



GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

Using Auxiliary Verbs

In order to be complete, a sentence must consist of a subject and predicate that combine to form an independent clause. The subject names “who” or “what” the sentence is about and refers to the person or thing doing or performing the action. A predicate is the part of a sentence that contains the verb and its modifiers and that makes a comment or assertion about the subject.

An auxiliary is a verb that joins with another verb to form a predicate. Auxiliary or so-called helping verbs can be placed before main verbs to form complete verbs. In a complete verb, the auxiliary shows tense (past or present) and person (singular or plural). The main verb shows the action or state being described. Complete verbs are used to form questions and negatives, to make predictions and express uncertain conditions, and to show certain time frames that determine tense. Auxiliary or helping verbs include forms of **be**, **have**, and **do** and the nine modal auxiliary verbs **will**, **would**, **can**, **could**, **shall**, **should**, **may**, **might**, and **must**. In addition, the verb phrase “**ought to**” is often classified as a modal. The form of the main verb depends on the auxiliary that precedes it.

USING AUXILIARY VERBS: “BE,” “HAVE,” AND “DO”

The auxiliary verb “**be**” and its forms (**am**, **is**, **are**, **was**, **were**, **being**, and **been**) combine with a present participle, a verb form ending in “**-ing**,” to form the progressive tenses, which express continuing action. The present progressive expresses an action that is going on at a particular moment: “We **are going** to the concert in the park.” The past progressive expresses an action that was going on simultaneously with another action in the past: “They **were eating** dinner when the phone rang.” Forms of “**be**” can also combine with the past participle, a verb form ending in “**-d**,” “**-t**” or “**-n**,” to form the passive voice, when the grammatical subject is the receiver of the action.

The students **were rewarded** for their efforts.

The acceptance letter **was sent** on the first day of the month.

I **was taken** to the hospital by ambulance.

When **be**, **being**, or **been** is used as the auxiliary, it needs another verb in order to be complete.

The performance **will be scheduled** for the next season.

Many of the children **were being assigned** to another classroom.

We **have been invited** to the rehearsal.

The auxiliary verb “**have**” and its forms (has, have, had) combine with the “-ed” or “-en” form of a verb to show that an action began prior to the main time frame of a passage. **Have** and **has** are used for action beginning prior to the present; **had** is used to show action beginning prior to a time in the past.

They **have lived** in New York since graduating from college.

By the time I entered high school, we **had lived** in six different cities.

A form of auxiliary verb “**do**” (does, do, did) followed by the base form of a verb is used to form a question or a negative statement:

I need to make a reservation. / **Do** I need a reservation? / I **do** not need a reservation.

If there is already an auxiliary in a statement, use that auxiliary instead of “**do**” to form a question or negative from that statement:

She **is** making a reservation. / **Is** she making a reservation? / She **is** not making a reservation.

The auxiliary verb “**do**” is also used to add emphasis to a positive statement:

I hate vegetables, but I **do** eat them.

USING MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

A modal plus the base form of a verb is used for a variety of purposes, including speaking about a future time, making predictions, expressing uncertain conditions, or showing politeness:

We **will** eat dinner in ten minutes.

He promised that he **would** be home for dinner.

I **might** be unable to finish my work on time.

Would you call me if you are going to be late, please?

Note that all modal forms may be used in present time frames:

I think I **will** go. / I think I **might** go. / I wish I **could** go.

However, only **would**, **could**, **might**, and **should** can be used in past time frames:

He said he **would** go. / We thought you **should** know. / He knew they **could** do it.