

Verb Forms (EnglishClub.com/search)

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

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

Forms of Main Verbs

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

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

	base V1	past simple V2	past participle V3	present participle	3rd person singular present simple	#
reg.	work	worked		working	works	4
irreg.	cut			cutting	cuts	3
	make	made		making	makes	4
	sing	sang	sung	singing	sings	5
	have	had		having	has	4
	do	did	done	doing	does	5
	base	past simple (2 forms)	past participle	present participle	present simple (3 forms)	#
	be	was were	been	being	am are is	8

In the above examples:

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

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

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Infinitive

There are two possibilities for the infinitive:

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

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

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

At school, students often learn by heart the **base**, **past simple** and **past participle** (sometimes called V1, V2, V3, meaning Verb 1, Verb 2, Verb 3) for irregular verbs. They may spend many hours chanting: *sing, sang, sung; go, went, gone; have, had, had; etc.* They do not learn these for regular verbs for one very simple reason - the past simple and past participle are always the same: they are formed by adding "-ed" to the base.

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

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

Example Sentences

These example sentences use main verbs in different forms.

Base - Infinitive

- She helped him **work** on his homework.

- We heard them **sing** their national anthem.
- I want **to have** a drink.
- **To be**, or not **to be**, that is the question:

Base - Imperative

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

Base - Present simple (except 3rd person singular)

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

Base - After modal auxiliary verbs

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

Past simple

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

Past participle

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

Present participle

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

3rd person singular present simple

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

Forms of Helping Verbs

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

There are 2 groups of helping verbs:

1. Primary helping verbs

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

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

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

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

2. Modal helping verbs

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

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

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We use the word "form" to mean the "shape" or "writing" of the actual verb itself. Do not confuse verb forms with tenses. We use the different verb forms to make the tenses and other verb structures, but they are not the same thing.