

Introduction to auxiliary verbs

There are three classes of verbs in English.

1 The auxiliary verbs do, be, and have These are used to form tenses, and to show forms such as questions and negatives.

2 Modal auxiliary verbs Must, can, should, might, will, and would are examples of modal auxiliary verbs. They 'help' other verbs, but unlike do, be, and have, they have their own meanings. For example, must expresses obligation and can expresses ability

3 Full verbs These are all the other verbs in the language, for example, play, run, help, think, want, go, etc. Do, be, and have can also be used as full verbs with their own meanings.

do I do my washing on Saturdays.

She does a lot of business in Eastern Europe.

What do you do? = What's your job? (The first do is an auxiliary; the second is a full verb.)

be We are in class at the moment.

They were at home yesterday.

I want to be a teacher.

have He has a lot of problems.

They have three children.

A note on have and have got

There are two forms of the verb have: have as a full verb with do/does/did for questions, negatives, and short answers and have got where have is an auxiliary.

1.1 Tenses and auxiliary verbs

When do, be, and have are used as auxiliary verbs, they make different verb forms.

do

In the Present Simple and the Past Simple there is no auxiliary verb, so do, does, and did are used to make questions and negatives (except with be/have got).

Where do you work?

She doesn't like her job.

What did you buy?

We didn't buy anything

be

1. Be + verb + -ing is used to make continuous verb forms.

Continuous verb forms describe activities in progress and temporary activities.

He's washing his hair. (Present Continuous)

They were going to work. (Past Continuous)

I've been learning English for two years. (Present Perfect Continuous)

I'd like to be walking along the beach right now. (Continuous infinitive)

2. Be + past participle is used to form the passive.

Paper is made from wood. (Present Simple passive)

My car was stolen yesterday. (Past Simple passive)

The house has been redecorated. (Present Perfect passive)

This homework needs to be done tonight. (Passive infinitive)

Have

Have + past participle is used to make perfect verb forms.

He has worked in seven different countries. (Present Perfect)

She was crying because she had had some bad news. (Past Perfect)

I'd like to have met Napoleon. (Perfect infinitive)

1.2 Negatives and auxiliary verbs

To make a negative, add -n't to the auxiliary verb. If there is no auxiliary verb, use don't/doesn't/didn't.

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Positive

He's working

I wasn't thinking.

We've seen the play.

She works in a bank.

They like skiing.

He went on holiday.

Negative

He isn't working.

I wasn't thinking.

We haven't seen the play.

She doesn't work in a bank.

They don't like skiing.

He didn't go on holiday.

It is possible to contract the auxiliaries be and have and use the uncontracted not.

He 's not playing today. (= He isn't playing today.)

We 're not going to Italy after all. (= We aren't going to Italy ...)

I 've not read that book yet. (= I haven't read the book yet.) verb, so pt with

But

I 'm not working. NOT I amn't working

1.3 Questions and auxiliary verbs

1. To make a question, invert the subject and the auxiliary verb. If there is no auxiliary verb, use do/does/did.

She's wearing jeans.

You aren't working.

You were born in Paris.

Peter's been to China.

We have been studying.

I know you

He wants ice-cream.

They didn't go out.

Question

What is she wearing?

Why aren't you working?

Where were you born?

Has Peter been to China?

Have you been studying?

Do I know you?

What does he want?

Why didn't they go out? go out.

2. There is usually no do/does/did in subject questions. Compare:

Who wants ice-cream?

What flavour ice-cream do you want?

What happened to your eye?

What did you do to your eye?

Who broke the window?

How did you break the window?

1.4 Short answers and auxiliary verbs

Short answers are very common in spoken English. If you just say Yes or No, it can sound rude. We use short answers after Yes/No questions. To make a short answer, repeat the auxiliary verb. In the Present and Past Simple, use do/does/did.

Short answer

Are you coming with us?	Yes, I am .
Have you had breakfast?	No, I haven't.
Kate likes walking.	No, she doesn't.
Mary didn't phone.	Yes, she did. You were out.
Don't forget to write.	No, I won't.