

be¹ S1 W1

/bi; strong biː/

auxiliary verb (*past tense* **was**, **were**, *past participle* **been**, *present participle* **being**, *first person singular* **am**, *second person singular and plural* **are**, *third person singular* **is**)

1 used with a present participle to form the CONTINUOUS (4) tenses of verbs:

Don't disturb me while I'm working.

Gemma was reading.

They've been asking a lot of questions.

That guy's always causing trouble.

We'll be starting in about an hour.

He isn't leaving, is he?

2 used with past participles to form the PASSIVE:

Smoking is not permitted.

I was told about it yesterday.

The house is being painted.

She's been invited to a party.

The flames could be seen several miles away.

The police should have been informed about this.

3 be to do something (formal)

a)

used to talk about arrangements for the future:

Audrey and Jimmy are to be married in June.

Two men are to appear in court on charges of armed robbery.

b) TELL/ORDER SOMEBODY TO DO SOMETHING

used to give an order or to tell someone about a rule:

You are to wait here in this room until I return.

All staff are to wear uniforms.

c)

used to say or ask what someone should do or what should happen:

What am I to tell her?

He is not to be blamed.

d)

used to ask how something can be done:

How are we to get out of the present mess?

4 **be to be seen/found/heard etc** CAN'T

used to say that something can be seen, found, or heard somewhere:

A large range of species are to be seen in the aquarium.

*We searched everywhere but the ring **was nowhere to be found** (= could not be found) .*

The only sound to be heard was the twittering of the birds above us.

5 **was/were to do something**

used when talking about a time in the past to say what happened later:

This discovery was to have a major effect on the treatment of heart disease.

6 IF

a)

used in CONDITIONAL¹ (2) sentences about an imagined situation:

were somebody to do something/if somebody were to do something

Even if England were to win the next two matches, Germany would still be three points ahead.

Were we to offer you the job, would you take it?

b)

used in CONDITIONAL sentences to introduce an aim when you are saying what must be done in order to achieve it:

if somebody/something is to do something

If we are to succeed in this enterprise, we shall need to plan everything very carefully.

7 (old use) used instead of 'have' to form the PERFECT³ tense of some verbs:

The hour is come.

be²

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verb

1 [linking verb]_{BE} used to say that someone or something is the same as the subject of the sentence:

My name is Susan.

These are my favourite pictures.

He's my brother.

The problem is finding the time to get things done.

Our aim was to reduce the number of accidents.

2 [intransitive always + adverb/preposition]_{PLACE} used to say where something or someone is:

Jane's upstairs.

Are my keys in the drawer?

The principal's in his office.

How long has she been here?

3 [intransitive always + adverb/preposition]_{TIME/AT A PARTICULAR TIME} used to say when something happens:

The concert was last night.

The party is on Saturday.

4 [linking verb] used to describe someone or something, or say what group or type they belong to:

The sky was grey.

Spiders are not really insects.

Mr Cardew was a tall thin man.

She wants to be a doctor when she leaves school.

Her dress was pure silk.

I'm not ready yet.

5 there is/are EXIST

used to say that something exists or happens:

There's a hole in your trousers.

There was a loud explosion.

'I thought there was going to be a party.' 'No, there isn't.'

Is there a problem?

6 [linking verb]to behave in a particular way:

He was just being rude.

Don't be silly.

You'd better be careful.

7 [linking verb]used to say how old someone is:

His mother died when he was 20.

Rachel will be three in November.

8 [linking verb]used to say who something belongs to:

Whose is this bag? It isn't mine and it isn't Sarah's.

9 [linking verb]used to talk about the price of something:

'How much are the melons?' 'The big ones are £2 each.'

10 [linking verb]to be equal to a particular number or amount:

32 divided by 8 is 4.

11 be that as it may (formal) ACCEPT

used to say that even though you accept that something is true, it does not change a situation:

'He was only joking.' 'Be that as it may, silly remarks like that can do a lot of harm.'

12 [intransitive] EXIST (formal) to exist:

What was once a great and powerful empire has effectively ceased to be.

13 be yourself

to behave in a natural way, rather than trying to pretend to be different:

Don't try too hard – just be yourself.

14 not be yourself

to be behaving in a way that is unusual for you, especially because you are ill or upset:

Sorry – I'm not myself this morning.

15 the be-all and end-all IMPORTANT

the most important part of a situation or of someone's life:

the be-all and end-all of

For Jim, making money was the be-all and end-all of his job.

Word origin

Language: Old English

Origin: *beon*