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The Auxiliary Verb

Recognize an *auxiliary verb* when you see one.

Every sentence must have a verb. To depict doable activities, writers use action verbs. To describe conditions, writers choose linking verbs.

Sometimes an action or condition occurs just once—*bang!*—and it's over.

Nate *stubbed* his toe.

He *is* miserable with pain.

Other times, the activity or condition continues over a long stretch of time, happens predictably, or occurs in relationship to other events. In these instances, a single-word verb like *stubbed* or *is* cannot accurately describe what happened, so writers use multipart verb phrases to communicate what they mean. As many as four words can comprise a verb phrase.

A main or base verb indicates the type of

action or condition, and auxiliary—or *helping*—verbs convey the other nuances that writers want to express.

Read these three examples:

Sherylee **smacked** her lips as raspberry jelly **dripped** from the donut onto her white shirt.

Sherylee **is** always **dripping** something.

Since Sherylee is such a klutz, she **should have been eating** a cake donut, which **would** not **have stained** her shirt.

In the first sentence, **smacked** and **dripped**, single-word verbs, describe the quick actions of both Sherylee and the raspberry jelly.

Since Sherylee has a pattern of messiness, **is dripping** communicates the frequency of her clumsiness. The auxiliary verbs that comprise **should have been eating** and **would have stained** express not only time relationships but also evaluation of Sherylee's actions.

Below are the auxiliary verbs. You can conjugate **be**, **do**, and **have**; the modal auxiliaries, however, *never* change form.

Be	Do	Have
am	does	has
is	do	have
are	did	had
was		having
were		

being
been

Modal Auxiliaries [Never Change Form]

can, could, may, might, must, ought to,
shall, should, will, would

Understand the dual nature of *be*, *do*, and *have*.

Be, *do*, and *have* are both stand-alone verbs *and* auxiliary verbs. When these verbs are auxiliary, you will find them teamed with other verbs to complete the verb phrase. Compare these sentences:

Freddy *is* envious of Beatrice's steaming bowl of squid eyeball stew.

Is = linking verb.

Freddy *is studying* Beatrice's steaming bowl of squid eyeball stew with envy in his eyes.

Is = auxiliary verb; *studying* = present participle completing the verb phrase.

We *did* our homework for Mrs. Long.

Did = action verb.

We're not slackers! We *did prepare* our homework for Mrs.

Long.

Did = auxiliary verb; **prepare** = main verb completing the verb phrase.

Selena **has** twelve orange goldfish in her aquarium.

Has = action verb.

Selena **has bought** a catfish to help keep the tank clean.

Has = auxiliary verb; **bought** = past participle completing the verb phrase.

Form progressive tenses with the auxiliary verb **be**.

All progressive tenses use a form of **be**.
Present progressive follows this pattern:

AM, IS, OR ARE + PRESENT

PARTICIPLE

Use the present progressive tense to convey an action or condition happening *right now* or frequently.

I **am baking** chocolate-broccoli muffins today.

Am = auxiliary verb; **baking** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Alex **is sitting** at the kitchen

table, anticipating his first bite.

Is = auxiliary verb; **sitting** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Alex must wait a while longer because the muffins **are cooling** by the window.

Are = auxiliary verb; **cooling** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Impatient Alex **is** always **waiting** to taste whatever I cook.

Is = auxiliary verb; **waiting** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Past progressive follows this pattern:

WAS OR WERE + PRESENT
PARTICIPLE

Use the past progressive tense to show either 1) an action or condition that continued in the past or 2) an action or condition interrupted by another.

Naomi **was hoping** for an A in her organic chemistry class.

Was = auxiliary verb; **hoping** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Unfortunately, Naomi's lab

reports **were missing** the nutritional data on chocolate-broccoli muffins.

Were = auxiliary verb; **missing** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

While Naomi **was obsessing** about her grade, Jason shared the data that she needed.

Was = auxiliary verb; **obsessing** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Future progressive looks like this:

WILL + BE + PRESENT PARTICIPLE

Use the future progressive tense to indicate an action that will continue in the future.

I **will be growing** broccoli in the backyard this spring.

Will, be = auxiliary verbs; **growing** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Soon, Alex **will be eating** organic chocolate-broccoli muffins!

Will, be = auxiliary verbs; **eating** = present participle completing the verb phrase.

Form passive voice with *be*.

You can make any **transitive verb**—an **action verb** that can take a **direct object**—passive with the auxiliary verb *be*.

Active voice looks like this:

SUBJECT + **VERB** + **DIRECT**
OBJECT .

Here are some samples:

We *licked* our lips.

Frank *devoured* a bacon double
cheeseburger.

Everyone *envied* his enjoyment.

Passive voice makes these changes:

DIRECT OBJECT AS SUBJECT +
FORM OF BE + **PAST PARTICIPLE**
+ **BY** + **SUBJECT AS OBJECT OF**
THE PREPOSITION .

Now read these revisions:

Our lips *were licked by* us.

The double bacon cheeseburger
was being devoured by Frank.

His enjoyment *was envied by*
everyone.

Notice how wordy and clunky passive voice

is! Now you know why English teachers tell you to avoid it!

Form perfect tenses with *have*.

All perfect tenses use a form of *have*.

Present perfect follows this pattern:

HAS OR HAVE + **PAST PARTICIPLE**

Use the present perfect tense to convey an action or condition that began in the past but continues [or is finished] in the present.

Marge *has bought* earplugs to drown out her husband's snoring.

Has = auxiliary verb; *bought* = past participle completing the verb phrase.

The earplugs *have saved* Marge's marriage to George.

Have = auxiliary verb; *saved* = past participle completing the verb phrase.

Past perfect follows this pattern:

HAD + **PAST PARTICIPLE**

Use the past perfect tense to show that one action in the past occurred before another.

Because Marge *had purchased* the earplugs, she no longer fantasized about smothering George with a pillow.

Had = auxiliary verb; **purchased** = past participle completing the verb phrase.

Future perfect follows this pattern:

WILL + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE

Use the future perfect tense to indicate that an action will be finished in the future.

This Sunday, Marge **will have gotten** an entire week of uninterrupted sleep.

Will, have = auxiliary verbs; **gotten** = past participle completing the verb phrase.

Form emphatic tenses with **do**.

When you use a form of **do** as an auxiliary verb, you form the emphatic tense. This tense is useful for asking questions or emphasizing an action. The patterns look like these:

FORM OF DO + MAIN VERB

FORM OF DO + SUBJECT + MAIN VERB ... ?

I **did** not **eat** your leftover pizza!

Did = auxiliary verb; **eat** = main verb completing the verb phrase.

Do you always **accuse** the first person you see?

Do = auxiliary verb; **accuse** = main

verb completing the verb phrase.

Doesn't the evidence **point** to Samuel, who still has a bit of black olive stuck to his front tooth?

Does = auxiliary verb; **point** = main verb completing the verb phrase.

Understand the job of modal auxiliary verbs.

Modal auxiliary verbs never change form. You cannot add an **ed**, **ing**, or **s** ending to these words. **Can**, **could**, **may**, **might**, **must**, **ought to**, **shall**, **should**, **will**, and **would** have only *one* form.

You can use modal auxiliary verbs in these patterns:

MODAL + MAIN VERB

MODAL + BE + PRESENT PARTICIPLE

MODAL + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE

With modal auxiliaries, you can indicate *necessity* or *obligation*:

To lose her orange glow, Yvonne **should eat** fewer carrots.

John **must remember** his wife's birthday this year.

If Cecilia wants a nice lawn, she **ought to be raking** the leaves.

Or you can show *possibility*:

Fred ***might share*** his calculus homework if you offer him a slice of pizza.

Ann ***could have run*** the half marathon if she had started to train four months ago.

Modal auxiliaries also show *willingness* or *ability*:

Nicole ***will babysit*** your pet iguana for a reasonable fee.

Jason ***can pass*** chemistry this semester if he stops spending his study time at the arcade.



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