



## Auxiliary Verbs in English

Auxiliary verbs, also referred to as helping verbs, are one of the most common verbs in the English. Generally, they are used together with a main verb.

Together with a main verb, auxiliary verbs show tense or can be used to form a negative or a question. They add important functional and/or grammatical meaning to sentences, usually in the form of three common verbs:

- *Be.*
- *Do.*
- *Have.*

We will discuss these in more detail below, with some examples.

### How to Identify an Auxiliary Verb

Auxiliary verbs can have several functions in a sentence:

- They can express tense by referencing past, present, or future
- They can express modality, or how many things are related to the verb
- They help us understand voice, that is, the relationship between verb and the subject or object
- They can add emphasis to a sentence

As you know, every sentence must contain at least one verb. It is important to first recognize that there are two kinds of verbs: action and linking verbs. An action verb is used to describe a specific activity that is being done, whereas a linking verb helps by explaining the conditions under which the activity is done. Both of these kinds of verbs can be accompanied by an auxiliary verb (especially one of the common ones, *do*, *be*, and *have*).

To help illustrate this, consider these examples of verbs and their auxiliary (or helping) verb.

Angela is studying to become a doctor.

→ Here the main verb is “studying,” and is accompanied by the auxiliary verb “is.”

The dog was waiting for me to feed him.

→ Here the main verb is “waiting,” and is accompanied by “was,” the past tense of the auxiliary verb “is.”

I hope you don’t expect me to stay for the entire party.

→ Here the main verb is “expect,” and is accompanied by the auxiliary verb “do + not.”

Tomas had told me about the plans they have this weekend.

→ Here the main verb is “told,” and is accompanied by “had,” the past tense of the auxiliary verb “have.”

### **Be, Do, and Have: The Three Most Common Auxiliary Verbs**

Let’s take a look at the three most common auxiliary verbs, be, do, and have, with some example to help with understanding their role.

#### **The Auxiliary Verb “Be”**

The verb “to be” is frequently used in the English language and has a number of functions. Among other uses, it can be used by itself as an action verb, with its respective tenses *be, to be, been, am, are, is, was, were, was not, are not, and were not*. For example, you can simply say, “That is a grey cat.”

However, “to be” can also be used as an auxiliary verb. In that case, it must be paired with another main verb. It can be used in either the singular or plural, and a negation can easily be formed using the word “not.” Here are some examples:

Even when he is eating, Tom talks a lot.

→ Here the main verb is “eating,” and is accompanied by the auxiliary verb “is.”

They were not planning to go out tonight.

→ Here the main verb is “planning,” and is accompanied by the auxiliary verb “is” in its past tense negative form “were not.”

#### **The Auxiliary Verb “Do”**

The verb “to do” is also frequently used in the English language. Among other uses, it can be used by itself as an action verb, with its respective tenses *do, do, does, done, did, didn't, doesn't or did not*. For example, you can simply say, “That grey cat does not like me.”

However, “to do” can also be used as an auxiliary verb. In that case, it must be paired with another main verb. It can be used in either the singular or plural, and a negation can easily be formed using the word “not.” It can easily be used to add emphasis to a sentence, as in: “I did go to school today!” This auxiliary verb is also used to form questions, including negative ones, such as, “Jonathan sings well, doesn't he?”

Here are some additional examples:

Jonathan didn't take singing lessons as a child.

→ Here the main verb is “take,” and is accompanied by the auxiliary verb “do” in its past tense negative form “did not.”

We do not plan to go on vacation this summer, because it will be too expensive.

→ Here the main verb is “plan,” and is accompanied by the auxiliary verb “do” in its negative form.

### **The Auxiliary Verb “Have”**

The verb “to have” is quite common in the English language as well. Among other uses, it can be used by itself as an action verb, with its respective tenses *has, have, having, had, hadn't or had not*. This very is often used to show ownership, ability, or to describe appearance. For example, you can simply say, “That cat has grey fur.” It is also frequently used to stand in for or substitute the verbs “eat” and “drink,” as in “Let's have some coffee.”

However, “to have” can also be used as an auxiliary verb. In that case, it must be paired with another main verb. It can be used in either the singular or plural, and a negation can easily be formed using the word “not.” Here are some examples:

Anthony has eaten more cake than anyone else here.

→ Here the main verb is “eaten,” and is accompanied by the auxiliary verb “have” in its form “has.”

I hadn't thought about the fact that it will be June in 2 days already.

→ Here the main verb is “thought,” and is accompanied by the auxiliary verb “have” in its past tense negative form “had not.”

## **Modal Auxiliary Verbs**

There are additional auxiliary verbs in English beyond the three primary ones we introduced here (be, do, and have). These never change form. These additional verbs are called modal auxiliary verbs (see list below):

Can  
Could  
May  
Might  
Must  
Ought to  
Shall  
Should  
Will  
Would

