the filly.
5. These people have argued that a race horse can sense the amount of prestige surrounding a race.
6. One famous breeder has pointed out that the hooves of a 1,000-pound horse running at 35 mph strike the ground with an impact of 5,500 pounds per square inch.
7. Some experts are breeding more for muscular than for skeletal strength.
8. They may be producing stronger, but more fragile horses.
9. Consequently, the long, slender legs of race horses have been contributing to their beauty, but also to their vulnerability.
10. Sound, sturdy horses are not in demand at race courses.
11. The Dallas Cowboys had won all their preseason games by September 1st.
12. Joanie had been shoplifting for eight years before she was imprisoned.
13. In the mornings, just before the sun would rise over the mountain, the farmer and his wife would begin the chores of the day.
14. Sheila has never sung at Disney World.
15. Her sister, however, has been singing at Disney World since 1973.
16. The wrestling team is learning basic pinning moves.
17. The seniors had practiced all during the preceding week.
18. The lack of maintenance will have caused millions of accidents.
19. The president has been issuing demands for days.
20. Several judges will be rating the contestants today.

### Practical Applications: Modal Auxiliaries

In this exercise, you are asked to draw on the meaning of modal auxiliaries and use other auxiliaries to relate an action to a specific time (past, present, or indefinite) and aspect (perfect or progressive). Use the bolded words in your response to the following suggestions.

1. Using the simple present tense, write a sentence describing something a friend **always** does.
2. Write a sentence describing something you **can** do very well. Identify the time of the action and the tenses of each main verb phrase.
3. Write a sentence describing something you **could** do once but that you no longer **can**. Identify the time of the action and the tenses of each main verb phrase.
4. Write a sentence describing what a university **could** do to make registration simpler. Identify the time of the action and the tenses of each main verb phrase.
5. Write a sentence describing something you **are** doing right now. Identify the time of the action and the tenses and aspects of each main verb phrase.
6. Write a sentence about something that you are pleased to **have** finally finished. Identify the time of the action and the tenses and aspects of each main verb phrase.
7. Write a sentence describing something you **will** do next week. Identify the time of the action and the tenses of each main verb phrase.
8. Write a sentence describing something you once believed **had** happened but later discovered had not. Identify the time of the action and the tenses and aspects of each main verb phrase.

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### KEY TERMS

adjective phrase (ADJP)  
adverb phrase (ADVP)  
aspect  
auxiliary verb (AUX)  
base form  
BE auxiliary  
complement  
constituent  
finite verb  
form  
function  
future time  
HAVE auxiliary

headword  
imperative mood  
indicative mood  
main verb  
main verb phrase (MVP)  
main verb phrase formula  
modal, modal auxiliary  
noun phrase (NP)  
number  
past-participle form  
perfect progressive verb forms  
perfect verb forms  
person

phrase	subject
predicate	subjunctive mood
present-participle form	tense
progressive verb forms	verb expansion rule
simple past-tense form	verb phrase, VP
simple present-tense form	

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## ENDNOTES

1. Examples are based on Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), pp. 19–23.
2. Chicano examples are based on Gustavo Gonzalez, "Chicano English," in *Chicano Speech in the Bilingual Classroom*, eds. Dennis J. Bixler-Marquez and Jacob Ornstein-Galicia (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1988), pp. 77–78. All rights reserved.