d) Expletive pronouns

4. The following sentence includes what type of dummy pronoun? “It was warm outside when they went to the pool.”
a) Subject
b) Object
c) Hyphenated
d) None of the above

5. Dummy pronouns are different from regular pronouns because they don't have which of the following?
a) Clauses
b) Periods
c) Antecedents
d) Adverbs

Verbs

Definition

Verbs are used to indicate the actions, processes, conditions, or states of beings of people or things.

Verbs play an integral role to the structure of a sentence. They constitute the root of **the predicate**, which, along with **the subject** (the "doer" of the verb's action), forms a full clause or sentence—we cannot have a sentence without a verb.

When we discuss verbs' role in the predicate, we usually divide them into two fundamental categories: **finite and non-finite verbs**.

Finite and Non-Finite Verbs

The predicate requires at least one **finite verb** to be considered complete. A finite verb has a direct relationship to the subject of a sentence or clause, and does not require another verb in the sentence in order to be grammatically correct. For example:

- "I **swim** every day."
- "She **reads** many books."
- "He **talked** for several hours."

Each of the above is a finite verb, expressing an action that is directly related to the subject of the sentence. **Non-finite verbs**, on the other hand, do not express that relationship directly.

The only verbs that can be considered finite are those in their base form (the infinitive form without the particle *to*), their **past tense** form, or their **third-person singular** form. Verb forms that are never considered finite are **gerunds**, **infinitives**, and **participles** (both past and present).

Let's look at an example containing both a finite and non-finite verb:

• "We **are learning** about the American Revolution in school."

This sentence uses the present continuous verb *are learning*. This functions as a single unit, with *learning* expressing most of the meaning.

However, *learning* is a present participle, which is considered a **non-finite verb**; the finite verb of the sentence is actually just the **auxiliary verb** *are*. It is an inflection of the verb *be* used for a **first person plural** subject (*we*).

We can see the difference if we use each verb in isolation with the subject:

• "*We* **are**"

• "*We* **learning**"

We can see that the first verb is finite because it expresses a direct relationship with the subject, and it can go on to form any number of complete sentences. For example:

✔ "*We* **are** tired."

✔ "*We* **are** almost there."

✔ "*We* **are** a large group."

The second verb, the present participle *learning*, cannot make such sentences, and so is not finite. The following examples all require a finite verb to be correct:

✖ "*We* **learning** math."

✖ "*We* **learning** a lot."

✖ "*We* **learning** in school."

To learn more about the differences between these two classes of verbs, go to the section **Finite and Non-finite Verbs** in this chapter.

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Every verb is classed as being either **transitive** or **intransitive**.

Transitive verbs describe an action that is happening to someone or something. This person or thing is known as the **direct object** of the verb. For example:

• "He's **reading** *a book*." (The action of *reading* is happening to *the book*.)

• "The people **watched** *the game* from the bleachers." (The action of *watched* is happening to *the game*.)

• "I was **eating** *a delicious steak* for dinner last night." (The action of *eating* is happening to *a delicious steak*.)

Transitive verbs can also take **indirect objects**, which are the people or things receiving the direct object. For instance:

• "I **sent** my brother *a letter*." (*My brother* receives *the letter* through the action of *sent*.)

Conversely, **intransitive** verbs do **not** have objects—their action is not happening to anyone or anything. For example:

• “I can’t believe our dog **ran away**.” (There is no object receiving the action of *ran away*.)

• “There was a lot of dust in the air, which made me **sneeze**.” (There is no object receiving the action of *sneeze*.)

• “Don’t be too loud while the baby **sleeps**.” (There is no object receiving the action of *sleeps*.)

Regular and Irregular Verbs

Just as every verb is either transitive or intransitive, each one is considered to be either **regular** or **irregular**

Most verbs are **regular verbs**, which means that “-d” “-ed” can be added to their base or form (the infinitive of the verb without *to*) to both the **past simple tense** and **past conjugate participle** forms. For example:

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle
“I **play** violin.”	“I **played** violin.”	“I had **played** violin.”
“I **bake** cakes.”	“I **baked** cakes.”	“I had **baked** cakes.”
“I **listen** to my teacher.”	“I **listened** to my teacher.”	“I had **listened** to my teacher.”
“I **gather** firewood.”	“I **gathered** firewood.”	“I had **gathered** firewood.”
“I **climb** trees.”	“I **climbed** trees.”	“I had **climbed** trees.”

Irregular verbs, on the other hand, have past tense and past participle forms that do not (or do not seem to) adhere to a distinct or predictable pattern, and they are usually completely different from one another.

Unfortunately, this means that there is generally no way of determining *how* to conjugate irregular verbs—we just have to learn each one individually. There are many irregular verbs, but here are a few common ones:

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle
"I **see** the horizon."	"I **saw** the horizon."	"I had **seen** the horizon."
"I **grow** bigger every day."	"I **grew** bigger every day."	"I had **grown** bigger every day."
"I **give** to charity."	"I **gave** to charity."	"I had **given** to charity."
"I **sing** on Tuesday."	"I **sang** on Tuesday."	"I had **sung** on Tuesday."
"I **swim** often."	"I **swam** often."	"I had **swum** often."
"I **drive** to work."	"I **drove** to work."	"I had **driven** to work."

Uniquely, the verb *be* is considered **highly irregular**, having three different present tense forms (*is, am, are*) and two past tense forms (*was, were*), in addition to its base form and its past and present participles (*been, being*).

Forms and categories

All verbs are either finite or non-finite and transitive or intransitive in a given sentence,

depending on their form and function. There are many different forms and categories of verbs that we'll be looking at in this chapter, and we'll give a brief summary of the different kinds of verbs below. You can continue on to their individual sections to learn more.

Verb forms

Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary or "**helping**" **verbs** are verbs that are used to complete the meaning of other primary or "main" verbs in a sentence. In the example we looked at above, *are* is an auxiliary to the main verb, *learning*.

The three **primary auxiliary verbs**—*be, have*, and *do*—are used to create different **tenses**, to form negatives, or to ask questions. For example:

- "I ***am* working** on my project." (**present continuous tense**)
- "She ***does* not work** here anymore." (negative sentence)
- "***Have*** you **seen** my keys?" (question)

There are also **modal auxiliary verbs** (often just called **modal verbs**), which are used to express **modality**—that is, possibility, likelihood, ability, permission, obligation, or future intention. These are *can, could, will, would, shall, should, must, may*, and *might*. They are distinguished by the fact that they are **unable** to conjugate into different forms, and they are only followed by a verb in its base form. For example:

• “I ***will*** **be** there tonight.” (future intention)

• “She ***can*** **write** very well.” (ability)

• “***May*** I **be excused** from the table?” (permission)

• “We ***must*** **finish** this today.” (obligation)

Infinitives

Infinitives are the most basic construction of a verb. When we talk of a verb as a general concept, we usually use the infinitive form, which is the uninflected base form of the verb plus the **particle** *to*. For instance:

- **to run**
- **to walk**
- **to read**
- **to be**
- **to learn**
- **to act**

Infinitives can be used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs in a sentence, but they do not actually function as verbs—they are used to express an action as a concept, rather than what is being done or performed by the subject of a clause. For example:

• “I love **to run**.” (functions as a noun)

• “I wish I had something **to do**.” (functions as an adjective)

• “I run a lot **to stay healthy**.” (functions as an adverb)

Participles

Participles are forms of verbs that either function with auxiliary verbs to create the **continuous** and **perfect** verb tenses, or as adjectives to modify nouns. Every verb (except the **modal auxiliary verbs**) has two participle forms: a **present participle** and a **past participle**.

The **present participle** is always the base form of the verb + “-ing.” Although the spelling of some verbs changes very slightly to accommodate this suffix, every verb takes “-ing” for the present participle.

We use present participles with the auxiliary *be* to form **continuous tenses**, as in:

• “Can’t you see that I **am *reading***?” (**present continuous tense**)

• “I **was *watching*** that.” (**past continuous tense**)

• “They **will be *arriving*** soon.” (**future continuous tense**)

The **past participle** is usually the same as a verb’s simple past tense form, which is made by adding “-d” or “-ed” to the end of the verb. However, many verbs are **irregular**, meaning they do not follow this spelling pattern, and they have different past tense and past participle forms. (We’ll look at **regular and irregular verbs** later on.)

The past participle is used with the auxiliary *have* to form the **perfect tenses**:

• "You **have *worked*** long enough." (**present perfect tense**)

• "We **had *seen*** too much." (**past perfect tense**)

• "They**'ll have *arrived*** before we get there." (**future perfect tense**)

We can also use participles as adjectives to add description to nouns. Though they still relate to action, they are **not** functioning as verbs when used this way. For example:

• "The mother looked down at her **smiling** child."

• "I could tell by the **exhausted** look on his face that he needed sleep."

Categories of verbs

There are many different categories of verbs that describe different kinds of actions or states of being.

Action (Dynamic) Verbs

Action verbs (also known as **dynamic verbs**) describe an active process that results in an effect. For example:

• "I **ran** to school."

• "She **read** a book."

• “They **talked** during lunch.”

• “We **swam** for over an hour.”

Stative Verbs

In contrast to action verbs, **stative verbs** describe states of being of a subject. These include **linking verbs**, such as *be* and verbs of the senses, which are used to describe or rename a subject using a **predicative adjective** or **noun**. For example:

• “I **am** hungry.”

• “You **sound** tired.”

• “He **seems** like a bully.”

Other stative verbs are those that express emotions, possession, cognition, and states or qualities. For example:

• “She **likes** old movies.”

• “They **own** three cars.”

• “I **understand** the issue.”

• “Your happiness **depends** on doing something you enjoy.”

Light Verbs

Light verbs do not carry unique meaning on their own, but instead rely on another word or words that follow them to become meaningful. Common examples include *do, have*, and *take*, as in:

• "***Do*** your **homework**!"

• "Why don't we ***have*** **something** to eat?"

• "I ***took*** a **shower** before breakfast."

In many cases, the same light verb will have different meanings, depending on the word or words it is paired with. For instance:

• "Please don't ***make*** a **mess**."

• "Please ***make*** your **bed**."

Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs are verbs that pair with **prepositions** or **particles** to create unique, specific meanings. These are largely idiomatic, which means that they don't make literal sense according to their individual parts. For example:

• "I can't believe that you're **giving up**!"

• "The plane **took off** an hour late."

• "He has been **looking after** his mother."

• “Stop **picking on** your brother!”

Conditional Verbs

The term **conditional verbs** refers to verb constructions that are used in **conditional sentences**, which describe a hypothetical outcome that is reliant upon another conditional situation being true. These sentences most often use the conjunction *if* with one of the verbs to express the conditional situation, and often use **modal auxiliary verbs** to describe the hypothetical outcome. For example:

• “The leaves **will fall** if the wind **blows**.”

• “If you **had done** your chores, you **could have had** an ice cream cone.”

• “You **would get** better grades if you **studied** harder.”

Causative Verbs

Causative verbs are used to indicate that a person or thing is causing another action or an event to happen. They are generally followed by a noun or pronouns and an infinitive verb that is **not** causative, which describes the action that was caused to happen. For example:

• “He **let** *his dog run* through the field.”

• “The bigger house **enabled** *the family to have* more room for their belongings.”

• “The new dress code **forced** *the students to wear* different shoes.”

• “The law **requires** *a person to obtain* a permit before hunting on public land.”

Factitive Verbs

Factitive verbs are used to indicate a condition or state of a person, place, or thing that results from the action of the verb. For example:

• “She was **appointed** *commissioner* by the mayor.”

• “The committee **elected** Mr. Fuller *chairman of the board*.”

• “The jury **judged** the defendant *not guilty*.”

Reflexive Verbs

Reflexive verbs have subjects that are also their direct objects—that is, the action of the verb is both committed and received by the same person or thing. The **objects** of transitive reflexive verbs are usually **reflexive pronouns**. For example:

• “I accidentally **burned** *myself* with the hairdryer.”

• “The problem seems to have **worked** *itself* **out** in the end.”

• “*This car* **doesn’t drive** properly anymore.” (intransitive—no direct object)

Conjugation

When we discuss verbs, we usually must touch upon **conjugation**. This is the **inflection** (changing of form) of verbs to create new meaning in specific contexts. We generally refer to **tense** (which we looked at briefly above) when we talk about conjugation, but verbs experience a large amount of inflection depending on how they are being used in a sentence. For more information, go to the chapter on **Conjugation** in the part of this guide called **Inflection (Accidence)**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What is the function of verbs in a sentence?

a) To identify the person or thing performing or controlling an action

b) To describe an action, state of being, or condition performed or experienced by someone or something

c) To identify the person or thing directly receiving the effect of an action

d) To add descriptive information about another part of the sentence

2. The predicate of a sentence **always** contains what kind of verbs?

a) Regular verbs

b) Transitive verbs

c) Finite verbs

d) Non-finite verbs

3. **Unlike** regular verbs, irregular verbs usually have **different**:

a) Past tense and past participle forms
b) Present tense and present participle forms
c) Past tense and present tense forms
d) Present tense and past participle forms

4. **Unlike** transitive verbs, intransitive verbs are **not** able to take which of the following?

a) Subjects
b) Direct objects
c) Indirect objects
d) Modifiers
e) A & C
f) B & C
g) All of the above

5. Identify the **form** of the verb in **bold** in the following sentence: "We **were** looking for a place to eat."

a) Transitive verb
b) Auxiliary verb
c) Infinitive verb
d) Participle

5. What is the term for changing a verb's form to reflect things like **tense**?

a) Conscription

b) Transformation

c) Conjugation

d) Declension

Finite and Non-finite Verbs Definition

Finite verbs are verbs that have subjects and indicate grammatical tense, person, and number. These verbs describe the action of a person, place, or thing in the sentence. Unlike other types of verbs, finite verbs do not require another verb in the sentence in order to be grammatically correct.

Here are some examples of finite verbs:

• "They **went** to the mall today."

• "The outfielder **leaped** for the baseball."

• "Many people **travel** to the ocean in the summer."

• "The sailboat **glides** over the water."

• "The lion **is** the king of the jungle."

Difference from non-finite verbs

Non-finite verbs are verbs that do not have tenses or subjects that they correspond to. Instead, these verbs are usually infinitives, gerunds, or participles. Gerunds and present participles end in "-ing," while past participles usually end in "-ed," "-d," or "-t."

Let's have a look at how infinitives, gerunds, and participles function in a sentence in contrast to finite verbs.

Infinitives

If an **infinitive** is used in its full form (*to* + base form of the verb), it can function as a noun, adjective, or adverb in the sentence. Bare infinitives (base form of the verb without *to*) of non-finite verbs are used in conjunction with **modal auxiliary verbs**, which are considered the finite verb(s) of the sentence. For example:

• "*To run* **is** often tiresome." (The infinitive *to run* functions as a noun, while *is* functions as the finite verb.)

• "It **takes** a while *to learn to ride a bicycle*." (The infinitive phrase *to learn to ride a bicycle* functions as an adjective, modifying "a while.")

• "I **can**'t *swim* yet." (The bare infinitive *swim* relies on the finite auxiliary verb *can* to be complete.)

Gerunds

Gerunds are "-ing" forms of a verb that function as nouns in a sentence. Because they do not have the grammatical function of a verb, gerunds are always non-finite.

• "*Seeing* the ocean for the first time **is** incredible."

• "*Reading* books **is** often very enjoyable."

Participles

Present Participles

Present participles have the same form as gerunds, ending in "-ing." However, they function in a sentence as either part of a continuous tense, relying on an auxiliary verb to be complete; as an adjunct to a finite verb, indicating a secondary action; or as an **attributive** or **predicative adjective**, modifying a noun.

• "My daughter **is** *watching* me work." (*Watching* is used with *is* to form the **present continuous tense**.)

• "The car **sat** *rusting* in the driveway for over a year." (*Rusting* is used in conjunction with the finite verb *sat* to indicate a parallel activity.)

• "I **read** a very *engaging* book last week." (*Engaging* functions as an attributive adjective

of *book*.)

• "This book **is** *engaging*." (*Engaging* functions as a predicative adjective, following the finite linking verb *is* and modifying *book*.)

Past Participles

Past participles of verbs are used to create non-continuous perfect verb tenses (**past perfect**, **present perfect**, and **future perfect**), or else function as adjectives modifying nouns (again, either attributively or predicatively). They are also used when forming the **passive voice**.

It is important to note that non-finite past participles and finite past tense verbs often both end in "-d" or "-ed." If the word directly describes the action of a subject, then it is a finite verb. However, if the word is being used as an adjective or requires another verb to be complete, then it is a non-finite verb.

• "I **had** already *walked* for many miles." (*Walked* is a past participle that depends on the auxiliary verb *have* to create the past perfect tense.)

• "Those clothes **are** *washed*." (*Washed* is a past participle acting as an predicative adjective to the noun *clothes*, following the finite linking verb *are*.)

• "She **carried** the *washed* clothes upstairs." (*Carried* is a past tense verb describing the action of the subject, *she*; *washed* is a past participle acting as an attributive adjective to the noun *clothes*.)

Importance to sentence structure

Sentences need a finite verb in order to be complete. Without a finite verb, a sentence would simply be a subject, or a subject and other parts of speech that do not express action and are not linked together properly. In other words, sentences do not function correctly without finite verbs.

To illustrate this point, consider the following examples:

• “The car.”

• “The car on the road.“

• “The car on the road through the mountains.”

In the above examples, *car* is the subject. In order to make complete sentences, a finite verb must be used to describe the action of the *car*, as well as show how the other parts of the sentence relate to it. In the following examples, a finite verb is used to form complete sentences:

• “The car **drove**.”

• “The car **drove** on the road.”

• “The car **drove** on the road through the mountains.”

Simply adding the finite verb *drove* makes all three of these sentences complete. This is because it lets the reader know what the car is doing, and it connects the subject to the other parts of the sentence.

We can also see how a using a non-finite verb instead of a finite one would render the sentence incomplete again. For example:

• "The car *driving* on the road through the mountains."

Because we used the present participle *driving*, the sentence is now disjointed—the action is not fully expressed by the sentence. We would need to add a finite verb to complete it, as in:

• "The car **was** *driving* on the road through the mountains."

Identifying finite verbs

Due to the fact that multiple types of verbs can often exist in the same sentence, it is helpful to know some common instances of finite verbs that can help you identify them.

Third person singular present verbs ending in "-s"

Any verb that has an "-s" ending for the third person singular present form is a finite verb. Non-finite verbs do not have tense, and thus never switch their endings to "-s" in the third person singular present form.

(The exceptions to this are **modal auxiliary verbs**: *can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might,* and *must*. Modal verbs also cannot take an "-s" ending for third person singular

present; however, they are always finite. They come directly after the subject and before main verbs, and help to determine aspect, tense, and mood.)

Here are some examples of finite verbs in the third person singular present form with "-s" endings:

• "He **runs** to the store every morning."

• "The woman **swims** in the ocean."

• "The boy **kicks** the soccer ball at the goal."

• "She **has** three cars in her driveway."

Past tense irregular verbs

Verbs that are functioning in the past tense (not past participles) are inherently finite. As we noted above, the majority of verbs have the same form for both past tense and past participle. These are known as **regular verbs**. To determine if a regular verb is in the past tense or is a past participle (and thus finite or non-finite), we have to examine how it is functioning in the sentence.

However, some verbs are **irregular**, and they have a past tense form that is separate from their past participle form. Here are a few examples of sentences using irregular verbs:

Be

• "She **was** feeling unwell." (past tense – finite)

• “She has *been* feeling unwell.” (past participle – non-finite)

Go

• “I **went** to the store.” (past tense – finite)

• “I had *gone* to the store.” (past participle – non-finite)

Fly

• “They **flew** to San Diego already.” (past tense – finite)

• “They have *flown* to San Diego already.” (past participle – non-finite)

There are quite a few irregular verbs, and there is no rule to how they are conjugated (which is why they are irregular). To learn more, go to the section about **Regular and Irregular Verbs**.

Verbs that immediately follow subjects

Finite verbs often directly follow the subjects whose actions they are describing. This location allows for a clear connection between the subject and the verb—it makes it easy for the reader or listener to understand that the verb is describing the action of the subject and not another word in the sentence. Here are some examples of finite verbs appearing directly after subjects in sentences:

• “*Everyone* **listened** to the music.”

• “*Elephants* **travel** together in herds to find water.”

• “Across the field, *the trees* **swayed** in the wind.”

Non-finite verbs however, generally do not appear directly after the subject. This is because they are often not directly describing the action of the subject, but are instead serving another grammatical purpose in the sentence.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a finite verb?

a) to jump
b) swimming
c) is
d) gone

2. Identify the finite verb in the following sentence.

“Running late, the family quickly drove to their relative's house.”

a) Running
b) to their
c) relative
d) drove

3. Finite verbs correspond to a specific subject and _____.

a) a tense
b) an infinitive
c) a past participle
d) a present participle

4. Which of the following verbs in the sentence is **not** a finite verb?
"Jumping into the ocean can be very refreshing after a long day."
a) can
b) Jumping
c) be
d) A & B
e) B & C

5. In the past tense, finite verbs commonly end in:
a) "-ing"
b) "-s"
b) "-ed"
d) "-er"

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Definition

English verbs are split into two major categories depending on how they function in a sentence: **transitive** and **intransitive**. Transitive verbs take one or more objects in a sentence, while intransitive verbs take **no** objects in a sentence.

Distinguishing between the two Transitive Verbs

Put simply, a transitive verb describes an action that is happening **to** something or someone, which is known as the verb's **direct object**. For instance, in the sentence "I am reading a book," *book* is the direct object, which the action *reading* is happening to.

To put it another way, the verb is transitive if a word or words in the sentence answer the question "**Who** or **what** did the action of the verb happen to?"

Examples

• "The people **watched *the game*** from the bleachers." (*The game* is what the people *watched*.)

• "I was **eating *a delicious steak*** for dinner last night." (*A delicious steak* is what I *was eating*.)

• “They **met *your brother*** at the airport in Dubai.” (*Your brother* is who they *met*.)

Intransitive Verbs

An intransitive verb, on the other hand, describes an action that does **not** happen to something or someone. For example, in the sentence “I arrived late,” *arrived* is describing an action, but there is nothing and no one for that action to happen **to**—the action is complete on its own. The verb is intransitive if we **cannot** answer the question “**Who** or **what** did the action of the verb happen to?”

Examples

• “I can’t believe our dog **ran away**.” (What did the dog *run away*? Nothing, there is no object receiving the action of *ran away*.)

• “There was a lot of dust in the air, which made me **sneeze**.” (What did I *sneeze*? Nothing, there is no object receiving the action of *sneeze*.)

• “Don’t be too loud while the baby **sleeps**.” (What did the baby *sleep*? Nothing, there is no object receiving the action of *sleeps*.)

Intransitive verbs with prepositional phrases

When intransitive verbs are modified by prepositional phrases, they can often look like they are transitive because the preposition has its own object; however, this is not the case. Take, for example, the following sentences:

• "I can't believe our dog **ran away** *from home*."

• "I **sneezed** *from the dust*."

• "The baby is **sleeping** *in our room*."

It may seem like *home*, *dust* and *our room* are all objects of the verbs in these sentences, but they're actually objects of the prepositions, which together form **prepositional phrases** that modify the verbs. The verbs remain intransitive, regardless of the objects in prepositional phrases.

Mnemonic device

One way to remember the difference between the two is to think about their names:

Trans*itive* verbs ***trans****ition* or ***trans****fer* an action to a person or thing that receives it.

In- means **not** in this case, so ***in****trans****itive*** verbs do ***not trans****ition/****trans****fer* an action to a person or thing that receives it.

"Ambitransitive Verbs"

Some action verbs can be both transitive and intransitive, depending on the context of the

sentence or what information the speaker wishes to include. These are sometimes known as **ambitransitive** or **ergative verbs**.

For example:

• "She **eats** before going to work." (Intransitive—no direct object receiving the action of the verb *eats*.)

• "She **eats *breakfast*** before going to work." (Transitive—has a direct object (*breakfast*) receiving the action of the verb *eats*.)

Here are some other examples of verbs that function both transitively and intransitively.

• "I've been trying to **read** more." (intransitive)

• "I've been trying to **read *more novels***." (transitive)

• "I'm still **cooking**, so I'm going to be a little late." (intransitive)

• "I'm still **cooking *dinner***, so I'm going to be a little late." (transitive)

• "I've been **exercising** every day this month." (intransitive)

• "I've been **exercising *my arms*** every day this month." (transitive)

Monotransitive, Ditransitive, and "Tritransitive" Verbs

As we've seen, a transitive verb is by definition a verb that takes an object. Most verbs are

monotransitive, meaning they only take one object. However, some verbs, known as **ditransitive verbs**, can take two objects in a sentence, while others, known as **tritransitive verbs**, can take (or seem to take) three objects.

Monotransitive Verbs

A verb that acts upon a single object in a sentence is referred to as **monotransitive** (*mono* meaning *one*). This single object is called its **direct object**. All of the examples we've seen so far have been monotransitive verbs; here's a few more:

- "I **rode *my bike*** to get here."
- "Jim just **told *a funny joke***."
- "I'm **making *lasagna*** for dinner."
- "I heard she's **writing *a novel***."

Ditransitive Verbs

There are some verbs in English that take <u>two</u> objects: a **direct object** and an **indirect object**. These are known as **ditransitive verbs**. The direct object relates to the person or thing that <u>directly</u> receives the action of the verb, while the indirect object relates to the person or thing that <u>indirectly</u> receives or benefits from the action as a result.

The indirect object in a ditransitive verb can either come immediately before the direct

object in a sentence, or it can form the object of a prepositional phrase using *to* or *for* that follows and modifies the direct object.

For example:

• "He **gave *Mary*** **a pen**." (The indirect object, *Mary* immediately follows the direct object, *pen*.)

or

• "He **gave a pen *to Mary***." (The indirect object, *Mary*, forms the object of the prepositional phrase *to Mary*, which follows and modifies the direct object, *pen*.)

Here are some other examples:

• "She **teaches *the students*** **mathematics**."
• "She **teaches mathematics *to the students***."
• "I **sent *my brother*** **a letter**."
• "I **sent a letter *to my brother***."
• "My father **baked *our class*** **a batch of cupcakes**."
• "My father **baked a batch of cupcakes *for our class***."

Factitive Verbs

Factitive verbs are or appear to be ditransitive as well. Instead of having a direct object that impacts on an indirect object, factitive verbs describe a status, category, quality, or result

that the direct object is becoming due to the action of the verb. This secondary element can be either an object or object complement of the verb. For example:

- "The American people **elected her** ***the president of the United States***."
- "He was **appointed** ***Supreme Court justice***."
- "The committee **selected Mrs. Fuller** ***chairman of the board***."
- "The group **designated Marshall** ***the leader*** from then on."
- "The coach **made Linda** ***point guard***."
- "We **painted the ceiling** ***white***."

See the section on **factitive verbs** to learn more.

"Tritransitive" verbs

An unofficial third type of transitive verb is what's sometimes known as a **tritransitive verb**, meaning that it takes three objects. This third "object" is formed from a prepositional phrase or clause that appears to receive the action of the verb by way of the indirect object. For example:

- "We will **make** ***you*** **CEO** *for $300,000*."
- "I'd **trade** ***you*** **that sandwich** *for an ice cream cone*."
- "I **bet** ***you*** **50 bucks** *(that) our team will win the championship*."

There is some dispute among linguists, however, as to whether these kinds of verbs truly have three objects, or whether the third piece of information is merely considered an **adjunct**, as the sentence would be grammatically sound without it.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. What do all transitive verbs have that intransitive verbs do **not**?

a) a preposition
b) a subject
c) an object
d) an adverbial clause

2. What kind of verb can be **both** transitive and intransitive?

a) monotransitive
b) ditransitive
c) tritransitive
d) ambitransitive

3. What kind of verb is in the following sentence? “I played my grandmother a song.”

a) intransitive

b) monotransitive
c) ditransitive
d) tritransitive

4. What kind of verb is in the following sentence?
"I swam for half an hour before my meeting."
a) intransitive
b) monotransitive
c) ditransitive
d) tritransitive

5. What kind of verb **only** has a direct object?
a) intransitive
b) monotransitive
c) ditransitive
d) tritransitive

Regular and Irregular Verbs Definition

All English verbs are either **regular or irregular**, depending on how they are **conjugated**.

The majority are regular verbs, which means that "-d" or "-ed" is added to their base form (the infinitive of the verb without *to*) to create **both** the **past simple tense** and **past participle**.

The past simple tense and past participles of irregular verbs, on the other hand, have many different forms that do not adhere to a distinct or predictable pattern. Much of the time, their past tense and past participle forms are completely different from one another. Unfortunately, this means that there is no way of determining *how* to conjugate irregular verbs—we just have to learn each one individually.

Conjugating Regular and Irregular Verbs

In the following sections, we'll look at various examples of regular and irregular verbs and how the past simple tense and past participle are formed for each one.

We'll also look at a few examples of how each of these different forms functions in a sentence.

Regular verbs

As we saw above, regular verbs are defined as having both their past simple tense and past participle forms constructed by adding "-d" or "-ed" to the end of the word. For most regular verbs, this is the only change to the word.

Here are some examples of common regular verbs.

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle
play	played	played
bake	baked	baked
listen	listened	listened
approach	approached	approached
gather	gathered	gathered
climb	climbed	climbed
walk	walked	walked
arrive	arrived	arrived
bolt	bolted	bolted

In all of the above examples, the only alteration to the verb has been the addition of "-d" or "-ed." Notice, too, that the past tense and past participle forms are identical in each case— this is a defining feature of regular verbs.

Changing spelling

In some cases, though, we have to modify the verb slightly further in order to be able to add "-d" or "-ed."

For instance, with verbs that end in a "short" vowel followed by a consonant, we double the final consonant *in addition* to adding "-ed";* when a verb ends in a consonant + "y," we replace the "y" with "i" and add "-ied"; and when a verb ends in "-ic," we add the letter "k"

in addition to "-ed."

For example:

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle
chop	cho**pped**	cho**pped**
copy	cop**ied**	cop**ied**
panic	panic**ked**	panic**ked**

*(*Usage Note: An exception to this rule occurs for words that end in a soft vowel and the consonant "l" (as in travel, cancel, fuel, label, etc.). In this case, we merely add "-ed" to form the past simple and the past participle (as in traveled, canceled, fueled, labeled, etc.)—we do **not** double the consonant. Note, however, that this exception only occurs in American English; in other varieties of English, such as British or Australian English, the consonant is still doubled.)*

See the chapter on **Suffixes** to learn more about how words change when we add to their endings.

Example sentences

• "I **walk** around the park each evening." (base form)
• "I **walked** around the park in the afternoon." (past simple tense)

• “I have **walked** around the park a few times this morning.” (past participle)
• “I’m going to **chop** some vegetables for the salad.” (base form)
• “He **chopped** some vegetables for the salad before dinner.” (past simple tense)
• “He had already **chopped** some vegetables for the salad.” (past participle)
• “Don’t **copy** other students’ answers or you will get an F.” (base form)
• “I think he **copied** my answers.” (past simple tense)
• “The only answers he got right were the ones he had **copied**.” (past participle)
• “Your father’s fine, don’t **panic**!” (base form)
• “I **panicked** when I heard he was in the hospital.” (past simple tense)
• “I wish hadn’t **panicked** like that.” (past participle)

Irregular verbs

Irregular verbs, by their very definition, do not have spelling rules that we can follow to create the past simple tense and past participles. This means that the only way of knowing how to spell these forms is to memorize them for each irregular verb individually. Below are just a few examples of some common irregular verbs.

Base Form	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle

be	was/were	been
see	saw	seen
grow	grew	grown
give	gave	given
think	thought	thought
throw	threw	thrown
drive	drove	driven
ride	rode	ridden
run	ran	run
swim	swam	swum
sit	sat	sat

As you can see, irregular verbs can have endings that are dramatically different from their base forms; often, their past simple tense and past participles forms are completely different, too. Again, the only way to learn these variations is to memorize them.

Examples

Let's look at some sentences that use irregular verbs in their various forms:

• "I **am** excited that college is starting." (base form)
• "I **was** sad to leave home, though." (past simple tense)
• "I have **been** making a lot of new friends already." (past participle)

• “I **drive** to work every morning.” (base form)
• “I **drove** for nearly an hour yesterday.” (past simple tense)
• “I had already **driven** halfway to the office when I realized I forgot my briefcase.” (past participle)
• “I would love to **grow** vegetables in my garden.” (base form)
• “I **grew** some juicy tomatoes last summer.” (past simple tense)
• “He has **grown** a lot of different vegetables already.” (past participle)
• “I **think** I would like to get a dog.” (base form)
• “She **thought** a dog would provide some good company.” (past simple tense)
• “She hadn’t **thought** about how much work they are.” (past participle)

Conjugating present tense and the present participle

Although there are stark differences between regular and irregular verbs when it comes to conjugating their past simple tense and past participles, both kinds of verbs **do** follow the same conventions when creating present participles and present tense in the third person singular (the other two elements of **verb conjugation**).

For example:

Regular Verbs

Regular Verb	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle	Third Person Singular Present Tense	Present Participle
bake	baked	baked	bakes	baking
tap	tapped	tapped	taps	tapping
tidy	tidied	tidied	tidies	tidying
mimic	mimicked	mimicked	mimics	mimicking

Irregular Verbs

Irregular Verb	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle	Third Person Singular Present Tense	Present Participle
ride	rode	ridden	rides	riding
see	saw	seen	sees	seeing
give	gave	given	gives	giving
swim	swam	swum	swims	swimming

The exception to this is the verb *be*, which conjugates the present tense irregularly for first, second, and third person, as well as for singular and plural:

Verb	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle	Present Tense	Present Participle
be	was/were	been	is/am/are	being

For this reason, *be* is known as a **highly irregular** verb. Note, however, that it still forms the present participle following the same conventions as all other verbs.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a **regular** verb?

a) think
b) find
b) listen
d) ran

2. Which of the following is an **irregular** verb?

a) happen
b) talk
c) walk

d) swim

3. Identify whether the verb in the following sentence is regular or irregular: “The family hiked over the mountain.”

a) regular

b) irregular

4. Identify the **irregular** verb in the following sentence:

“She gave me a bunch of potatoes, which she harvested herself, to cook for dinner later.”

a) cook

b) gave

c) picked

d) bunch

5. In which of the following ways do regular and irregular verbs conjugate **differently**?

a) When forming the past simple tense

b) When forming the past participle

c) When forming the present participle

d) A & B

e) B & C

d) None of the above

6. In which of the following ways do regular and irregular verbs conjugate **in the same way**?

a) When forming the past simple tense
b) When forming the past participle
c) When forming the present participle
d) A & B
e) B & C
d) None of the above

Auxiliary Verbs

Definition

Auxiliary verbs (also called **helping verbs**) are verbs that add functional meaning to other "main" or "full" verbs in a clause. They are used to create different **tenses** or **aspects**, to form negatives and interrogatives, or to add emphasis to a sentence. However, they do not have semantic meaning unto themselves.

Types of Auxiliary Verbs

Here is the complete list of auxiliary verbs:

- **be**

- **do**
- **have**
- **can**
- **could**
- **will**
- **would**
- **shall**
- **should**
- **must**
- **may**
- **might**
- **ought to**
- **used to**
- **need**
- **dare**

The **primary auxiliary verbs** are ***be, do***, and ***have***, and they are the most commonly occurring auxiliaries in English. Each can also be used as a main verb in a clause, and each is able to conjugate to reflect plurality, tense, or aspect.

The verbs ***can, could, will, would, shall, should, must, may***, and ***might*** are known as

modal auxiliary verbs. These are distinguished by the fact that they are **unable** to conjugate into different forms, and they are only followed by a verb in its base form. The remaining verbs—***ought to, used to, need***, and ***dare***—are known as **semi-modal verbs**, since they do not share all the characteristics of the modal verbs above and only function as auxiliary verbs in certain ways.

Creating verb tenses

One of the most common uses of auxiliary verbs is to create the continuous and perfect continuous verb tenses (as well as the **future simple tense**).

Future Simple Tense

The future tense is structured as *will* + the main verb, ***or*** *is/am/are* + *going to* + the main verb:

• "I ***will*** **arrive** in New York at 10 PM."

or:

• "I ***am*** **going to arrive** in New York at 10 PM."

Present Continuous Tense

The present continuous tense is structured as *am/is/are* + the present participle of the main

verb:

• “I ***am*** **working** tomorrow.”

• “She ***is*** **living** in New York.”

• “They ***are*** **trying** to save some money.”

Past Continuous Tense

The past continuous tense is structured as *was/were* + the present participle of the main verb:

• “I ***was*** **cooking** breakfast when she called.”

• “We ***were*** **talking** on the phone at the time.”

Future Continuous Tense

The future continuous tense is structured as *will be* + the present participle of the main verb, ***or*** *am/is/are* + *going to be* + the present participle of the verb:

• “I ***will be*** **leaving** in the morning.”

or:

• “I ***am*** **going to *be* leaving** in the morning.”

Present Perfect Tense

The present perfect tense is structured as *have/has* + the past participle of the main verb:

• “I ***have*** **lived** here all my life.”

• “She ***has*** **studied** for this exam for weeks.”

• “They ***have*** **tried** to find a solution to the problem.”

Past Perfect Tense

The past perfect tense is structured as *had* + the past participle of the main verb:

• “I ***had*** **already made** my fortune when I was your age.”

• “We ***had*** **seen** that the results were constant.”

Future Perfect Tense

The future perfect tense is usually structured as *will have* + the past participle of the main verb:

• “I ***will have*** **finished** by that time.”

• “She ***will have*** **sung** with a professional orchestra before the tour begins.”

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

The present perfect continuous tense is structured as *have been* + the present participle of the main verb:

• "I ***have been*** **trying** to reach you for over an hour."

Past Perfect Continuous Tense

The past perfect continuous tense is structured as *had been* + the present participle of the main verb:

• "We ***had been*** **working** through the night."

Future Perfect Continuous Tense

The future perfect continuous tense is structured as *will have been* + the present participle of the main verb, ***or*** *am/is/are + going to + have been* + the present participle of the verb:

• "She **will *have been*** **living** here for most of her life."

• "I ***am*** **going to *have been*** **working** here for 10 years next week."

Identifying auxiliary verbs

Auxiliary verbs can be identified by two main criteria: whether the verb is capable of

inversion with the subject, and whether it can take the negating adverb *not* as a **postdependent modifier**.

(An exception to the first two rules is the **linking verb** *be*, which can both invert and take *not*, despite having the function of a main verb.)

Subject-auxiliary inversion

Inversion refers to the reversal of the normal position of the subject and the auxiliary verb of a clause. While it is technically possible for a main verb to invert with its subject, it is much less likely than having an auxiliary verb cause an inversion, due to the fact that **subject-auxiliary inversion** is commonly used to create **interrogative sentences**. Additionally, subject-auxiliary inversion can be used to create **conditional sentences**, as well as for emphasis in negative sentences when negating phrases are used.

Interrogative sentences

When a sentence is in the **present simple tense** or **past simple tense**, we use the auxiliary verb *do* to form it into a question word. *Do* is inverted with the subject, coming before it in the sentence. For example:

- "John works across town." (declarative sentence)
- "**Does** John work across town?" (interrogative sentence)

If the verb is in a continuous tense (present, past, or future) or the **future simple tense**, then

the auxiliary verb used to create the tense is inverted with the subject; if the verb is in a perfect continuous tense (present, past, or future), then the first of the two auxiliary verbs is inverted. For example:

Present continuous tense:

• "John **is** working across town." (declarative)
• "**Is** John working across town?" (interrogative)

Past continuous tense:

• "John **was** working across town." (declarative)
• "**Was** John working across town?" (interrogative)

Present perfect continuous tense:

• "John **has been** working across town." (declarative)
• "**Has** John **been** working across town?" (interrogative)

Past perfect continuous tense:

• "John **had been** working across town." (declarative)
• "**Had** John **been** working across town?" (interrogative)

Future simple tense:

• "John **will** work across town." (declarative)
• "**Will** John work across town?" (interrogative)

or:

• “John **is going to** work across town.” (declarative)
• “**Is** John **going to** work across town?” (interrogative)

Future continuous tense:

• “John **will be** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Will** John **be** working across town?” (interrogative)

or:

• “John **is going to be** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Is** John **going to be** working across town?” (interrogative)

Future perfect continuous tense:

• “John **will have been** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Will** John **have been** working across town?” (interrogative)

or:

• “John **is going to have been** working across town.” (declarative)
• “**Is** John **going to have been** working across town?” (interrogative)

Question words and modal verbs

This inversion holds true even when a question word is used, as in:

• “Where **will** John **be** working across town?”

• "Why **had** John **been** working across town?"

• "When **was** John working across town?"

Modal auxiliary verbs can also be used to create questions with specific meanings, as in:

• "**Can** you work a forklift?" (question of ability)

• "**May** I watch television for an hour?" (question of permission)

• "**Must** we sit through another boring play?" (question of obligation)

Inversion of *be*

Finally, as we mentioned earlier, *be* is able to invert when it functions as a **linking verb** (meaning it is a **main verb**) as well as when it functions as an auxiliary. For example:

• "I **am** cold."

• "**Are** you cold?"

• "They **were** all present."

• "**Were** they all present?"

Conditional sentences

Conditional sentences are most often formed using the conjunction *if* to create a **condition clause**. For example:

• "**If** I were to move to Florida, I would be warm all year round."

• "**If** they had trained a little harder, they would have won."

We can also achieve conditional clauses by using subject-auxiliary inversion, although the sentence sounds a bit more formal as a result:

• "**Were** I to move to Florida, I would be warm all year round."

• "**Had** they trained a little harder, they would have won."

Negative phrases

Negative phrases are sometimes used to provide extra emphasis in a negative sentence. Because the main verb remains affirmative, the negative phrase appears ahead of the subject and the main verb, which means that an auxiliary verb must come between it and the subject.

If the negative phrase were to come after the main verb of the sentence (as adverbial phrases often do), the sentence would become unclear because the verb would shift from an affirmative position to a negative one. For example:

✖ "You **are** spending the night there under no circumstances." (No inversion—the sentence is unclear and/or lacks emphasis.)

✔ "Under no circumstances **are** you spending the night there." (Subject-auxiliary inversion —the sentence is now clear with proper emphasis on the negative phrase.)

✖ "They told us what the problem was at no point." (no inversion)

✔ "At no point **did** they tell us what the problem was." (subject-auxiliary inversion)

Forming negative sentences with *not*

The most common way to make a verb negative is to use the adverb *not*. However, main verbs usually do not take *not* on their own—they require an auxiliary verb to accomplish this. For example:

• "I work in a law firm downtown." (affirmative sentence)

✖ "I work **not** in a law firm downtown." (incorrect negative sentence)

✔ "I **do not** work in a law firm downtown." (correct negative sentence)

As with subject-verb inversion, *be* as a main verb is an exception to this rule. For instance:

✔ "He **is** very warm." (affirmative)

✔ "He **is not** very warm." (negative)

Finally, it must be noted that in older, formal, and more literary English, main verbs were able to take *not* without an auxiliary. For example:

• "I know **not** where the problems lie."

• "Betray **not** your kin."

However, this type of negative formation is rarely used in modern speech or writing.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a **modal** auxiliary verb?

a) be
b) do
c) must
d) have

2. What can the **primary** auxiliary verbs do that modal verbs **cannot**?

a) Take the adverb *not* to become negative
b) Invert with the subject in an interrogative sentence
c) Form a verb tense
d) Conjugate to reflect plurality

3. Which of the following can perform subject-verb inversion as a **main verb** in the same way as auxiliary verbs?

a) be
b) do
c) have
d) will

4. Identify the auxiliary verb in the following sentence:

“I have to tell you that you are being ridiculous.”

a) have
b) tell
c) are
d) being

5. Select the auxiliary verb that will put the following sentence in the **future perfect continuous tense**:
"James will ____ been studying for three years come this September."
a) be
b) do
c) have
d) will

Primary Auxiliary Verbs Definition

The "**primary**" **auxiliary verbs** are *be, have*, and *do*—they occur most commonly in English. They are also some of the trickiest to master, because each can also be used as a main verb in a clause, and each is able to conjugate to reflect plurality and tense as a result. *Be* and *have* are used as auxiliaries to conjugate the continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous tenses. *Do* is used to make main verbs negative or to form **interrogative**

sentences; it can also be used to add emphasis to a sentence.

We will begin by examining these different conjugations, and then we'll look more closely at how these verbs function as auxiliaries.

Conjugating *be*, *have*, and *do*

Because *be*, *have*, and *do* are able to function as main verbs, they must also be able to inflect for plurality and tense; it is important to know these conjugations, as they must be used correctly when the verbs function as auxiliaries.

Do conjugates as *did* (past tense), *does* (third-person singular present tense), *done* (past participle), and *doing* (present participle); ***have*** conjugates as *had* (past tense/participle), *has* (third-person singular present tense), and *having* (present participle).

Be, meanwhile, has seven conjugations: *am* (first-person singular present tense); *are* (first-person plural present tense, second-person singular/plural present tense, third-person plural present tense); *is* (third-person singular present tense); *was* (first-person singular past tense, third-person singular past tense); *were* (first-person plural past tense, second-person singular/plural past tense, third-person plural past tense); *been* (past participle); and *being* (present participle).

The following tables will help illustrate these different conjugations. Note that only conjugations used in an **auxiliary** capacity have been included:

Be Conjugations	Form	Auxiliary example sentence
be	base form	"You must **be** joking."
am	first-person singular present tense	"I **am** moving to Germany next month."
are	first-person plural present tense second-person singular/plural present tense third-person plural present tense	"We **are** leaving tomorrow morning." "**Are** you working later?" "Where **are** they going?"
is	third-person singular present tense	"She **is** wondering where we're going."
was	first-person singular past tense third-person singular past tense	"I **was** talking to my brother yesterday." "It **was** raining quite hard last night."

were	first-person plural past tense second-person singular/plural past tense third-person plural past tense	"We **were** looking for a new place to live." "You **were** thinking of running away?" "When **were** they planning on electing a new president?"
been	past participle	"Everyone has **been** worrying about their jobs."

Have **Conjugations**	**Form**	**Auxiliary Example sentence**
have	base form	"I **have** been to this part of town before."
has	third-person singular present tense	"It **has** been raining for over an hour now."
had	past tense	"They **had** been confident in the project's success."

having	present participle	"**Having** worked his whole life, Larry relished the thought of retirement."

Do **Conjugations**	**Form**	**Auxiliary Example sentence**
do	base form	"**Do** be careful."
does	third-person singular present tense	"**Does** he know what he's talking about?"
did	past tense	"We **did**n't know any better."

Auxiliary Functions

Forming Tenses

The verbs *be* and *have* are used as auxiliary verbs to form different tenses of main verbs. *Be* is used on its own to form the **continuous tenses**, while *have* is used to form the **perfect tenses**. Both *have* and *been* (the past participle of *be*) are used together to form the perfect continuous tenses.

As we saw above, *be* and *have* both have multiple conjugations, all of which must be used correctly when they function as auxiliaries.

Present Continuous Tense (Progressive)

The present continuous tense is structured as *am/is/are* + the present participle of the main verb:

• "I ***am*** **working** tomorrow."

• "She ***is*** **living** in New York."

• "They ***are*** **trying** to save some money."

Past Continuous Tense

The past continuous tense is structured as *was/were* + the present participle of the main verb:

• "I ***was*** **cooking** breakfast when she called."

• "We ***were*** **talking** on the phone at the time."

Future Continuous Tense

The future continuous tense is structured as *will be* + the present participle of the main verb OR *am/is/are + going to be* + the present participle of the verb:

• “I **will *be* leaving** in the morning.”

• “I ***am* going to *be* meeting** with my professor later.”

• “He ***is* going to *be* studying** abroad next year.”

Present Perfect Tense

The present continuous tense is structured as *have/has* + the past participle of main verb:

• “I ***have* lived** here all my life.”

• “She ***has* studied** for this exam for weeks.”

• “They ***have* tried** to find a solution to the problem.”

Past Perfect Tense

The past continuous tense is structured as *had* + the past participle of the main verb:

• “I ***had* already made** my fortune when I was your age.”

• “We ***had* seen** that the results were constant.”

Future Perfect Tense

The future continuous tense is usually structured as *will have* + the past participle of the main verb:

• “I **will *have* finished** by that time.”

• “She **will *have* sung** with a professional orchestra before the tour begins.”

(Notice that *have* does not conjugate for the third-person singular in this tense.)

Present Perfect Continuous Tense

The present perfect continuous tense is structured as *have been* + the present participle of the main verb:

• “I ***have been* trying** to reach you for over an hour.”

Past Perfect Continuous Tense

The past perfect continuous tense is structured as *had been* + the present participle of the main verb:

• “We **had *been* working** through the night.”

Future Perfect Continuous Tense

The future perfect continuous tense is structured as *will have been* + the present participle of the main verb:

• “I **will *have been* working** here for 10 years next week.”

(Notice that *have* does not conjugate for the third-person singular in this tense.)

You may have noticed that the future tenses also use the auxiliary verb *will*. This is one of the **modal auxiliary verbs**, which will be covered in a separate section.

Forming negative sentences with *not*

The most common way to make a verb negative is to use the adverb *not*. However, main verbs cannot take *not* on their own—they require an auxiliary verb to do this.

Using *do*

If a verb does not already use an auxiliary verb (i.e., to form one of the tenses above), we use the auxiliary verb *do/does* to accomplish this.

For example:

• "I work on the weekends." (affirmative sentence)

✖ "I work **not** on the weekends." (incorrect negative sentence)

✔ "I ***do*** **not** work on the weekends." (correct negative sentence)

• "She lives in the city." (affirmative)

✖ "She lives **not** in the city." (incorrect negative sentence) ✔

"She **does not** live in the city." (correct negative sentence)

Notice that because the auxiliary verb *do* conjugates to reflect the third-person singular, the main verb of the sentence reverts back to its base form.

Likewise, if a sentence is in the **past simple tense**, *do* conjugates to *did*, and the main verb remains in the present-tense base form. For instance:

• "He studied in Europe." (affirmative simple past tense)

✖ "He studied **not** in Europe." (incorrect negative past tense)

✔ "He **did not** study in Europe." (correct negative past tense)

Using *not* with other tenses

If a verb is already using one or more auxiliary verbs to create a perfect, continuous, or perfect continuous tense, then it is the auxiliary closest to the subject that takes the word *not*. For example:

• "I **am working** later." (affirmative present continuous tense)

• "I ***am not* working** later." (negative present continuous tense)

• "She **had been living** there for a month." (affirmative past perfect continuous tense)

• "She ***hadn't* been living** there for a month." (negative past perfect continuous tense)

• "They **will have been writing** their dissertations for almost a year." (affirmative future perfect continuous tense)

• "They ***will not* have been writing** their dissertations for almost a year." (negative future perfect continuous tense)

Errors with *have not*

A frequent error is to make the verb *have* negative in the present simple tense. We need to always remember that the present simple negative is *do not* (contracted as *don't*) or, in third person singular, *does not* (contracted as *doesn't*). For example:

✖ "I haven't a dog." (incorrect)
✔ "I don't have a dog." (correct)

✖ "She hasn't a cat." (incorrect)
✔ "She **doesn't** have a cat." (correct)

If we say "I haven't a dog," we are using *have* as an auxiliary rather than as a main verb meaning "to possess"—in doing so, the main verb is now missing.

And just as in the present simple negative, we need an auxiliary verb when using the past simple negative:

✖ "I hadn't a car." (incorrect)
✔ "I didn't have a car." (correct)

Have and have got

Have, when used as a main verb meaning "to possess," means the same thing as the less formal *have got*. They can usually be used interchangeably, though not in every case.

In *have got*, *have* is acting as an auxiliary verb for *got*. Because of this, *have* is now able to take *not* in the negative present simple tense, usually contracted as *haven't* (or *hasn't* in the third-person singular):

• “He **has got** an idea about what happened.” (affirmative present simple tense)
• “He **hasn’t got** an idea about what happened.” (negative present simple tense)
• “They**’ve got** a plan to increase sales.” (affirmative present simple tense)
• “They **haven’t got** a plan to increase sales.” (negative present simple tense)

Forming interrogative sentences with subject-verb inversion

Inversion refers to the reversal of the normal position of the subject and the auxiliary verb of a clause. We cannot use subject-verb inversion with main verbs to create interrogative sentences—we have to either add the auxiliary verb *do*, or else invert an existing auxiliary verb.

Inversion with auxiliary *do*

When a sentence is in the **present simple tense** or **past simple tense**, we use the auxiliary verb *do* to form it into a question word. This is *inverted* with the subject, coming before it in the sentence. For example:

• “John works across town.” (present simple tense declarative sentence)
• “**Does** John work across town?” (present simple tense interrogative sentence)
• “They lived in an apartment.” (past simple tense declarative sentence)

• "**Did** they live in an apartment?" (past simple tense interrogative sentence)

Inversion with other auxiliary verbs

As we saw already, *be* and *have* are used to create the continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous verb tenses. In these cases, the auxiliary verb used to create the tense is inverted with the subject to create a question; if the verb is in a perfect continuous tense (and thus has two auxiliaries), then the first of the two auxiliary verbs is inverted. For example:

Present continuous tense:

• "John **is** working across town." (declarative)
• "**Is** John working across town?" (interrogative)

Past continuous tense:

• "John **was** working across town." (declarative)
• "**Was** John working across town?" (interrogative)

Present perfect tense:

• "John **has** worked across town for a long time." (declarative)
• "**Has** John worked across town for a long time?" (interrogative)

Past perfect tense:

• "John **had** worked across town for a long time." (declarative)
• "**Had** John worked across town for a long time?" (interrogative)

Present perfect continuous tense:

• "John **has been** working across town for a long time." (declarative)
• "**Has** John **been** working across town for a long time?" (interrogative)

Past perfect continuous tense:

• "John **had been** working across town for a long time." (declarative)
• "**Had** John **been** working across town for a long time?" (interrogative)

Errors with *have*

As we saw when forming the negative with *not*, we often run into errors when *have* is functioning as a **main verb** and the sentence is made into a question.

Just like any other main verb (with the exception of *be*), *have* **cannot** invert with the subject to form a question—it must take the auxiliary verb *do* to accomplish this, like we saw above. For example:

• "You had a car when you lived in London." (declarative)

✖ "Had you a car when you lived in London?" (incorrect interrogative)

✔ "Did you have a car when you lived in London?" (correct interrogative)

Question words

The rules of inversion that we've seen above hold true even when a question word is used.

For example:

• "Where **is** John working?"

• "Why **has** John **been** working across town?"

• "When **did** John work across town?"

Inversion of *be*

It is important to remember that we do not use *do, does* or *did* when *be* is a main verb. As we mentioned earlier, *be* is able to invert when it is functioning as a **linking verb** (meaning it is a **main verb**) as well as an auxiliary. For example:

• "I **am** cold." (declarative)

✖ "Do you be cold?" (incorrect interrogative)
✔ "**Are** you cold?" (correct interrogative)

• "They **were** all present." (declarative)

✖ "Did they be all present?" (incorrect interrogative)
✔ "**Were** they all present?" (correct interrogative)

The inversion of *be* also holds true when there is a question word, as in:

• "Why **are** you cold?"

• "When **were** they all present?"

• "Who **is** attending the party?"

Emphatic *do*

In addition to making interrogative sentences, *do* is also used as an auxiliary to create **emphatic** sentences. This is sometimes referred to as the **emphatic mood**, one of the grammatical **moods** in English. Its purpose in this case is not to add any new meaning to the sentence, but rather to emphasize the fact that something happened or someone did something.

Emphatic *do* comes before the main verb in a sentence. As is the case when *do* is used to create interrogative sentences, it takes the conjugation for tense or plurality, leaving the main verb in the base form. For example:

• "I washed the dishes." (no emphasis)

• "I **did** wash the dishes." (emphasizes the fact that the speaker washed the dishes)

• "He looks like an honest man." (no emphasis)

• "He **does** look like an honest man." (emphasizes the way the man looks)

As with interrogative sentences, however, we cannot use *do* when *be* is the main verb of the sentence:

• "I am cold." (no emphasis)

✖ "I **do** be cold." (incorrect emphasis)

In imperative sentences

We can also use emphatic *do* in **imperative sentences** to add emphasis to a command, instruction, or request, though this usually adds a more formal or old-fashioned tone to the sentence. Unlike in declarative sentences, we can use emphatic *do* when *be* is a main verb of an imperative sentence. For example:

• "**Do** be careful!"

• "**Do** try to be quiet."

• "Please **do** avoid walking on the grass."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** one of the "primary" auxiliary verbs?

a) be
b) will
c) do
d) have

2. Which of the following is the correct conjugation of the verb *be* in the **third-person present singular** ?

a) am
b) are
c) is

d) was

3. Which auxiliary verb is added to a make a verb **negative** in the present or past simple tense?

a) be
b) will
c) do
d) have

4. Identify the auxiliary verb used in the following sentence:
"Have you been working on this project for long?"

a) have
b) been
c) working
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) None of the above

5. Which of the following is a function of *do* as an auxiliary verb?

a) To form negatives with verbs in the present or past simple tense
b) To form the continuous, perfect, or perfect continuous tenses
c) To express the subject's ability to perform the function of the main verb

d) A & B
e) B & C
f) None of the above

Modal Auxiliary Verbs Definition

A **modal auxiliary verb**, often simply called a **modal verb** or even just a **modal**, is used to change the meaning of other verbs (commonly known as **main verbs**) by expressing **modality**—that is, asserting (or denying) possibility, likelihood, ability, permission, obligation, or future intention.

Modal verbs are defined by their inability to conjugate for tense and the third person singular (i.e., they do not take an "-s" at the end when *he*, *she*, or *it* is the subject), and they cannot form infinitives, past participles, or present participles. All modal auxiliary verbs are followed by a main verb in its base form (the infinitive without *to*); they can never be followed by other modal verbs, lone auxiliary verbs, or nouns.

As with the **primary auxiliary verbs**, modal verbs can be used with *not* to create negative sentences, and they can all invert with the subject to create **interrogative sentences**.

The Modal Verbs

There are nine “true” modal auxiliary verbs: *will, shall, would, should, can, could, may, might*, and *must*. The verbs *dare, need, used to*, and *ought to* can also be used in the same way as modal verbs, but they do not share all the same characteristics; for this reason, they are referred to as **semi-modal auxiliary verbs**, which are discussed in a separate section.

Will

As a modal auxiliary verb, *will* is particularly versatile, having several different functions and meanings. It is used to form future tenses, to express willingness or ability, to make requests or offers, to complete conditional sentences, to express likelihood in the immediate present, or to issue commands.

Shall

The modal auxiliary verb *shall* is used in many of the same ways as ***will***: to form future tenses, to make requests or offers, to complete conditional sentences, or to issue maxims or commands. Although *will* is generally preferred in modern English, using *shall* adds an additional degree of politeness or formality to the sentence that *will* sometimes lacks. Generally, *shall* is only used when *I* or *we* is the subject, though this is not a strict rule (and does not apply at all when issuing commands, as we’ll see).

Would

The modal auxiliary verb *would* has a variety of functions and uses. It is used in place of ***will*** for things that happened or began in the past, and, like ***shall***, it is sometimes used in place of *will* to create more formal or polite sentences. It is also used to express requests and preferences, to describe hypothetical situations, and to politely offer or ask for advice or an opinion.

Should

The modal verb *should* is used to politely express obligations or duties; to ask for or issue advice, suggestions, and recommendations; to describe an expectation; to create **conditional sentences**; and to express surprise. There are also a number of uses that occur in British English, but that are not common in American English.

Can

As a modal auxiliary verb, *can* is most often used to express a person or thing's ability to do something. It is also used to express or ask for permission to do something, to describe the possibility that something can happen, and to issue requests and offers.

Could

The modal verb *could* is most often used as a past-tense version of ***can***, indicating what someone or something was able to do in the past; it can also be used instead of *can* as a more polite way of making a request or asking for permission. *Could* is also used to express

a slight or uncertain possibility, as well as for making a suggestion or offer.

May

The modal verb *may* is used to request, grant, or describe permission; to politely offer to do something for someone; to express the possibility of something happening or occurring; or to express a wish or desire that something will be the case in the future. We can also use *may* as a rhetorical device to express or introduce an opinion or sentiment about something.

Might

The modal verb *might* is most often used to express an unlikely or uncertain possibility. *Might* also acts as a very formal and polite way to ask for permission, and it is used as the past-tense form of ***may*** when asking permission in **reported speech**. It can also be used to suggest an action, or to introduce two differing possibilities.

Must

The modal verb *must* is most often used to express **necessity**—i.e., that something *has to* happen or be the case. We also use this sense of the word to indicate a strong intention to do something in the future, to emphasize something positive that you believe someone should do, and to rhetorically introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment. In addition to indicating necessity, *must* can be used to indicate that something is certain or very likely to happen or be true.

Using Modal Verbs

Modal auxiliary verbs are used to uniquely shift the meaning of the main verb they modify, expressing things such as possibility, likelihood, ability, permission, obligation, or intention. As we will see, how and when we use modal verbs greatly affects the meaning of our writing and speech.

Subtleties in meaning

Modal verbs attach differing shades of meaning to the main verbs they modify. It is often the case that this difference in meaning is or seems to be very slight. To get a better sense of these differences in meaning, let's look at two sets of examples that use each of the modal verbs we discussed above in the same sentence, accompanied by a brief explanation of the unique meaning each one creates.

- "I ***will* go** to college in the fall." (It is decided that I **am going to** attend college in the fall.)
- "I ***shall* go** to college in the fall." (A more **formal** way of saying "I will go to college in the fall," possibly emphasizing one's determination to do so.)
- "I ***would* go** to college in the fall." (I **was planning** to attend college in the fall (but something not stated is preventing or dissuading me from doing so).)
- "I ***should* go** to college in the fall." (It is **correct, proper, or right** that I attend college in the all.)

- "I ***can*** **go** to college in the fall." (I am **able** to attend college in the fall.)
- "I ***could*** **go** to college in the fall." (I **have the ability** to attend college in the fall, but it is not decided.)
- "I ***may*** **go** to college in the fall." (I **will possibly** attend college in the fall, but it is not decided.)
- "I ***might*** **go** to college in the fall." (I **will possibly** attend college in the fall, but it is not decided.)
- "I ***must*** **go** to college in the fall." (I **have to** attend college in the fall, but it is not decided.)
- "***Will*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?" (Is it the future plan that we **are going to** spend the summer in Florida?)
- "***Shall*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?" (A more **formal** way of asking "Will we spend the summer in Florida?")
- "***Would*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?" (Has the plan been made that we spend the summer in Florida?)
- "***Should*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?" (Is it **correct or preferable** that we spend the summer in Florida?)
- "***Can*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?" (Can we have **permission** to spend the summer in Florida? ***Or:*** Are we **able** to spend the summer in Florida?)
- "***Could*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?" (Slightly more polite way of asking for

permission to spend the summer in Florida.)

- "***May*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?" (**More formal or polite** way of asking for **permission** to spend the summer in Florida.)
- "***Might*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?" (**Overly formal** way of asking for **permission** to spend the summer in Florida.)
- "***Must*** we **spend** the summer in Florida?" (**Very formal** way of asking if it is **necessary or required** that we spend the summer in Florida.)

Substituting Modal Verbs

As we can see from the above sets of examples, the different modal verbs often have very similar meanings, and it's sometimes unclear when it is appropriate to use one instead of another. To explore the subtle differences in meaning that occur when we substitute certain modal verbs, go to the section on **Substituting Modal Verbs**.

Omitting main verbs

A modal verb must always be used with a main verb—they cannot stand completely on their own.

However, it is possible to use a modal verb on its own by omitting the main verb, so long as it is implied by the context in or around the sentence in which the modal is used. This can occur when a sentence is in response to another one, or when the clause with the modal verb

occurs later in a sentence in which the main verb was already stated. For example:

• Speaker A: "I'm thinking about taking up scuba diving."
• Speaker B: "I think you ***should***!" (The verb *taking up* is omitted in the second sentence because it is implied by the first.)
• "I'd like to switch my major to mathematics, but I'm not sure I ***can***." (The verb *switch* is omitted in the final clause because it appears earlier in the same sentence.)

Using adverbs

Generally speaking, we use adverbs after a modal verb and either before or after the main verb in a clause. Sometimes putting an adverb before a modal is not **incorrect**, but it will sound better if placed after it. For example:

✖ "You only ***must*** **read** this chapter." (incorrect)
✔ "You ***must*** **only read** this chapter." (correct)
✔ "You easily ***could*** **win** the race." (correct but not preferable)
✔ "You ***could*** **easily win** the race." (correct)
✔ "You ***could*** **win** the race easily." (correct)

However, this is not a strict rule, and certain adverbs are able to go before the modal verb without an issue. For example:

✔ "You really ***should*** **see** the new movie." (correct)
✔ "You ***should*** **really see** the new movie." (correct)

✔ "I definitely ***will*** **try** to make it to the party." (correct)

✔ "I ***will*** **definitely** **try** to make it to the party." (correct)

When a modal verb is made **negative**, though, it is sometimes the case that an adverb must go before the modal verb. For example:

✖ "I ***can't*** **definitely** **go** out tonight." (incorrect)

✔ "I **definitely** ***can't*** **go** out tonight." (correct)

✖ "He ***must not*** **absolutely** **travel** alone." (incorrect)

✔ "He absolutely ***must not*** **travel** alone." (correct)

Unfortunately, there is no rule that will explain exactly when one can or cannot use an adverb before a modal verb—we just have to learn the correct usage by seeing how they are used in day-to-day speech and writing.

Common errors

Mixing modal verbs

Remember, a modal verb is only used before a main verb, or sometimes before *be* or *have* when they are used to create a verb **tense**. We do **not** use a modal verb before **auxiliary *do***, or in front of other modal verbs. For example:

✔ "We ***might*** **move** to Spain." (correct—indicates future possibility)

✔ "We ***might*** **be** **moving** to Spain." (correct—indicates future possibility using the **present continuous tense**)

✖ "Do you ***can*** **go**?" (incorrect)

✔ "***Can*** you **go**?" (correct)

✖ "I ***must will*** **finish** this before lunch." (incorrect)

✔ "I ***must*** **finish** this before lunch." (correct—indicates that it is necessary)

✔ "I ***will*** **finish** this before lunch." (correct—indicates a future action)

Conjugating the third-person singular

When main verbs function on their own, we conjugate them to reflect the third-person singular (usually accomplished by adding "-s" to the end of the verb).

However, we do **not** conjugate modal verbs in this way, **nor** do we conjugate a main verb when it is being used with a modal.

For example:

✔ "He **swims** well." (**present simple tense**)

✖ "He ***cans*** **swim** well." (incorrect)

✖ "He ***can*** **swims** well." (incorrect)

✔ "He ***can*** **swim** well." (correct—indicates ability)

Conjugating past tense

Similarly, we cannot use modal verbs with main verbs that are in a past-tense form; the verb that follows a modal must always be in its **base form** (the **infinitive** without the word *to*). Instead, we either use certain modal verbs that have past-tense meanings of their own, or **auxiliary *have*** to create a construction that has a specific past-tense meaning. For example:

✔ "I **guessed** what her response would be." (**past simple tense**)
✖ "I ***can* guessed** what her response would be." (incorrect)
✖ "I ***could* guessed** what her response would be." (incorrect)
✔ "I ***could* guess** what her response would be." (correct—indicates past ability)
✔ "I ***could* have guessed** what her response would be." (correct—indicates potential past ability)

✔ "I **tried** harder." (**past simple tense**)
✖ "I ***should* tried** harder." (incorrect)
✔ "I ***should* try** harder." (correct, but indicates a correct or proper future action)
✔ "I ***should* have tried** harder." (correct—indicates a correct or proper past action)

Following modal verbs with infinitives

As we saw above, all modal auxiliary verbs must be followed by the **base form** of a the main verb. Just as we cannot use a modal verb with a main verb in its past-tense form, we

also cannot use a modal verb with an **infinitive**.

✖ "She ***could*** **<u>to</u> speak** five languages." (incorrect)
✔ "She ***could*** **speak** five languages." (correct—indicates past ability)

✖ "I ***must*** **<u>to</u> see** the boss." (incorrect)
✔ "I ***must*** **see** the boss." (correct—indicates necessity)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a **not** a function of a modal auxiliary verb?

a) To indicate frequency
b) To indicate possibility or likelihood
c) To indicate ability
d) To indicate future intention

2. Which of the following modal verbs indicates **necessity**?

a) may
b) can
c) would
d) must

3. Which of the following modal verbs is used to request **permission**?

a) may
b) should
c) would
d) must

4. Which of the following is something that a modal verb **cannot** do?

a) Indicate a future action
b) Express a possible action or outcome
c) Conjugate for the third-person singular
d) Become negative with the word *not*

5. When can a modal verb stand **on its own**?

a) When an adverb is used before the modal verb
b) When the main verb is implied elsewhere
c) When it is used in an interrogative sentence
d) Anytime
e) Never

6. Which of the following is **not** one of the "true" modal verbs? a) must

b) need
c) will
d) should

Modal Auxiliary Verbs -

Will Definition

As a modal auxiliary verb, *will* is particularly versatile, having several different functions and meanings. It is used to form future tenses, to express willingness or ability, to make requests or offers, to complete conditional sentences, to express likelihood in the immediate present, or to issue commands.

Creating the future tense

One of *will*'s most common uses as a modal verb is to talk about things that are certain, very likely, or planned to happen in the future. In this way, it is used to create an approximation of the **future simple tense** and the **future continuous tense**. For example:

• "I ***will*** **turn** 40 tomorrow." (**future simple tense**)

• "She ***will*** **be singing** at the concert as well." (**future continuous tense**)

Will can also used to make the **future perfect tense** and the **future perfect continuous tense**. These tenses both describe a scenario that began in the past and will either finish in

or continue into the future. For example:

• "It's hard to believe that by next month we ***will*** **have been married** for 10 years." (**future perfect tense**)

• "By the time I get there, she***'ll*** **have been waiting** for over an hour." (**future perfect continuous tense**)

If we want to make any of the future tenses negative, we use *not* between *will* and the main verb or the next occurring auxiliary verb. We often contract *will* and *not* into *won't*. For example:

• "I ***won't*** **be seeing** the movie with you tonight."

• "At this pace, she ***won't*** **finish** in first place."

If we want to make a question (an **interrogative sentence**), we invert *will* with the subject, as in:

• "What ***will*** they **do** with the money?"

• "***Won't*** you **be coming** with us?"

Ability and willingness

We also sometimes use *will* to express or inquire about a person or thing's ability or willingness to do something. It is very similar to the future tense, but is used for more immediate actions. For example:

• “You wash the dishes; I***’ll*** **take** out the trash.”

• “This darn washing machine ***won’t*** **turn** on.”

• “***Won’t*** Mary **come** out of her room?”

Requests and offers

We often create interrogative sentences using *will* to make requests or polite offers. They are usually addressed to someone in the second person, as in:

• “***Will*** you walk the dog, Jim?”

• “***Will*** you have a cup of tea, Sam?”

However, we can use subjects in the first and third person as well. For instance:

• “***Will*** Jonathan bring his truck around here tomorrow?”

• “***Will*** your friend join us for some lunch?”

Conditional sentences

In present-tense conditional sentences formed using *if*, we often use *will* to express an expected hypothetical outcome. This is known as the **first conditional**. For example:

• “**If** I see him, I ***will*** **tell** him the news.”

• “I ***won’t*** **have to say** goodbye **if** I don’t go to the airport.”

Likelihood and certainty

In addition to expressing actions or intentions of the future, we can also use *will* to express the likelihood or certainty that something is the case in the immediate present. For instance:

- (in response to the phone ringing) "That ***will*** **be** Jane—I'm expecting her call."
- Speaker A: "Who is that with Jeff?"
- Speaker B: "That***'ll*** **be** his new husband. They were just married in May."

Commands

Finally, we can use *will* to issue commands, orders, or maxims. These have an added forcefulness in comparison to **imperative sentences**, as they express a certainty that the command will be obeyed. For example:

- "You ***will*** **finish** your homework this instant!"
- "This house ***will not*** **be used** as a hotel for your friends, do you understand me?"

Substituting Modal Verbs

In many cases, modal auxiliary verbs can be used in place of others to create slightly different meanings. For example, we can use the word ***shall*** in place of *will* in to express polite invitations. Similarly, ***would*** can also be substituted for *will* in requests to make them

more polite.

Explore the section on **Substituting Modal Verbs** to see how and when other modal auxiliary verbs overlap.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of *will* as a modal verb?

a) To form the future tense
b) To issue a command or maxim
c) To express what someone is allowed to do
d) To make a request or an offer

2. Which of the following sentences is a **conditional sentence**?

a) "I will be going to Europe in August."
b) "She'll be moving to Alaska if she can save up enough money."
c) "That will be your father at the door."
d) "You will not put off doing your chores any longer!"

3. Where does the modal verb *will* appear in an **interrogative sentence**?

a) Before the subject of the sentence
b) After the subject of the sentence

c) Before the main verb of the sentence
d) After the main verb of the sentence

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Would Definition

The modal auxiliary verb *would* has a variety of functions and uses. It is used in place of ***will*** for things that happened or began in the past, and, like ***shall***, it is sometimes used in place of *will* to create more formal or polite sentences. It is also used to express requests and preferences, to describe hypothetical situations, and to politely offer or ask for advice or an opinion.

Creating the future tense in the past

When a sentence expresses a future possibility, expectation, intention, or inevitability that began in the past, we use *would* instead of *will*. For example:

• "I thought he ***would*** **be** here by now."

• "She knew they ***wouldn't*** **make** it to the show in time."

• "I thought John ***would*** **be mowing** lawn by this point."

Past ability and willingness

We also use *would* for certain expressions of a person or thing's ability or willingness to do something in the past, though they are usually negative. For example:

• "This darn washing machine ***wouldn't*** **turn** on this morning."

• "Mary ***wouldn't*** **come** out of her room all weekend."

Likelihood and certainty

Like we saw with ***will***, we can also use *would* to express the likelihood or certainty that something was the case in the immediate past. For instance:

• Speaker A: "There was a man here just now asking about renting the spare room."

• Speaker B: "That ***would*** **be** Kenneth. He just moved here from Iowa."

Polite requests

We can use *would* in the same way as *will* to form requests, except that *would* adds a level of politeness to the question, as in:

• "***Would*** you please **take out** the garbage for me?"

• "***Would*** John **mind** helping me clean out the garage?"

Expressing desires

We use *would* with the main verb *like* to express or inquire about a person's desire to do something. (We can also use the main verb *care* for more formal or polite sentences.) For example:

• "I ***would*** **like** to go to the movies later."

• "Where ***would*** you **like** to go for your birthday?"

• "I ***would*** **not** care to live in a hot climate."

• "***Would*** you **care** to have dinner with me later?"

We can use this same construction to express or ask about a desire to <u>have</u> something. If we are using *like* as the main verb, it can simply be followed by a noun or noun phrase; if we are using *care*, it must be followed by the preposition *for*, as in:

• "***Would*** you **like** a cup of tea?"

• "He ***would*** **like** the steak, and I will have the lobster."

• "Ask your friends if they ***would*** **care** <u>for</u> some snacks."

Would that

Would can also be used to introduce a *that* clause to indicate some hypothetical or hopeful situation that one wishes were true. For example:

• "***Would* that** we **lived** near the sea."

• Speaker A: "Life would be so much easier if we won the lottery."

• Speaker B: "***Would* that** it **were** so!"

This is an example of the **subjunctive mood**, which is used to express hypotheticals and desires. While we still use *would* in the subjunctive mood to express preference or create conditional sentences (like Speaker A's sentence above), the *would that* construction is generally only found in very formal, literary, old-fashioned, or highly stylized speech or writing in modern English.

Preference

We use *would* with the adverbs *rather* and *sooner* to express or inquire about a person's preference for something. For instance:

• "There are a lot of fancy meals on the menu, but I ***would* rather have** a hamburger."

• "They ***would* sooner go** bankrupt than sell the family home."

• "***Would*** you **rather go biking** or **go** for a hike?"

Conditional sentences

Conditional sentences in the past tense are called **second conditionals**. Unlike the first conditional, we use the second conditional to talk about things that cannot or are unlikely to

happen.

To create the second conditional, we use the **past simple tense** after the *if* clause, followed by *would* + the bare infinitive for the result of the condition. For example:

• "If I went to London, I ***would*** **visit** Trafalgar Square."

• "I ***would*** **buy** a yacht **if** I ever won the lottery."

Hypothetical situations

We can also use *would* to discuss hypothetical or possible situations that we can imagine happening, but that aren't dependent on a conditional *if* clause.

For example:

• "They ***would*** **be** an amazing band to see in concert!"

• "Don't worry about not getting in—it ***wouldn't*** **have been** a very interesting class, anyway."

• "She ***would*** **join** your study group, but she doesn't have any free time after school."

• "I normally ***wouldn't*** **mind**, except that today is my birthday!"

Polite opinions

We can use *would* with opinion verbs (such as *think* or *expect*) to dampen the forcefulness

of an assertion, making it sound more formal and polite:

• "I ***would*** **expect** that the board of directors will be pleased with this offer."

• "One ***would*** **have thought** that the situation would be improved by now."

We can also ask for someone else's opinion with *would* by pairing it with a question word in an interrogative sentence, as in:

• "What ***would*** you **suggest** we do instead?"

• "Where ***would*** **be** a good place to travel this summer?"

Asking the reason *why*

When we use the question word *why*, we often follow it with *would* to ask the reason something happened or is true. For instance:

• "Why ***would*** my brother **lie** to me?"

• "Why ***would*** they **expect** you to know that?"

If we use *I* or *we* as the subject of the question, it is often used rhetorically to suggest that a question or accusation is groundless or false, as in:

• "Why ***would*** I **try** to hide anything from you?"

• "Why ***would*** we **give up** now, when we've come so close to succeeding?"

Polite advice

We can use *would* in the first person to politely offer advice about something. (It is common to add the phrase "if I were you" at the end, thus creating a conditional sentence.) For example:

• "I ***would*** **apologize** to the boss if I were you."

• "I ***would*** **talk** to her tonight; there's no point in waiting until tomorrow."

We can also use *would* in the second and third person to offer advice, usually in the construction "you would be wise/smart to do something," as in:

• "I think you ***would*** **be wise** to be more careful with your money."

• "Recent graduates ***would*** **be smart** to set up a savings account as early as possible."

Substituting Modal Verbs

In many cases, modal auxiliary verbs can be replaced with others to create slightly different meanings.

For example, in addition to using *would* to form the **second conditional** (which we use to describe something we would definitely do), we can also use ***could*** for what we would be able to do, as well as ***might*** for what it is possible (but unlikely) we would do.

For example:

• “If I won the lottery, I **could buy** a new house.”

• “If I were older, I **might stay up** all night long.”

In British English, ***should*** is often used in place of *would* in many constructions to add politeness or formality. For instance:

• “I ***should*** **apologize** to the boss if I were you.” (polite advice)

• “I ***should*** **like** a poached egg for breakfast.” (desire)

Explore the section **Substituting Modal Verbs** to see how and when other modal verbs overlap.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of *would* as a modal verb?

a) To form the future tense
b) To issue a command or maxim
c) To express a wish or desire
d) To politely offer advice

2. Which of the following sentences uses *would* to express **preference**?

a) “We would have won the game if you hadn’t missed that shot.”
b) “She’d be wise to start her assignments earlier.”

c) “I think this would be a great city to live in.”
d) “I’d rather have a salad for lunch.”

3. What kind of **conditional sentence** is formed using *would*?
a) Zero conditional
b) First conditional
c) Second conditional
d) Third conditional

4. Which of the following sentences uses a **very formal, old-fashioned** construction with *would* to express a wish or desire?
a) “Would that I’d made contact with him before his departure.”
b) “He would pay for college himself if he could afford it.”
c) “I think they’d rather go to the beach today.”
d) “Would you care for some lunch?”

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Shall Definition

The modal auxiliary verb *shall* is used in many of the same ways as ***will***: to form future tenses, to make requests or offers, to complete conditional sentences, or to issue maxims or

commands. Although *will* is generally preferred in modern English (especially American English), using *shall* adds an additional degree of politeness or formality to the sentence that *will* sometimes lacks.

Generally, *shall* is only used when *I* or *we* is the subject, though this is not a strict rule (and does not apply at all when issuing commands, as we'll see).

Creating the future tense

The future tenses are most often formed using *will* or *be going to*.

We can also use *shall* to add formality or politeness to these constructions, especially the **future simple tense** and the **future continuous tense**. For example:

• "I ***shall*** **call** from the airport." (**future simple tense**)

• "We ***shall*** **be staying** in private accommodation."

• "Our company ***shall not*** **be held** accountable for this."

• "I ***shan't****** **be participating** in these discussions."

(*Contracting *shall* and *not* into *shan't*, while not incorrect, sounds overly formal and stuffy in modern speech and writing; for the most part, it is not used anymore.)

It is also possible, though far less common, to use *shall* in the **future perfect** and **future perfect continuous** tenses as well:

• "As of next week, I ***shall*** **have worked** here for 50 years."

• “By the time the opera begins, we ***shall*** **have been waiting** for over an hour.”

Offers, suggestions, and advice

When we create interrogative sentences using *shall* and without question words, it is usually to make polite offers, invitations, or suggestions, as in:

• “***Shall*** we walk along the beach?”

• “***Shall*** I wash the dishes?”

When we form an interrogative sentence with a question word (*who, what, where, when,* or *how*), *shall* is used to politely seek the advice or opinion of the listener about a future decision, as in:

• “What ***shall*** I **do** with this spare part?”

• “Where ***shall*** we **begin**?”

• “Who ***shall*** I **invite** to the meal?”

Conditional sentences

Like *will*, we can use *shall* in conditional sentences using *if* to express a likely hypothetical outcome. This is known as the **first conditional**. For example:

• “**If** my flight is delayed, I ***shall not*** **have** time to make my connection.”

• “I ***shall*** **contact** the post office **if** my package has not arrived by tomorrow.”

Formal commands

While *will* is often used to form commands, we use *shall* when issuing more formal directives or maxims, as might be seen in public notices or in a formal situation, or to express a reprimand in a formal way. When used in this way, *shall* no longer has to be used solely with *I* or *we* as the subject. For example:

• “This establishment ***shall not*** **be held** liable for lost or stolen property.”

• “Students ***shall*** **remain** silent throughout the exam.”

• “The new law dictates that no citizen ***shall*** **be** out on the streets after 11 PM.”

• “You ***shall*** **cease** this foolishness at once!”

Substituting Modal Verbs

In many cases, modal auxiliary verbs can be used in place of others to create slightly different meanings. For example, we can use the word ***should*** in place of *shall* when issuing a command that is not mandatory, but rather is a guideline or recommendation. If, however, we want to express that the command or maxim is an absolute requirement, we can use ***must*** instead of *shall* in this context.

Explore the section **Substituting Modal Verbs** to see how and when other modal auxiliary

verbs overlap.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of *shall* as a modal verb?

a) To express what someone is allowed to do
b) To issue a command or maxim
c) To form the future tense
d) To create conditional sentences

2. Which of the following sentences is a **conditional sentence**?

a) "I shall be attending Harvard this fall."
c) "What shall we do this weekend?"
d) "Employees shall clock in at the beginning and end of every shift."
d) "They shall begin research immediately if funds are available."

3. Which of the following is a reason *shall* might be used instead of *will* in a sentence?

a) To add intensity to a command
b) To express an opinion about what is proper or correct
c) To add politeness or formality
d) To describe a habitual action in the past

Modal Auxiliary Verbs -

Should Definition

The modal verb *should* is used to politely express obligations or duties; to ask for or issue advice, suggestions, and recommendations; to describe an expectation; to create **conditional sentences**; and to express surprise. There are also a number of uses that occur in British English that are not common in American English.

Polite obligations

Should is used in the same construction as other modal verbs (such as ***will***, ***shall***, and ***must***) to express an obligation or duty.

However, whereas *must* or *will* (and even *shall*) make the sentence into a strict command, which might appear to be too forceful and could be seen as offensive, *should* is used to create a more polite form that is more like a guideline than a rule. For example:

• "Guests ***should*** **vacate** their hotel rooms by 10 AM on the morning of their departure."

• "I think she ***should*** **pay** for half the meal."

• "You ***shouldn't*** **play** loud music in your room at night."

• "I think healthcare ***should*** **be** free for everyone."

• “She ***should not*** **be** here; it’s for employees only.”

Asking the reason *why*

We can follow the question word *why* with *should* to ask the reason for a certain obligation or duty. For instance:

• “Why ***should*** I **have** to pay for my brother?”

• “Why ***shouldn’t*** we **be allowed** to talk during class?”

Advice and recommendations

Should can also be used to issue advice or recommendations in much the same way. For instance:

• “You ***should*** **get** a good map of London before you go there.” (recommendation)

• “You ***shouldn’t*** **eat** so much junk food—it’s not good for you.” (advice)

We can also use *should* in **interrogative sentences** to ask for someone’s advice, opinion, or suggestion, as in:

• “What ***should*** I **see** while I’m in New York?”

• “***Should*** she **tell** her boss about the missing equipment?”

• “Is there anything we ***should*** **be** concerned about?”

Expectations

Using *should* in **affirmative** (non-negative) sentences can be used to express an expected outcome, especially when it is followed by the verb *be*. For example:

• "She ***should*** **be** here by now."

• "They ***should*** **be** arriving at any minute."

• "I think this book ***should*** **be** interesting."

We can also follow *should* with other verbs to express expectation, but this is less common. For instance:

• "They ***should*** **find** this report useful."

• "We ***should*** **see** the results shortly."

If we use the negative of *should* (*should not* or *shouldn't*), it implies a mistake or error, especially when we use it with a future time expression. For example:

• "She ***shouldn't*** **be** here yet."

• "He ***shouldn't*** **be** arriving for another hour."

We normally do not use *should not* to refer to expected future actions like we do in the affirmative; it generally refers to something that just happened (in the present or immediate past).

Should vs. be supposed to vs. be meant to

In many instances, *should* can be replaced by *be supposed to* or *be meant to* with little to no change in meaning. For instance, we can use *be supposed to* or *be meant to* in place of *should* for something that is expected or required to happen.

For example:

• "He ***should*** **be** here at 10 AM."

• "He ***is meant to*** **be** here at 10 AM."

• "He ***is supposed to*** **be** here at 10 AM."

We can also use these three variations interchangeably when asking the reason *why* something is the case. For instance:

• "Why ***should*** I **have** to pay for my brother?"

• "Why ***am*** I **meant to pay** for my brother?"

• "Why ***am*** I **supposed to pay** for my brother?"

However, when we are expressing an obligation or duty, we can only replace *should* with *be supposed to* or *be meant to* when it is in the negative. For instance:

• "You ***shouldn't*** **play** loud music in your room at night."

• "You ***aren't meant to*** **play** loud music in your room at night."

• "You ***aren't supposed to*** **play** loud music in your room at night."

In affirmative sentences in which *should* expresses an obligation or duty (as opposed to an expectation), these verbs are **not** interchangeable. For instance:

• "I think she ***should*** **pay** for half the meal." (obligation)

• "I think she ***is supposed to*** **pay** for half the meal." (expectation)

• "I think she ***is meant to*** **pay** for half the meal." (expectation)

Be supposed to and *be meant to* are also used to express general beliefs, which is not a way we can use the modal verb *should*.

For example:

• "He ***is supposed to*** **be** one of the best lawyers in town." (general belief)

• "He ***is meant to*** **be** one of the best lawyers in town." (general belief)

• "He ***should*** **be** one of the best lawyers in town." (obligation)

We can see how the meaning changes significantly when *should* is used instead.

Conditional Sentences

Should can be used in conditional sentences to express an outcome to a possible or hypothetical conditional situation.

Sometimes we use *should* alongside *if* to create the **conditional** clause, as in:

• “If anyone ***should*** **ask**, I will be at the bar.”

• “If your father ***should*** **call**, tell him I will speak to him later.”

We can also use *should* on its own to set up this condition, in which case we invert it with the subject. For example:

• “***Should*** you **need** help on your thesis, please ask your supervisor.”

• “The bank is more than happy to discuss financing options ***should*** you **wish** to take out a loan.”

Expressing surprise

Occasionally, *should* is used to emphasize surprise at an unexpected situation, outcome, or turn of events.

We do so by phrasing the surprising information as a question, using a question word like *who* or *what* and often inverting *should* with the subject. (However, the sentence is spoken as a statement, so we punctuate it with a period or exclamation point, rather than a question mark.)

The “question” part of the sentence is introduced by the word *when*, with the “answer” introduced by the word *but*. For example:

• “I was minding my own business, when who ***should*** I **encounter** but my brother Tom.”

• “The festival was going well when what ***should*** **happen** but the power goes out!”

Uses of *should* in British English

There are a number of functions that *should* can perform that are more commonly used in British English than in American English. Several of these are substitutions of *would*, while other uses are unique unto themselves.

Should vs. *would* in British English

There are several modal constructions that can either take *would* or *should*. American English tends to favor the modal verb *would* in most cases, but, in British English, it is also common to use *should*, especially to add formality.

Polite advice

We can use *should/would* in the first person to politely offer advice about something. (It is common to add the phrase "if I were you" at the end, thus creating a conditional sentence.) For example:

• "I ***should/would*** **apologize** to the boss if I were you."

• "I ***shouldn't/wouldn't*** **worry** about that right now."

Expressing desires

We can use either *should* or *would* with the main verb *like* in the first person to express or inquire about a person's desire to do something. (We can also use the main verb *care* for more formal or polite sentences.) For example:

- "I ***should/would*** **like** to go to the movies later."
- "We ***shouldn't/wouldn't*** **care** to live in a hot climate."
- "I ***should/would*** **like** a cup of tea, if you don't mind."
- "I don't know that I ***should/would*** **care** for such an expensive house."

Asking the reason *why*

In addition to asking the reason *why* a certain obligation or requirement is the case, we can also use *should* in the same way as *would* to ask the reason something happened or is true. For instance:

- "Why ***should/would*** my brother **lie** to me?"
- "Why ***should/would*** they **expect** you to know that?"

If we use *I* or *we* as the subject of the question, it is often used rhetorically to suggest that a question or accusation is groundless or false, as in:

- "Why ***should/would*** I **try** to hide anything from you?"
- "Why ***should/would*** we **give up** now, when we've come so close to succeeding?"

To show purpose

Should and *would* can also be used after the phrase "so that" and "in order that" to add a sense of purpose to the main verb, as in:

• "I brought a book so that I ***shouldn't/wouldn't*** **be** bored on the train ride home."

• "He bought new boots in order that his feet ***should/would*** **remain** dry on the way to work."

After other words and phrases

There are several instances in British English in which *should* is used after the relative pronoun *that* or certain other phrases to create specific meanings, especially in more formal language.

To express an opinion or feeling

When we use a **noun clause** beginning with *that* as an **adjective complement**, we can use *should* in it to express an opinion or sentiment about what is said. For example:

• "It's very sad that she ***should*** **be forced** to leave her house."

• "Isn't it strange that we ***should*** **meet** each other again after all these years?"

Conditional circumstances

Similarly, *should* can be used after the phrases *for fear (that)*, *in case (that)*, and (less commonly) *lest (that)* to demonstrate the possible conditional circumstances that are the reason behind a certain action. For example:

• "I always pack my rain jacket when I cycle for fear (that) it ***should*** **start** raining midway."

• "You should pack a toothbrush in case (that) you ***should*** **be** delayed at the airport overnight."

• "She makes sure to set the alarm before leaving lest (that) someone ***should*** **try** to break in."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of *should* as a modal verb?

a) To form the future tense
b) To express an obligation or duty
c) To express surprise
d) To politely offer advice

2. Which of the following sentences uses *should* to express an **expectation**?

a) “I will be just around the corner should I be needed.”
b) “We really shouldn’t lie to your parents like this.”
c) “Don’t forget a spare pencil lest yours should break.”
d) “The movie should finish around 5 PM.”

3. Which of the following is a situation in which *should* can be used instead of *would* in **British English**?
a) To express past ability or willingness
b) To politely offer advice
c) To form a polite request
d) To express surprise

4. True or False: *Should* is able to form conditional sentences **without** the word *if*.
a) True
b) False

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Can Definition

As a modal auxiliary verb, *can* is most often used to express a person or thing’s ability to do something. It is also used to express or ask for permission to do something, to describe the

possibility that something can happen, and to issue requests and offers.

Expressing ability

Can is used most often and most literally to express when a person or thing is physically, mentally, or functionally able to do something. When it is used with *not* to become negative, it forms a single word, *cannot* (contracted as *can't*). For example:

- "John ***can*** **run** faster than anyone I know."
- "It's rare to find a phone that ***cannot*** **connect** to the Internet these days."
- "We don't have to stay—we ***can*** **leave** if you want to."
- "***Can*** your brother **swim**?"
- "I don't think he ***can*** **read**."
- "Just **do** the best you ***can***."
- "***Can't*** you just **restart** the computer?"
- "When ***can*** you **start**?"

"Can do"

In response to a request or an instruction, it is common (especially in American English) to use the idiomatic phrase "**can do**." This usually stands on its own as a **minor sentence**. For

example:

• Speaker A: “I need you to fix this tire when you have a chance.”
• Speaker B: “**Can do**!”
• Speaker A: “Would you mind making dinner tonight?”
• Speaker B: “Can do, darling!”

The phrase has become so prolific that it is also often used as a modifier before a noun to denote an optimistic, confident, and enthusiastic characteristic, as in:

• “His **can-do** spirit is infectious in the office.”
• “We’re always looking for **can-do** individuals who will bring great energy to our team.”

We can also make this phrase negative, but we use the word *no* at the beginning of the phrase rather than using the adverb *not* after *can*, as we normally would with a modal verb. For example:

• Speaker A: “Is it all right if I get a ride home with you again tonight?”
• Speaker B: “Sorry, **no can do**. I need to head to the airport after work.”

Permission

We often use *can* to express permission* to do something, especially in questions (**interrogative sentences**).

For example:

• "***Can*** I **go** to the bathroom, Ms. Smith?"

• "***Can*** Jenny **come** to the party with us?"

• "You ***can*** **leave** the classroom once you are finished with the test."

• "You ***can't*** **have** any dessert until you've finished your dinner."

(*Usage note: Although it is sometimes considered grammatically incorrect to use *can* instead of ***may*** to express permission, it is acceptable in modern English to use either one. *Can* is very common in informal settings; in more formal English, though, *may* is still the preferred modal verb.)

As a rhetorical device

Sometimes, we use *can* in this way as a rhetorical device to politely introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment about something, in which case we invert *can* with the subject. For instance:

• "***Can*** I just **say**, this has been the most wonderful experience of my life."

• "***Can*** we **be** clear that our firm will not be involved in such a dubious a plan."

• "And, ***can*** I **add**, profits are expected to stabilize within a month."

Note that we can accomplish the same thing by using the verbs *let* or *allow* instead, as in:

• "***Let*** me **be** clear: this decision is in no way a reflection on the quality of your work."

• "***Allow*** us **to say**, we were greatly impressed by your performance."

Adding angry emphasis

Can is sometimes used to give permission (sometimes ironically) as a means of adding emphasis to an angry command, especially in **conditional sentences**. For example:

• "You ***can*** just **walk** home if you're going to be so ungrateful!"

• "If he continues being so insufferable, he ***can*** **have** his party all alone!"

• "You ***can*** **go** to your room and stay there, young man! I'm sick of listening to your backtalk."

Possibility and likelihood

Similar to using *can* to express ability, we also use *can* to describe actions that are possible. It may appear to be nearly the same in certain cases, but the usage relates less to physical or mental ability than to the possibility or likelihood of accomplishing something or of something occurring. For instance:

• "You ***can*** **get** help on your papers from your teaching assistant."

• "My mother-in-law ***can*** **be** a bit overbearing at times."

• "People forget that you ***can*** **get** skin cancer from tanning beds."

• “It ***can*** **seem** impossible to overcome the debt from student loans.”

Negative certainty and disbelief

We use the modal verb ***must*** to express certainty or high probability, but we generally use *can’t* (or, less commonly, *cannot*) to express **negative** certainty, extremely low likelihood, or a disbelief that something might be true. For example:

• “You ***can’t*** **be** tired—you’ve been sleeping all day!”

• “I ***can’t*** **have** left my phone at home, because I remember packing it in my bag.”

• “After three years of college, she wants to drop out? She ***cannot*** **be** serious.”

Making requests

It is common to use *can* to make a request of someone. For example:

• “***Can*** you **get** that book down from the shelf for me?”

• “Your sister is a lawyer, right? ***Can*** she **give** me some legal advice?”

• “***Can*** you kids **turn** your music down, please?”

However, this usage can sometimes be seen as being too direct or forceful, and sometimes comes across as impolite as a result. In more formal or polite circumstances, we can use other modal verbs such as ***could*** or ***would*** to create more polite constructions, as in:

• "***Would*** you please **be** quiet?"

• "***Could*** you **help** me with this assignment?"

Making offers

While it might be seen as impolite to use *can* to make a request, it is perfectly polite to use it to make an offer. For example:

• "***Can*** I **do** anything to help get dinner ready?"

• "***Can*** I **help** you find what you need?"

• "***Can*** I **give** you a ride home?"

If we want to be even more polite or add formality to the offer, we can use *may* instead, as in:

• "***May*** I **be** of some assistance?"

• "***May*** we **help** you in any way?"

• "How ***may*** our staff **be** of service to you?"

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of *can* as a modal verb?

a) To ask for permission
b) To request something
c) To offer to do something
d) To express an opinion or feeling

2. Which of the following sentences uses *can* to express **ability**?
a) “Can I watch TV later?”
b) “It can get a bit too hot here in the summer.”
c) “I’m sure glad I can drive.”
d) “You can have some ice cream if you behave yourselves.”

3. Which of the following is an **informal** use of the modal verb *can*?
a) “You can just go without your dinner if you’re going to behave that way!”
b) “When can we expect the package to arrive?”
c) “Can I spend the night at my friend’s house?”
d) “Can we carry those groceries for you?”

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Could Definition

The modal verb *could* is most often used as a past-tense version of ***can***, indicating what

someone or something was able to do in the past; it can also be used instead of *can* as a more polite way of making a request or asking for permission. *Could* is also used to express a slight or uncertain possibility, as well as to make a suggestion or offer.

Past ability

When describing what a person or thing was physically, mentally, or functionally able to do in the past, we use *could* instead of *can*. For example:

• "When I was younger, I ***could* run** for 10 miles without breaking a sweat!"

• "Our TV growing up ***could*** only **get** about four channels."

• "She ***couldn't* read** until she was nearly 12 years old."

• "***Could*** your family **afford** any food during the Great Depression, Grandma?"

We also use *could* instead of *can* when describing an ability that is desired or wished for. (This is known as the **subjunctive mood**, which is used for describing hypothetical or unreal situations.) For example:

• "I wish I ***could* swim**; it looks like so much fun."

Conditional sentences

Conditional sentences in the past tense are called **second conditionals**. Unlike the first conditional, we use the second conditional to talk about things that cannot or are unlikely to

actually happen.

To create the second conditional, we usually use the **past simple tense** after the *if* clause, followed by ***would*** + a bare infinitive to describe what would be the expected (if unreal) result of the condition.

However, if we want to describe what we would be **able** to do under a certain condition, we can use *could* instead. For example:

• "If I got that promotion at work, I ***could*** finally **afford** a new car!"

• "If we moved to California, I ***could*** **surf** every day!"

We often use *could* in what's known as a **mixed conditional**, which occurs when the tense in one part of a conditional sentence does not match the other half. This often occurs with *could* when a present-tense verb is being used in an *if* conditional clause to express a hypothetical scenario that is likely to or possibly could happen. For example:

• "If I get some money from my parents, we ***could*** **go** to the movies."

• "We ***could*** **visit** our friends at the beach if you ask your boss for Friday off."

Asking for permission

When we ask someone for permission to do something, it is often considered more polite to use *could* instead of *can*. However, we can only make this substitution when asking for permission—when stating or granting permission, we can only use *can* (or, more politely,

may).

For example:

• "Dad, ***could*** I **spend** the night at my friend's house?"

• "***Could*** we **invite** Sarah to come with us?"

• "I was wondering if I ***could*** **take** a bit of time off work."

Making a request

Just as we use *could* instead of *can* to be more polite when asking for permission, it is also considered more polite to substitute *could* when making a general request. For example:

• "***Could*** you please **be** quiet?"

• "***Could*** you **help** me with this assignment?"

Note that we can also do this with the modal verb ***would***:

• "***Would*** you **ask** Jeff to come over here?"

• "***Would*** Tina **help** me paint this fence?"

As a rhetorical device

Sometimes, we use *could* as a rhetorical device to politely introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment about something, in which case we invert *could* with the subject. For

instance:

• "***Could*** I just **say**, this has been a most wonderful evening."

• "And ***could*** I **clarify** that I have always acted solely with the company's interests in mind."

• "***Could*** I **add** that your time with us has been greatly appreciated."

Note that we can accomplish the same thing by using the verbs *let* or *allow* instead, as in:

• "***Let*** me **clarify**: this decision is in no way a reflection on the quality of your work."

• "***Allow*** me **to add**, we were greatly impressed by your performance."

Possibility and likelihood

Like *can*, we can also use *could* to describe actions or outcomes that are possible or likely. Unlike using *could* to talk about an ability, this usage is not restricted to the past tense. For instance:

• "I think it ***could*** **rain** any minute."

• "She ***could*** **be** in big trouble over this."

• "Due to this news, the company ***could*** **see** a sharp drop in profits next quarter."

• "Be careful, you ***could*** **hurt** someone with that thing!"

• "Answer the phone! It ***could*** **be** your father calling."

Making a suggestion

Similar to expressing a possible outcome, we can also use *could* to suggest a possible course of action. For instance:

• "We ***could*** **go** out for pizza after work on Friday."

• "You ***could*** **see** if your boss would let you extend your vacation."

• "I know it will be tricky to convince your parents, but you ***could*** **try**."

Adding angry emphasis

We also use *could* to add emphasis to an angry or frustrated remark. For example:

• "My mother has traveled a long way to be here—you ***could*** **try** to look a little more pleased to see her!"

• "You ***could*** **have told** me that you didn't want a party before I spent all this time and effort organizing one!"

Making offers

In addition to using *could* to make a suggestion, we can also use it to make an offer to do something for someone. For example:

• "***Could*** I **give** you a hand with dinner?"

• "***Could*** we **help** you find what you need?"

• "***Could*** I **give** you a ride home?"

Rhetorical questions

Could is sometimes used informally in sarcastic or rhetorical questions that highlight a behavior someone finds irritating, unacceptable, or inappropriate. It is often (but not always) used with *be* as a main verb. For example:

• "***Could*** you **be** any louder? I can barely hear myself think!"

• "Oh my God, Dad, ***could*** you **be** any more embarrassing?"

• "Danny, we're going to be late! ***Could*** you **walk** any slower?"

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of the modal verb *could*?

a) To ask for permission

b) To create a future tense

c) To request something

d) To offer to do something

2. Which of the following sentences uses *could* to express **possibility or likelihood**?

a) “Could I please have a second helping of dessert?”
b) “I wish I could drive.”
c) “I have a feeling it could snow tonight.”
d) “I could move out of this dump if I get a role in that big movie.”

3. Which of the following sentences uses *could* **incorrectly**?

a) “You and your friends could go to the movies later, if you’re looking for something to do.”
b) “I thought Jonathan could be here by now.”
c) “Could I spend Thanksgiving with Grandpa this year?”
d) “Could you be any more insulting?”

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - May Definition

The modal verb *may* is used to ask, grant, or describe permission; to politely offer to do something for someone; to express the possibility of something happening or occurring; or to express a wish or desire that something will be the case in the future. We can also use *may* as a rhetorical device to express or introduce an opinion about something.

Asking or granting permission

May is very commonly used to express or ask for permission to do something. There are other ways to do this (by using the modals ***can*** or ***could***, for instance), but *may* is considered the most polite and formally correct way to do so. For example:

- "***May*** I **borrow** your pen, please?"
- "***May*** we **ask** you some questions about your experience?"
- "General, you ***may*** **fire** when ready."
- "She ***may*** **invite** one or two friends, but no more than that."
- "***May*** we **be** frank with you, Tom?"
- "Students ***may not*** **leave** the class once their exams are complete."

Making a polite offer

Like *can*, we can use *may* to offer do something for someone else, though it is generally a more polite, formal way of doing so. For example:

- "***May*** I **help** you set the table?"
- "***May*** we **be** of assistance in any way?"

Expressing possibility

Another common use of *may* is to express the possibility that something will happen or occur in the near future, especially when that possibility is uncertain. For instance:

- "I'm worried that it ***may*** **start** raining soon."
- "We ***may*** **run into** some problems down the line that we didn't expect."
- "I ***may*** **be coming** home for the winter break, depending on the cost of a plane ticket."
- "Although we ***may*** **see** things improve in the future, there's no guarantee at the moment."
- "There ***may*** **not be** any issues at all; we'll just have to see."

Expressing wishes for the future

May is also used in more formal language to express a wish or desire that something will be the case in the future. When used in this way, *may* is inverted with the subject, as in:

- "***May*** you both **have** a long, happy life together."
- "***May*** you **be** safe in your journey home."
- "We've had great success this year; ***may*** we **continue** to do so for years to come."
- "***May*** this newfound peace **remain** forever between our two countries."

As a rhetorical device

Sometimes, we use *may* in this way as a rhetorical device to politely introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment about something, in which case we invert *may* with the subject. For instance:

• "***May*** I just **say**, this has been the most wonderful experience of my life."

• "***May*** we **be** clear that our firm will not be involved in such a dubious plan."

• "***May*** I **be** frank: this is not what I was hoping for."

Note that we can accomplish the same thing by using the verbs *let* or *allow* instead, as in:

• "***Let*** me **be** clear: this decision is in no way a reflection on the quality of your work."

• "***Allow*** us **to say**, we were greatly impressed by your performance."

May not vs. Mayn't (vs. Can't)

Grammatically, it is not technically incorrect to contract *may not* into the single-word *mayn't*. For instance:

• "You ***mayn't* wish** to share these details with others."

• "No, you ***mayn't* go** to the dinner unaccompanied."

However, this has become very rare in modern English, and generally only occurs in

colloquial usage. In **declarative sentences**, it is much more common to use the two words separately, as in:

• "Employees ***may not*** **use** company computers for recreational purposes."

• "There ***may not*** **be** much we can do to prevent such problems from occurring."

It is also uncommon, though, to use *may not* in questions, in which *may* is inverted with the subject. The resulting construction (e.g., "may I not" or "may we not") sounds overly formal in day-to-day speech and writing. Because of this, it is much more common to use the contraction *can't* instead, as in:

• "***Can't*** we **stay** for a little while longer?"

• "***Can't*** I **bring** a friend along with me?"

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of the modal verb *may*?

a) To ask for permission
b) To express a wish for the future
c) To request something from someone
d) To offer to do something

2. Which of the following sentences uses *may* to express **possibility or likelihood**?

a) “You may not watch television until your homework is done.”
b) “May you always live life in the way you see fit.”
c) “We may not have a choice in the matter.”
d) “They may stay for dinner if they’d like to.”

3. Which of the following sentences is considered the **most correct** in modern English?
a) “The two companies mayn’t have any option but to abandon the proposed merger.”
b) “Can’t we come with you to the movie later?”
c) “May I not stay up a little later tonight?”
d) “Mayn’t we watch some TV before starting our homework?”

4. Identify the function of *may* in the following sentence:
“May I state for the record, I’ve always supported the governor’s decisions.”
a) To express permission
b) To make a polite offer
c) To express possibility
d) As a rhetorical device

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Might Definition

The modal verb *might* is most often used to express an unlikely or uncertain possibility. *Might* is also used to very formally or politely ask for permission, and it is used as the past-tense form of ***may*** when asking permission in **reported speech**. It can also be used to suggest an action, or to introduce two differing possibilities.

Expressing possibility

When we use *might* to indicate possibility, it implies a very weak certainty or likelihood that something will happen, occur, or be the case. For instance:

- "I'm hoping that she ***might* call** me later."
- "We ***might* go** to a party later, if you want to come."
- "You should pack an umbrella—it looks like it ***might* rain**."
- "There ***might* be** some dinner left over for you in the fridge."

In conditional sentences

We also often use *might* to express a possibility as a hypothetical outcome in a **conditional sentence**. For example:

- "If we don't arrive early enough, we ***might not* be** able to get in to the show."
- "We still ***might* make** our flight if we leave right now!"

• “If we’re lucky, we ***might*** **have** a chance of reversing the damage.”

Politely asking for permission

Although *may* is the “standard” modal verb used to politely ask for permission, we can also use *might* if we want to add even more politeness or formality to the question. For example:

• “***Might*** we **go** to the park this afternoon, father?”

• “***Might*** I **ask** you a few questions?”

• “I’m finished with my dinner. ***Might*** I **be** excused from the table?”

However, even in formal speech and writing, this construction can come across as rather old-fashioned, especially in American English. It more commonly occurs in indirect questions—i.e., **declarative sentences** that are worded in such a way as to express an inquiry (though these are technically not questions). For example:

• “I was hoping I ***might*** **borrow** the car this evening.”

• “I wonder if we ***might*** **invite** Samantha to come with us.”

Past tense of *may*

When we use **reported speech**, we traditionally conjugate verbs one degree into the past. When *may* has been used, especially to ask for permission, in a sentence that is now being reported, we use *might* in its place, as in:

• "He asked if he ***might*** **use** the car for his date tonight."

• "She wondered if she ***might*** **bring** a friend to the show."

However, this rule of conjugating into the past tense is largely falling out of use in modern English, and it is increasingly common to see verbs remain in their original tense even when being reported.

Making suggestions

Might can also be used to make polite suggestions to someone. This is much less direct and forceful than using ***should***: it expresses a suggestion of a possible course of action rather than asserting what is correct or right to do. For example:

• "You ***might*** **ask** your brother about repaying that loan the next time you see him."

• "It tastes very good, though you ***might*** **add** a bit more salt."

• "You ***might*** **try** rebooting the computer; that should fix the problem for you."

Suggesting a possibility

In a similar way, we can use *might* to suggest a possible action or situation to another person. For example:

• "I was wondering if you ***might*** **be** interested in seeing a play with me later."

• "I thought you ***might*** **like** this book, so I bought you a copy."

Adding angry emphasis

Just as we can with the modal verb ***could***, we can use *might* to make a suggestion as a means of adding emphasis to an angry or frustrated remark. For example:

• "My mother has traveled a long way to be here—you ***might*** **try** to look a little more pleased to see her!"

• "You ***might*** **have told** me that you didn't want a party before I spent all this time and effort organizing one!"

Introducing differing information

Another use of *might* is to introduce a statement that is contrary to or different from a second statement later in the sentence. This can be used as a means of highlighting two different possible outcomes, scenarios, or courses of action. For example:

• "Sure, you ***might*** **be** able to make money quickly like that, but you're inevitably going to run into difficulties down the line."

• "I ***might not*** **have** much free time, but I find great satisfaction in my work."

• "Our organization ***might*** **be** very small, but we provide a unique, tailored service to our clientele."

As a rhetorical device

Sometimes, we use *might* as a rhetorical device to politely introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment about something, in which case we invert *might* with the subject. For instance:

• "***Might*** I just **say**, this has been a most wonderful evening."

• "And ***might*** I **clarify** that I have always acted solely with the company's interests in mind."

• "***Might*** I **add** that your time with us has been greatly appreciated."

Note that we can accomplish the same thing by using the verbs *let* or *allow* instead, as in:

• "***Let*** me **clarify**: this decision is in no way a reflection on the quality of your work."

• "***Allow*** me **to add**, we were greatly impressed by your performance."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of the modal verb *might*?

a) To ask for permission

b) To express a possibility

c) To request something from someone

d) To suggest something

2. In which of the following situations do we use *might* as the past tense of *may*?

a) In conditional sentences
b) When making a suggestion
c) When a request for permission is being reported
d) To express a possibility

3. Which of the following sentences would occur **least commonly** in modern English?

a) “Might I inquire about your stake in this claim?”
b) “I’m worried that we might not make the train.”
c) “I was hoping I might go out with my friends after school.”
d) “You might have warned me that the boss was going to be here!”

4. Identify the function of *might* in the following sentence:

“Jonathan, you might see about securing the loan before committing to anything else.”

a) To express permission
b) To introduce differing information
c) To express possibility
d) To make a suggestion

Modal Auxiliary Verbs - Must

Definition

The modal verb *must* is most often used to express **necessity**—i.e., that something *has to* happen or be the case. We also use this sense of the word to indicate a strong intention to do something in the future, to emphasize something positive that we believe someone should do, and to rhetorically introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment. In addition to indicating necessity, *must* can be used to indicate that something is certain or very likely to happen or be true.

Necessity

When *must* indicates that an action, circumstance, or situation is necessary, we usually use it in a **declarative sentence**. For example:

- "This door ***must* be** left shut at all times!"
- "We absolutely ***must* get** approval for that funding."
- "You ***must not* tell** anyone about what we saw."
- "Now, you ***mustn't* be** alarmed, but we've had a bit of an accident in here."

We can also use *must* in **interrogative sentences** to inquire whether something is necessary, usually as a criticism of some objectionable or undesirable action or behavior. For instance:

- "***Must*** we **go** to dinner with them? They are dreadfully boring."

• "***Must*** you **be** so rude to my parents?"

• "***Must*** I **spend** my entire weekend studying?"

However, this usage is generally reserved for more formal speech and writing, and isn't very common in everyday English.

Indicating strong intention

We use the same meaning of *must* to indicate something we have a very strong intention of doing in the future. For example:

• "I ***must*** **file** my taxes this weekend."

• "I ***must*** **get** around to calling my brother."

• "We ***must*** **have** the car checked out soon."

Emphasizing a suggestion

We also use this meaning to make suggestions to others of something positive we believe they should do, as in:

• "You simply ***must*** **try** the new Ethiopian restaurant on 4th Avenue—it's fantastic!"

• "It was so lovely to see you. We ***must*** **get** together again soon!"

• "You ***must*** **come** stay with us at the lake sometime."

As a rhetorical device

Finally, we can also use this meaning of *must* as a rhetorical device to politely introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment about something:

• "I ***must*** **say**, this has been a most wonderful evening."

• "And I ***must*** **add** that Mr. Jones has been an absolute delight to work with."

• "I ***must*** **be** clear: we will disavow any knowledge of this incident."

Note that we can accomplish the same thing by using the verbs *let* or *allow* instead, as in:

• "***Let*** me **be** clear: this decision is in no way a reflection on the quality of your work."

• "***Allow*** us **to say**, we were greatly impressed by your performance."

Certainty and likelihood

In addition to being used to indicate a necessary action or situation, *must* is also often used to describe that which is certain or extremely likely or probable to happen, occur, or be the case. For example:

• "You ***must*** **be** absolutely exhausted after your flight."

• "Surely they ***must*** **know** that we can't pay the money back yet."

• "There ***must*** **be** some way we can convince the board of directors."

• "I ***must* have** left my keys on my desk at work."

• Speaker A: "I just got back from a 12-week trip around Europe."

• Speaker B: "Wow, that ***must* have been** an amazing experience!"

Generally speaking, we do not use the negative of *must* (*must not* or *mustn't*) to express a negative certainty or strong disbelief. Instead, we use *cannot* (often contracted as *can't*), as in:

• "You ***can't* be** tired—you've been sleeping all day!"

• "I ***can't* have** left my phone at home, because I remember packing it in my bag."

• "After three years of college, she wants to drop out? She ***cannot* be** serious."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a function of the modal verb *must*?

a) To ask for permission
b) To express a certainty
c) To indicate an intention
d) To suggest something

2. In which of the following situations do we generally use *can* instead of *must*?

a) When expressing a necessity
b) When making a suggestion
c) When expressing disbelief or a negative certainty
d) When indicating a strong intention

3. Which of the following sentences uses *must* to indicate a **strong intention**?
a) “Employees must sign in before and after every shift.”
b) “We mustn’t let this setback deter us.”
c) “I must see about getting a refund on this software.”
d) “You must come over and see the new house sometime!”

4. Identify the function of *must* in the following sentence:
“Jonathan, you must have driven through the night to have arrived so early!”
a) To introduce or emphasize an opinion or sentiment
b) To indicate a strong intention
c) To express necessity
d) To express a certainty or high probability

Substituting Modal Verbs

Modal auxiliary verbs express different shades of meaning; very often, they can be quite similar in how they are used, and it is sometimes unclear when it is appropriate to use one

instead of another. Below, we'll look at some comparisons between commonly confused modal verbs.

Indicating the future – Will / Shall

Will is the most common modal verb used to indicate one of the **future tenses**, as in:

• "I ***will*** **walk** to work tomorrow." (**future simple tense**)

• "I ***will*** **be walking** to work this week." (**future continuous tense**)

• "I ***will*** **have walked** to work each day this week." (**future perfect tense**)

• "By December, I ***will*** **have been walking** to work each week for a year." (**future perfect continuous tense**)

We can also use *shall* in place of *will* to form the future tense, but only when the subject is in the first person (*I* or *we*). However, this makes the sentence very formal, and it is more commonly found in British English or in polite invitations. For instance:

• "I ***shall*** **be** attending a dinner with the prime minister in April."

• "***Shall*** we **dance**, my dear?"

Requesting permission – Can / Could / May / Might

Each of these four modal verbs can be used to ask for permission, and each changes how formal the sentence is.

- "***Can*** I **open** the window, please?"
- "***Could*** I **open** the window, please?"
- "***May*** I **open** the window, please?"
- "***Might*** I **open** the window, please?"

In the above examples, *can, could, may*, and *might* are all used to request to permission do something.

Can is the least formal of the four, and some sticklers for grammatical etiquette will claim that it should not be used in this way at all; however, it is perfectly acceptable in informal conversation.

Could is more polite and a bit more formal than *can*. We can use this in most situations, except perhaps in very formal conversation.

May is more formal than either *can* or *could*, and it is commonly used as the standard modal verb to express or request permission.

Might is the most formal of them all; however, it can only be used to request permission (not to state that someone **has** permission), and it is not commonly used except in extremely formal circumstances.

Indicating ability – Can / Could

We often use *can* to indicate physical, mental, or functional ability in doing something. For example:

• "I ***can*** **speak** three languages." (I have the mental ability to do this.)

• "He ***can*** **swim** very well." (He has the physical ability to do this.)

Could is also used to indicate ability but as the past tense of *can*. For example:

• "He ***could*** **speak** three languages when he was four years old. (He had this ability by the time he was four years old.)

• "She ***couldn't*** **ski** until she was a teenager. (She did not have this ability until she was a teenager.)

Indicating possibility – May / Might

We use *may* and *might* to express a possibility. When describing a possible action, they generally indicate the same 50 percent chance of likelihood. For example:

• "I ***might*** **go** to the cinema today."

• "I ***may*** **go** to bed early this evening."

May is regarded as being more formal in this use.

Both *may* and *might* are also used to indicate a possible outcome or set of circumstances. In this case, *might* tends to express **less** certainty or a **lower** likelihood than *may*, although the difference is slight. For example:

• "We've tested thoroughly, but there ***might* be** some issues we've yet to discover."

• "He ***may* have** a chance of making a comeback in the polls."

Making an offer – Can / May / Shall

Shall, *may*, and *can* can all be used to offer to do something for someone. For example:

• "***Can*** I **get** the door for you?"

• "***May*** I **get** the door for you?"

• "***Shall*** I **get** the door for you?"

May is considered more formal and polite than *can*, although *can* is perfectly acceptable. *Can* and *may*, however, are both a little less direct than *shall*, which is used as more of a polite suggestion.

Making a request – Will / Can / Could / Would

All four of these modals can be used to make a request of someone, with differing degrees of

politeness:

• "***Will*** you **get** the door for me, please?" (most direct – least polite)

• "***Can*** you **get** the door for me, please?" (slightly less direct – slightly more polite)

• "***Could*** you **get** the door for me, please?" (less direct – more polite)

• "***Would*** you **get** the door for me, please?" (least direct – most polite)

Could and *would* are the most polite modals to use for requests; however, the accompanying language we use (saying "please," "if you don't mind," "if you could be so kind," etc.) makes a bigger difference on the politeness of the request, no matter which modal verb is used.

Indicating an obligation – Must / Shall / Should / Will

When expressing an obligation to do something, we often use *must*, which is particularly direct and forceful. This might be found in a public notice, as in:

• "Employees ***must*** **wash** their hands before returning to work."

• "Owners ***must*** **clean** up after their pets."

Must can also be used in direct commands or directives, such as:

• "You ***must*** **finish** your homework before you can go outside to play."

• "Students ***must* put** their names on their assignments, or they won't be graded."

We usually only find *shall* being used to express obligations in contracts or legal documents; it is used as a more polite and formal construction than *must*. For instance:

• "The defendant ***shall* pay** the plaintiff $5,000 in damages."

• "The purchaser agrees that he or she ***shall* forego** any right to a refund after 90 days."

When indicating obligation in more conversational English, we tend to use *should* instead, which is less formal than either *shall* or *must*. It is also less forceful than either, and it is used as more of a strong suggestion of what is best or most proper to do. For example:

• "Students ***should* hand in** their assignments before Friday."

• "She ***should* apologize** for her behavior!"

• "You ***should* always pay** your bills on time."

We can technically use *will* in the same way as *must, shall* and *should*, but it is even more forceful than *must* and is less commonly used; it is generally reserved for strong commands or directives, as in:

• "You ***will* eat** your vegetables or you won't get any dessert!"

• "They ***will* agree** to the terms of the lease or face eviction."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. In American English, when can we use *shall* instead of *will* to form the **future tense**?

a) In informal speech or writing
b) When the subject is *I* or *we*
c) To express a polite invitation
d) All of the above
e) A & B only
f) B & C only

2. Which of the following modal verbs is considered the **most** polite when requesting **permission**?

a) can
b) could
c) may
d) might

3. Which of the following is **most commonly** used to indicate **obligation**?

a) must
b) shall
c) should
d) will

4. Which of the following modal verbs can be substituted for the underlined word in the following sentence?
"Excuse me, can you tell me where the nearest gas station is?"
a) will
b) could
c) would
d) All of the above
e) A & B only
f) B & C only

Semi-Modal Auxiliary Verbs Definition

Semi-modal auxiliary verbs, often simply called **semi-modal verbs**, are verbs that *sometimes* behave like **modal auxiliary verbs**. (They are also sometimes known as **marginal modal verbs**.) Like the "proper" modal verbs, they are used with the base form of verbs (the infinitive without *to*) to create a unique meaning.

Dare, need, used to, and ought to

Not all sources agree on the complete list of semi-modal verbs, but there are four that are widely considered as the standard set: *dare, need, used to*, and *ought to*.

Dare and *need* are considered semi-modal because they can also function as main verbs, able to take nouns and **infinitives** as objects and to conjugate for person, tense, and number. *Ought to* and *used to*, while unable to be main verbs, are considered semi-modal because they are always followed by **infinitives** (compared to "true" modals, which can never be followed by infinitives).

As semi-modal verbs, these verbs are used in conjunction with "main" verbs to create a complete verb expression; they do not conjugate for third-person singular subjects; they do not have a simple past tense; and they cannot form infinitives, present participles, or past participles.

We'll look at each of these verbs individually, examining when and how they function as semi-modal verbs.

Dare

When *dare* is used as a semi-modal verb, it means "to be brave, reckless, or rude enough to do or try something." Remember, when functioning modally, it does not conjugate for person or tense. For example:

• "If he **dare** cross me again, I'll make sure he pays dearly for it."

As a semi-modal verb, *dare* more often takes *not* to form a negative statement (very rarely contracted as *daren't*), or is inverted with the subject to form an **interrogative sentence**. For example:

• “I **dare not** press the issue any further.”

• “How **dare** she talk to me like that?”

• “**Dare** he meddle with the laws of nature?”

• “They **daren’t** give him a reason to be angry.”

However, with the exception of the now idiomatic phrase “How *dare* (someone),” the use of *dare* as a modal verb has become rare in modern English.

As a main verb

Dare can also be used as an intransitive main verb with the same meaning as the modal version. When it functions as a main verb, however, it is able to conjugate for person and tense, and it can be followed by a verb in either its base or infinitive form (the *to* becomes optional). For example:

• “I can’t believe he **dared** (***to***) stand up to the boss.”

• “No one **dares** (***to***) question my authority!”

When *dare* is used as a main verb, it must take the **auxiliary verb** *do* to form questions or be made negative. As we saw in the section on **primary auxiliary verbs**, it is *do*, rather than the main verb, that conjugates for tense, person, and number in this case. For example:

• “***Did*** they **dare** (***to***) go through with it?”

• “He ***doesn’t*** **dare** (***to***) argue with the principal.”

Dare can also mean "to challenge someone to (do) something that require courage, boldness, or recklessness," in which case it must take a noun, pronoun, or infinitive as a direct object. It cannot be used modally with this meaning. For example:

• "I **dare *you*** to ask Suzy on a date."

• "I've never been **dared** to race someone before."

Need

Need as a semi-modal verb is almost always used in negative sentences to express a lack of obligation or necessity, either taking the adverb *not* (usually contracted as *needn't*) or paired with a negative word or phrase, such as *never, no one, nothing,* etc. For example:

• "No one **need** know about this."

• "He **needn't** have called; I told him I would be late."

• "You **needn't** worry about my grades."

• "Nothing **need** change simply because my father is no longer here."

It can also be used to form interrogative sentences by inverting with the subject, as in:

• "**Need** we be concerned?"

• "**Need** I go to the market later?"

Like *dare*, though, the modal use of *need* has become quite uncommon in modern English, except in very formal speech or writing.

As a main verb

Need is much more common as a main verb. This means it conjugates for person (becoming *needs* in the third-person singular) or tense (becoming *needed*), and it uses auxiliary *did* to form negatives and questions. As a main verb, *need* can be followed by nouns, noun phrases, pronouns, **gerunds**, or infinitives. For example:

- "He **needs** that report by tomorrow."
- "***Does*** she **need** to know where the house is?"
- "You have plenty of time, so you ***don't*** **need** to rush."
- "He **needed** a place to stay, so I offered him one."

Used to

When we speak about a past habit, condition, or fact that is no longer the case, we can use the semi-modal *used to* with the base form of the verb. For example:

- "I **used to** get up early when I lived in New York."
- "She **used to** live in Ireland."
- "We **used to** be in a band together."
- "This watch **used to** belong to my father."

Uniquely among the modal and semi-modal verbs, we form the question and negative of *used to* the same way as for main verbs in the past tense—that is, by using the auxiliary *did* for the question and *did not* for the negative.

Example:

• "***Did*** you **use to** live in Manchester?"

• "I ***didn't*** **use to** like coffee."

• "She ***didn't*** **use to** go to the gym every day."

(Technically speaking, we should remove the "-d" from *used to* when forming questions and negatives, as the auxiliary verb *did* takes the past tense. Because of *to* immediately following *use*, however, the pronunciation stays the same, and many writers include the "-d" regardless. It is common to see it written both ways in modern English.)

As a main verb

A large source of confusion arises around the difference between the semi-modal verb *used to* and two similarly structured main verbs — *be used to* and *get used to*.

Be used to

When we use *be used to* with a noun, noun phrase, or the gerund of a verb, it means "to be accustomed to something." For example:

• “I **am used to** getting up at 7 AM every morning.”

• “She **was used to** the stress by that point.”

To form the negative of *be used to*, we add *not* after the auxiliary verb *be*, which can be contracted to *isn’t, aren’t, wasn’t*, or *weren’t*. To form interrogative sentences, we invert *be* with the subject. For example:

• “I **am *not* used to living** in the city.”

• “He **was*n’t* used to** so much work.”

• “***Are*** you **used to living** with roommates?”

Get used to

Get used to has a slightly different meaning from *be used to*; *get* here means *become*. In fact, in more formal English, it is considered preferable to say *become used to* instead. In everyday speech and writing, however, *get used to* is perfectly acceptable.

We often use *get used to* in the **present continuous tense**. For example:

• “I **am getting used to** living in the city.” (I am *becoming* accustomed to living in the city.)

• “He **is getting used to** public speaking. (He is *becoming* accustomed to the act of public speaking.)

We can also use *get used to* in the **past simple tense**, but usually in negative constructions with the word *never*, as in:

• “She ***never*** **got used to** the silence of the countryside.”

Often, we use *get used to* with the modal verbs *could*, *will*, and *cannot* (or *can’t*). *Could* is used to create a hypothetical scenario, *will* creates the future tense (often paired with *never*), and *cannot* is used to mean “unable.” For example:

• “I ***can’t*** **get used to** working so many hours. I am so tired.” (I am unable to become accustomed to this.)

• “I ***could*** **get used to** doing nothing all day.” (This is something that I could find easy to do.)

• “I ***will*** **never get used to** these cramped conditions.” (At no point in the future will I become accustomed to this.)

Ought to

Ought to is considered semi-modal because, like *used to*, it ends in *to* and so makes verbs infinitive. It is commonly compared to *should* because it expresses that something is viewed as correct, preferable, or necessary—or as probable, likely, or expected. It can also be used to ask for or offer advice about something.

For example:

• “With the cost of airfare so high, in-flight meals **ought to** be free.” (It is correct or preferable that the meals be free.)

• “We **ought to** arrive in the evening.” (It is probable or expected that we’ll arrive in the

evening.)

• "I think we **ought to** turn back." (Turning back is the necessary or best course of action— worded as advice.)

• "You **ought to** see the Grand Canyon some day." (It is my advice or recommendation for you to visit the Grand Canyon.)

When *ought to* is made negative, *not* comes between *ought* (sometimes contracted as *oughtn't*) and *to*; it is common to omit *to* when **ought to** is used with *not*. For example:

• "You **ought *not* to** read in such dim light."

• "We **ought*n't*** leave the house; it isn't safe."

We can also form questions by inverting *ought* with the subject; this is not very common, though. Again, *to* is sometimes omitted in this form. For example:

• "**Ought** we find someplace to eat?"

• "**Ought*n't*** she study for her exam?"

• "**Ought** they **to** be more worried about the storm?"

• "**Ought *not*** he **to** finish his homework first?"

Ought to is becoming far less common than *should* in modern English, especially in American English.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** one of the semi-modal verbs?

a) dare
b) should
c) ought to
d) need

2. Which of the following is something that semi-modal verbs **cannot** do?

a) Conjugate for third-person singular subjects
b) Come before main verbs to create unique meanings
c) Form the past tense
d) Become negative with the word *not*
e) A & B
f) A & C
g) B & C

3. In which of the following sentences is *need* used as a semi-modal verb?

a) "Nobody need hear about this disaster."
b) "He needs to learn some respect."
c) "I think you need a haircut."

d) “Does she need to study more?”

4. Which is the only semi-modal verb that takes the auxiliary verb *do* to become negative?

a) dare
b) need
c) used to
d) ought to

5. Which of the following sentences does **not** use a semi-modal verb?

a) “Need I ask why this report is late?”
b) “We’d all like some more, but who dares ask?”
c) “We all used to live here when we were younger.”
d) “You oughtn’t concern yourself with this matter.”

Infinitives

Definition

An **infinitive** is the most basic form of a verb. It is “unmarked” (which means that it is not conjugated for tense or person), and it is preceded by the **particle** *to*.

Infinitives are known as **non-finite verbs**, meaning they do not express actions being

performed by the subjects of clauses. Instead, infinitives function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs to describe actions as ideas.

Infinitives are distinct from a similar construction known as **bare infinitives** or the **base forms** of verbs, which are simply infinitives without the particle *to*. Although nearly identical, we use them in different ways than "full" infinitives, which we'll look at later in this section.

Using infinitives

Infinitives are used to express an action as a concept, rather than what is being done or performed by the subject of a clause. In this way, they can function as **nouns, adjectives**, or **adverbs**—that is, nearly any role in a sentence except that of a main verb.

Infinitives can stand on their own to complete these functions, or they can work together with their own **predicates** (any additional information that modifies or completes them) to form **infinitive phrases**. Infinitive phrases function as a nouns, adjectives, or adverbs as a single, holistic unit.

(In the examples in this section, infinitive phrases have been put in **bold**, while the infinitive verbs that begin them are in *italics*.)

Making infinitives negative

To make an infinitive or infinitive phrase negative, we use the word *not* before the infinitive.

We can also put greater emphasis on *not* by placing it after *to*.*

(*This creates what is known as a **split infinitive**—an infinitive that has an adverb between *to* and the base form of the verb. While some traditional grammar guides state that this should never be done, in reality there is no such "rule" in English; it is perfectly grammatical to split an infinitive, and in many cases it sounds more natural to do so.)

Infinitives as nouns

Because infinitives and infinitive phrases can function as nouns, it means that they can be **the subject** of a clause, the **direct object** of a verb, or a **predicate noun**.

Subjects

The **subject** performs, occupies, or controls the action of the verb.

• "***To err*** is human; ***to forgive*** is divine."

• "***To study* mathematics at Harvard** was her ultimate dream."

• "***To live* in the city** means adjusting to a completely different lifestyle."

Objects

As direct objects

A **direct object** is a person or thing that directly receives the action of the verb in a clause. An infinitive that acts as the object of another verb is sometimes known as a **verb complement**.

Remember that **intransitive verbs** do **not** take direct objects, so you will only find infinitives used as the objects of **transitive verbs**.

- "I'm not going unless you agree ***to go*** **with me**."
- "You appear ***to be*** **correct**."
- "Please be quiet; I'm trying ***to study***."
- "They're attempting ***to solve*** **the equation**."
- "Let me know if you decide **to leave early**."
- "We hope ***to go*** **in the near future**."
- "We rarely manage ***to get*** **out of the house for the night**."

As objects in reported speech

When we use **reported speech**, we often use infinitives as the direct object of a "reporting verb" to express what was said or asked in the past. For example:

- "He asked ***to help*** **us fix the car**."
- "She said **not** ***to answer*** **the phone**."

• “He demanded ***to speak*** **to the manager**.”

• “They offered ***to take*** **me to the airport**.”

• “I promised ***to buy*** **her a diamond ring**.”

• “He threatened ***to report*** **me to the police** if I didn’t give him back the money.”

As object complements

Certain verbs do not make sense with only a direct object, especially when that direct object is a person. More information is required about the object’s relationship with the verb to form a complete thought. This extra information is known as the **object complement**.

An infinitive can also act as an **object complement**, which is word or group of words that describe, rename, or complete the direct object of the verb. For example:

• “I don’t expect you ***to approve*** **of my decision**.”

• “She’s forcing me ***to work*** **through the weekend**.”

• “We need you ***to make*** **a few more copies**.”

• “Janet’s father wants her ***to go*** **to Harvard**.”

• “I would like the boss ***to see*** **these reports**.”

• “He persuaded me ***to marry*** **him**.”

• “They taught me (how) ***to work*** **the photocopier**.”

We often use infinitives as object complements in **reported speech** to express what someone said **to** or asked **of** someone. For example:

• "He asked me ***to help*** **him**."

• "She told me **not *to answer* the phone**."

Gerunds vs. Infinitives

Certain verbs can take either **gerunds** or infinitives as direct objects. In some cases, this results in no difference in meaning. For example:

Infinitive	Gerund
"I like ***to hike*** **on the weekend**."	"I like ***hiking*** **on the weekend**."
"She loves ***to read***."	"She loves ***reading***."
"They hate ***to get*** **bad news**."	"They hate ***getting*** **bad news**."
"I prefer ***to go out*** **on a Friday** than ***to stay*** **at home**."	"I prefer ***going out*** **on a Friday** than ***staying*** **at home**."

In other instances, however, the meaning of the clause is significantly changed as a result. For instance, the verbs *remember*, *forget*, *try*, and *stop* can have both infinitives and gerunds

as direct objects, but the meaning changes depending on which is used. For example

Infinitive	Gerund
“I remembered ***to close*** **the window**.” (I didn’t forget to do it.)	“I remember ***closing*** **the window**.” (I clearly recall it.)
“I forgot ***to meet*** **John earlier**.” (I didn’t remember to do it.)	“I forget ***meeting*** **John earlier**.” (I don’t remember this fact even though it happened.)
“Try ***to get*** **some rest**.” (Attempt to do this.)	“Try ***getting*** **some rest**.” (Try this as a possible solution to the problem.)
“I stopped ***to drink*** **water** before bed.” (I interrupted what I was doing to drink water.)	“I stopped ***drinking*** **water** before bed.” (I don’t drink water before bed anymore.)

Predicate nouns

Predicate nouns are a subset of a larger category known as **subject complements** (including **predicate pronouns** and **predicative adjectives**), which rename or re-identify the subject after a **linking verb** (usually a form of the verb *be*). For example:

• “All I want is ***to be*** **left alone**.”

• “The best thing in life is ***to spend*** **time with those you love**.”

• “The best we can hope for is ***to break*** **even**.”

Infinitives as adjectives

When infinitives are used as adjectives, they function in a similar way to **relative clauses** (also known as **adjective clauses**), providing more information about a noun or pronoun that they appear directly after. For example:

• “This is a good place ***to start*** **reading**.” (*To start reading* modifies the noun *place*.)

• “Give your brother something ***to play*** **with**.” (*To play with* modifies the pronoun *something*.)

• “Find a friend ***to help*** **you study**.” (*To help you study* modifies the noun *friend*.)

Infinitives as adverbs

We can also use infinitives as adverbs to modify the main verb in a sentence, describing a reason why an action is, was, or will be done. Infinitives used in this way are often known as **infinitives of purpose**. For example:

• “I started running ***to improve*** **my health**.”

We can also use the phrases *in order* and *so as* to add formal emphasis to an infinitive of purpose, as in:

• "We must leave now *in order* ***to catch*** **our train**."

• "He's been studying all week *so as* ***to improve*** **his grades**."

Note that we do not use the preposition *for* before the infinitive; we only use *for* with a noun or noun phrase to create a **prepositional phrase** that modifies the verb to describe its purpose. Consider, for example, these three sentences:

✔ "I went to the supermarket ***to buy*** **some bread**." (correct—infinitive phrase)

✔ "I went to the supermarket for some bread." (correct—prepositional phrase)

✖ I went to the supermarket **for** ***to buy*** **some bread**." (incorrect—preposition used with infinitive phrase)

Lone infinitives

We can also use infinitives in this way as isolated responses to questions asking *why* something is done or is the case. For example:

• Speaker A: "Why are you going to New York?"

• Speaker B: "***To see*** **the Empire State Building**."

• Speaker A: "Why did you turn on the TV?"

• Speaker B: "***To watch*** **the news**."

These responses are known as **elliptical sentences**, meaning that part of the sentence has been omitted because it is implied. In this case, the implied section is "because I wanted…." As this element is implicitly understood, we often leave it out entirely and simply use the infinitive on its own.

Infinitives vs. Base Forms (Bare Infinitives)

The **base form** of a verb is simply the infinitive without the particle *to*—like an infinitive, it is uninflected for tense and person. Because of this similarity, the base form of a verb is often known as a **bare infinitive**, and some grammar guides and writers make little distinction between the two forms.

However, infinitives and base-form verbs function differently, so it is important to distinguish between them. An infinitive can be used in a sentence as a noun, an adverb, or an adjective, but it cannot act as a true verb that expresses the action of a subject.

The base form of a verb, on the other hand, can be used in conjunction with the **auxiliary verb** *do* to become negative or to form questions. They are also used with **modal auxiliary verbs** to express things like possibility, necessity, obligation and permission, as well as to create the simple **future tense**.

Verbs that take bare infinitives

The base form is also used after the direct object of certain action verbs, such as *let*, *help*, and *make*, as well as after **verbs of the senses**, such as *hear*, *see*, and *feel*. Let's look at some examples of these below. The bare infinitives (base forms) are in **bold**, while the main verbs are underlined and the direct objects are *italicized*:

- "Please let *me* **go** to the party, mom." (Please give me permission to go.)
- "His father makes *him* **study**." (His father forces him to study.)
- "Jack is helping *me* **clean** the garage." (Jack is cleaning the garage with me.)
- "He heard *me* **shout**." (He could that I was shouting.)
- "I saw *her* **look** in my direction." (I could see that she was looking in my direction.)
- "I felt *him* **touch** my arm." (I could feel that he touched my arm.)

(Note that these are not the only verbs that can be followed by bare infinitives.)

After had better

The base forms of verbs are also used after the phrase *had better*, which acts like the modal verb ***should*** to suggest a required or desirable action. For example:

- "You had better **clean** this up before your father gets home."
- "I think we'd better **go** home soon."

After *why*

Bare infinitives can also follow the word *why* to form questions, as in:

• "Why **study** when I already know the material by heart?"

• "Why **watch** TV when we could play outside?"

These types of questions are called **elliptical**, which, as we saw above, means that part of the sentence has been left out because it is implied. The full questions might read:

• "Why ***should I*** **study** when I already know the material by heart?"

• "Why ***would we*** **watch** TV when we could play outside?"

Since the italicized parts of these sentences can be implied, they are sometimes left out entirely.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is a distinguishing feature of **infinitives**?

a) They cannot conjugate for tense or person
b) They can function as a noun, adjective, or adverb
c) They are preceded by the word *to*
d) A & C
e) B & C

f) All of the above

2. Which of the following is **not** something an infinitive can function as?

a) The subject of a clause
b) The main verb of a clause
c) The direct object of a verb
d) An adverb modifying a verb

3. True or False: Infinitives and gerunds are always interchangeable as direct objects of verbs.

a) True
b) False

4. Identify the grammatical function of the infinitive phrase (in **bold**) in the following sentence:

"I need the employees **to work a little harder**."

a) Object complement
b) Predicate noun
c) Adjective
d) Adverb

5. Which of the following distinguishes the **base form** of a verb from the **infinitive form**?

a) It conjugates for tense or person
b) It can function as a direct object of a main verb
c) It is not preceded by the word *to*
d) A & C
e) B & C
f) All of the above

Participles

Definition

Participles are words formed from verbs that can function as adjectives or gerunds or can be used to form the **continuous** tenses and the **perfect** tenses of verbs. There are two participle forms: the **present participle** and the **past participle**.

Form

The present participle

The present participle is the "-ing" form of a verb. This verb form is always the same, whether the verb is **regular** or **irregular**. For example:

Regular verbs

Regular verb	Present Participle
apologize	**apologizing**
close	**closing**
follow	**following**
look	**looking**
remember	**remembering**

Irregular verbs

Irregular verb	Present Participle
eat	**eating**
run	**running**
sing	**singing**
think	**thinking**

write	**writing**
be	**being**

The past participle

Unlike the present participle, the past participle form changes depending on the verb. The past participle of regular verbs ends in "-ed," and is generally the same as the simple past tense of the verb. For example:

Regular verb	Past Simple	Past Participle
apologize	apologized	**apologized**
close	closed	**closed**
follow	followed	**followed**
look	looked	**looked**
remember	remembered	**remembered**

The past participle form of irregular verbs has a variety of endings that must be memorized.

Note that the past participle is usually (but not always) different from the past simple form for irregular verbs. For example:

Irregular verb	Past Simple	Past Participle
eat	ate	**eaten**
run	ran	**run**
sing	sang	**sung**
think	thought	**thought**
write	wrote	**written**
be	was/were	**been**

Using participles as adjectives and in participle phrases

Present and past participles can be used as adjectives or as part of a **participle phrase**. Participles allow us to condense two sentences into one, expressing ideas that would otherwise require relative clauses, subordinating conjunctions, etc., in a more economical

way. For example:

Longer Form	Using a participle
“She soothed the baby, who was crying.”	“She soothed the **crying** baby.”
“I was oblivious to the doorbell ringing because I was singing in the shower.”	“**Singing in the shower**, I was oblivious to the doorbell ringing.”
“We finally found James, who was hiding under the bed, after hours of searching.”	“After hours of searching, we finally found James **hiding under the bed**.”

As adjectives

When we form an adjective using the *present participle*, we imply *action* on the part of the noun being modified. For example:

• “She soothed the **crying** *baby*.” (The baby is crying).

• “The **speeding** *car* crashed into the tree.” (The car was speeding.)

• “**Hugging**, *the two sisters* said goodbye to each other.” (The sisters were hugging.)

When we form an adjective using the *past participle*, on the other hand, we don’t imply action on the part of noun that it modifies. Instead, we describe a characteristic of that noun. For example:

• “I picked up the **broken** *bottle*.” (The bottle is broken.)

• “The **jumbled** *puzzle pieces* were all over the floor.” (The puzzle pieces are jumbled.)

• “Please get me a bag of **frozen** *vegetables*.” (The vegetables are frozen.)

As participle phrases

Participial phrases (sometimes known as **participial clauses**) are groups of words that contain a participle and function as adjective phrases.

Present participle phrase

If we use the present participle in a phrase, we give the clause an **active** meaning. In other words, the noun being modified is the **agent** of the action. For example:

• “**Singing in the shower**, *I* was oblivious to the doorbell ringing.” (I was singing.)

• “*James*, **hiding under the bed**, was completely silent.” (James was hiding.)

Past participle phrase

If we use the past participle, the noun being modified is either given a **passive** role in the action, or else is being described. For example:

• “*The turkey*, **burnt to a crisp**, was thrown in the garbage.”

• "*My sister*, **exhausted after a long day's work**, has fallen asleep on the sofa."

In the first example, *the turkey* is not the agent of the action, but is being *acted upon*; it has been burnt by the oven or by the person cooking, and so it has a passive role. In the second example, *my sister* is also not the agent of the verb *exhaust*. Instead, *exhausted* is used to describe how she feels.

Perfect participle phrase (*Having + past participle*)

When we want to emphasize that one event happened before another, we can use the structure *having + past participle*, also known as the **perfect participle**. For example:

• "**Having seen** the movie before, I wouldn't want to see it again."

• "**Having done** a lot of exercise this morning, we should eat a big lunch."

• "She was exhausted, **having stayed up** all night watching TV."

Sentence Placement

Initial position

When a participle or participle phrase occurs in the initial position, it is usually separated

from the rest of the sentence by a comma. For example:

• "**Running to the car**, the boy welcomed his father home after three months away."

• "**Singing in the shower**, I was oblivious to the doorbell ringing."

• "**Scared**, my sister slept with the light on."

Middle position

When the participle or phrase occurs in the middle position, and is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, it should be set apart from the rest of the sentence by two commas. For example:

• "My sister, **exhausted**, has fallen asleep on the sofa."

• "James, **hiding under the bed**, was completely silent."

• "The turkey, **burnt to a crisp**, was thrown in the garbage."

However, if it occurs in the middle position and is essential to the meaning of the sentence, it should **not** be set apart by commas. For example:

• "The students **finished with their work** may have a break."

• "Jackets **left behind** will be donated."

• "Participants **breaking the rules** will be removed from the competition."

Final position

If the participle or phrase occurs in the final position immediately after the noun that it modifies, it doesn't need a comma. For example:

• "We looked for hours and finally found *James* **hiding**."

• "The cat had no interest in *the poor dog* **wagging its tail**."

• "I was in such a hurry I didn't notice *my jacket* **left on the table**."

However, when it occurs in final position but **not** immediately after the noun that it modifies, it **does** need a comma. For example:

• "It was obvious *he* really enjoyed dinner, **having had a second helping of dessert**."

• "*My sister* cried as she packed up her belongings, **saddened at the idea of moving out of her childhood home**."

• "*Most of the puzzle pieces* have disappeared, **misplaced after so many years**."

Common mistakes

When we use participles as adjectives, it's important that the noun modified is clearly stated and that the participle appears as close to it as possible. Otherwise, we run the risk of errors known as **misplaced modifiers** and **dangling modifiers**.

Misplaced modifier

A misplaced modifier can occur when there is more than one noun in the sentence. If we don't place the participle close enough to the noun that it modifies, it may seem that it modifies another noun. For example:

• "**Terrified after watching a scary movie**, *my father* had to comfort *my little sister*."

In the above sentence, the participle phrase *terrified after watching a scary movie* is supposed to modify *my little sister*. However, since *my father* appears closer to the participle phrase, it seems it is the father that is terrified. The sentence should be rewritten to correct the misplaced modifier. For example:

• "My father had to comfort my sister, terrified after watching a scary movie." ***or***

• "**Terrified after watching a scary movie**, *my sister* had to be comforted by *my father*."

or

• "*My sister*, **terrified after watching a scary movie**, had to be comforted by *my father*."

Dangling modifier

A dangling modifier occurs when we don't clearly state the noun that is supposed to be modified by the participle. For example:

• "**Walking down the road**, the birds were singing."

Because the sentence does not state who was walking down the road, is seems that it was *the birds*, which probably is not the intended meaning. The sentence needs to be rewritten to correct the dangling modifier. For example:

• "**Walking down the road**, *I* heard the birds singing."

Using participles as gerunds

The present participle is also used to create **gerunds**. A gerund is a form of a verb that can be used as a noun, functioning as a **subject**, **complement**, or **object** of a sentence. For example:

• "**Swimming** is my favorite sport." (subject)

• "My brother's favorite sport is **cycling**." (complement)

• "Do you enjoy **running**?" (object)

Using participles in verb tenses

Both present and past participles are used along with auxiliary verbs to form multi-part verb tenses.

The present participle in verb tenses

The present participle is used to form the past, present, and future **continuous tenses**.

Present Continuous

The **present continuous tense** is mainly used for stating an action that is taking place at the moment of speaking, or an action that will take place in the near future. It is formed using the present tense of the auxiliary verb *be* + the present participle of the main verb. For example:

- "I**'m singing**."
- "He**'s running**."
- "We**'re hiding**."

Past Continuous

The **past continuous tense** is primarily used to describe an action that took place over a period of time in the past, especially if interrupted by another action. It is formed using *was* (the past tense of the auxiliary verb *be*) + the present participle of the main verb. For example:

- "I **was singing** in the shower when the doorbell rang."
- "She **was eating** dinner when I called."
- "They **were helping** their mom clean the house all day."

Present perfect continuous

The **present perfect continuous tense** is mainly used to describe an action that has recently taken place and still has an effect on the present. It places the emphasis on the duration of the action rather than the result. It is formed using *have/has* + *been* + the present participle form of the main verb. For example:

• "I **have been singing** loudly, so my throat's sore."

• "I think she**'s been crying**—her eyes are really red."

• "They**'ve been running** for 20 minutes already."

Past perfect continuous

The **past perfect continuous tense** is used to describe an action that began in the past, and continued until another point in the past. It is formed using *had* + *been* + the present participle form of the main verb. For example:

• "They **had been singing** for two hours when the concert finished."

• "She **had been waiting** for a bus for a long time when I saw her."

• "I **had been reading** my book for about 20 minutes when I realized it was time to leave."

Future Continuous

The **future continuous tense** is used to describe an action that will be in progress at a certain point in the future. It is formed using *will* + *be* + the present participle form of the main verb. For example:

• "Tomorrow at eight o'clock I **will be waiting** for my flight."

• "Don't call at six o'clock because they**'ll be having dinner**."

• "She**'ll be driving** all afternoon tomorrow."

Future Perfect Continuous

The **future perfect continuous tense** is used to describe an action that will continue up until a certain point in the future. It emphasizes the duration of the action, and is formed using *will* + *have* + *been* + the present participle form of the main verb. For example:

• "At eight o'clock I**'ll have been waiting** here for an hour."

• "She**'ll have been living** in New York City for 10 years next month."

• "We **will have been working** on this project for three weeks as of tomorrow."

The past participle in verb tenses

The past participle is used in forming the present, past, and future **simple perfect tenses**.

Present Perfect

The **present perfect tense** is used to describe an action or experience in the recent past that still has an effect on the present. It is similar to the present perfect continuous, but instead of placing the emphasis on the duration of the action, it subtly emphasizes the result. It is formed using *have/has* + the past participle form of the main verb. For example:

• "I **have eaten** already."

• "I**'ve** spent all my money."

• "She **hasn't been** here before."

Past Perfect

The **past perfect tense** is used to describe an action that was completed in the past, prior to another past action. It is formed using *had* + the past participle form of the main verb. For example:

• "I **had eaten** when she called."

• "Why did you visit Las Vegas again when you **had been** there before?"

• "She **had cooked** dinner and had it waiting on the table when we got home."

Future perfect

The **future perfect tense** is used to describe an action that will be completed at a certain point in the future. It is formed using *will* + *have* + the past participle form of the main verb.

For example:

• “When you get here, we**’ll have eaten** already.”

• “They**’ll have finished** by late tonight.”

• “The baby **will have woken up** by six o’clock tomorrow morning.”

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Participles are used to form _____.

a) adjectives
b) gerunds
c) verb tenses
d) A & B
e) all of the above

2. The present participle ends in _____.

a) “-ed”
b) “-ing”
c) A & B
d) none of the above

3. Which of the following words is **not** a past participle?

a) been
b) eaten
c) ran
d) sung

4. Complete the following sentence:

"_____ under the bed, the dog was terrified of the thunder."

a) Having hiding
b) Have hidden
c) Hid
d) Hiding

5. Which of the following sentences is punctuated **correctly**?

a) "James, scared he was going to fail the test, stayed up all night studying."
b) "James scared he was going to fail the test, stayed up all night studying."
c) "James, scared he was going to fail the test stayed up all night studying."
d) "James scared he was going to fail, the test stayed up all night studying."

Action Verbs

Definition

Action verbs (also known as **dynamic verbs**) are verbs that are used to explain what the subject of a sentence is actively doing. For example, *ran, swim, jump, move, look*, and *catch* are all action verbs. Here are some examples of action verbs being used in sentences:

• "The man **stretched** his arm before he **threw** the baseball."

• "The kittens **leaped** from the table to the chair."

• "After she **dove** into the water, the swimmer **raced** to the other side of the pool as fast as she could."

• "A boy **rolled** down the hill on a skateboard."

• "Before it **stopped** for a break, the horse **ran** for five miles."

Importance to sentences

Consider the following sentences:

• "The train **is** on the track."

• "The gazelles **are** in the field."

Neither of these sentences contains a verb that describes an *action* the subject is taking. Instead, they use the **stative verb** *be* to describe the conditions or states of being of the subjects. However, adding action verbs helps to identify what the subject of the sentence is

actively doing:

• "The train **raced** along the track."

• "The gazelles **are galloping** in the field."

Action verbs can also dramatically impact the meaning of the sentence. They not only say what the subject is doing, but can also demonstrate the manner in which the subject is doing it. For example, consider the following sentence:

• "Susie **sat** on the couch at the end of her work day."

The action verb *sat* lets the reader know that Susie moved from a standing position to a sitting position on her couch. The following sentence also tells the reader this information, but the different choice of action verb provides more meaning to the sentence:

• "Susie **collapsed** onto her couch at the end of the work day."

In this sentence, the action verb *collapsed* not only indicates that Susie moved from a standing position to a resting position, but that the transition was much more dramatic. This could be used to illustrate that Susie was very tired or perhaps not feeling well. In any case, it provides a more descriptive action than *sat*.

Here is another example of similar action verbs providing different information:

• "The man **tossed** the stone to the side of the path."

• "The man ***heaved*** the stone to the side of the path."

In both of the above sentences, the man is moving the stone off the path. However, the action

verb *tossed* implies that the stone was light enough to throw, while *heaved* indicates that the stone was very heavy. As you can see, by changing the action verb, we have significantly changed the sentence's meaning.

Difference from other verb types

All sentences require a verb to be complete, but it does not have to be an action verb: there are also stative verbs, linking verbs, and auxiliary verbs.

Stative verbs

Unlike action verbs, **stative verbs** indicate the state or condition of the subject, such as **thoughts or opinions** (*agree, recognize, doubt*), **possession** (*own, possess, belong, have*), **emotion** (*love, hate, like, fear, enjoy*), or **senses** (*seem, look, hear, taste, feel*).

We can see how no action is being described by these verbs in the following examples:

• "I **own** 10 cars."

• "The kids **love** to play outside in the summer."

• "Janet **feels** that we should go home."

You may have noticed that some of the stative verbs can function as action verbs in certain contexts. In this case, a simplified rule for identifying if a verb is stative or active is to conjugate the verb into one of the continuous tenses (by using its **present participle**) and see if the sentence still makes sense.

For example:

✔ “I **own** 10 cars.”

✖ “I **am owning** 10 cars.” (incorrect—stative verb)

✔ “I **see** your point.”

✖ “I **am seeing** your point.” (incorrect—stative verb) However:

✔ “I **am seeing** a movie later.” (correct—action verb)

(There are some exceptions and peculiarities in English around this rule, but it is a good starting point for differentiating stative and action verbs. Go to the section on **Stative Verbs** to learn more.)

Linking verbs

Linking verbs are a subset of the stative verbs we looked at above—they also describe condition or state as opposed to an action. Linking verbs are used to connect a subject to an adjective or phrase that describes it. For example:

• “She **is** smart.”

• “They **seem** very strong.”

• “This soup **tastes** funny.”

Auxiliary verbs

Auxiliary verbs are verbs that precede stative, linking, or action verbs to help complete their meaning. For example:

• "They **should** *run* faster."

• "You **can** *see* the lake from the porch on the lake house."

• "I **have been** *thinking* about a new method for the project."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following words is an action verb?

a) is
b) can
b) jump
d) shall

2. Identify the action verb in the following sentence.
"I think the man who delivers our mail is cute."

a) think
b) is

c) who
d) delivers

3. Which of the following sentences does **not** contain an action verb?
a) “I hope to possess my own company some day.”
b) “He jumped from the rooftop into the pool.”
c) “She has been smiling at me from across the classroom.”
d) “Let’s drive to the mountains for the weekend.”

4. Action verbs are also known as which of the following?
a) stylistic verbs
b) state verbs
c) dynamic verbs
d) holding verbs

Stative Verbs

Definition

Stative verbs (also known as **state verbs**) are verbs that describe a static condition, situation, or state of being. They are contrasted with **action verbs** (also called **dynamic verbs**), which describe an active, dynamic action that can be performed by a person or thing.

Stative verbs can be in the present, past, or future tense; however, because they describe static conditions, they are usually unable to progress through time, and they therefore cannot be used when forming the **continuous** or **progressive forms** of verb tenses. For this reason, they are sometimes referred to as **non-continuous verbs** or **non-progressive verbs**.

However, some stative verbs *can* be used in a continuous tense in certain situations, as when describing a temporary state that has begun and will end. This is becoming more common in modern English, and the prescriptive rule that stative verbs can never be continuous is becoming less strict. We'll look at some of these exceptions in the sections below.

Types of stative verbs

Linking verbs are usually used as stative verbs; these include the verb *be* and the **verbs of the senses**. Other verbs that are considered stative are those that express emotions, possession, cognition, and states or qualities.

Below, we'll look at common examples of different types of stative verbs. As we will see, certain verbs can be either dynamic or stative, depending on their use and context in a sentence.

(It's important to note that the sections below do not contain exhaustive lists of stative verbs; they are only meant to provide illustrative examples.)

To be

The verb *be* is the most common linking verb. It is used for describing general characterizations, sensations, measurements, location, or to rename the subject.
For example:

- "You **are *wrong***."
- "It **was *hot*** yesterday."
- "I **am not *hungry***."
- "They **were *confused***."
- "I can tell that you **are *upset***."
- "Our daughter **is *one week old***."
- "She **is *five feet tall***."
- "John **is *in the other room***."
- "This **is** *a lost cause*."

Using the continuous form

However, the linking verb *be* can function as an action verb when it is used to mean "to behave." We can test whether *be* is acting as a stative or action verb by putting it into one of the continuous tenses. For example:

✔ "The children **are being *too noisy***." (Correct—it is an **action verb**.)

✖ “The children **are being *outside***.” (Incorrect—it is a **stative verb**.)

Sense verbs

Verbs of the senses, or “**sense verbs**” for short, are used to indicate perceptions based on physical or mental sensations. The sense verbs are:

- taste
- smell
- sound
- seem
- feel
- look
- appear

When sense verbs are used as linking verbs, they merely relate the means by which the speaker has arrived at such a sensation about the subject. We pair them with **predicative adjectives**.

For example:

- “I **feel *terrible*** today.”
- “You **sound *tired***.”
- “She didn’t **sound *Irish***.”

- "You **look *fabulous*** today."
- "He doesn't **look *very happy***."
- "This doesn't **seem *right***."
- "The car **appears *OK***, but I'll have to drive it to be sure."
- "That **smells *nice***."
- "This milk **tastes *strange***."

Using the continuous form

Note, however, that some of the sense verbs can take the continuous tense to describe a temporary state in some contexts; they are more common in more casual speech and writing. For example:

• "You **are looking** great, Suzy!"

• "It **is seeming** less likely by the day that we will succeed."

The sense verb *feel* is unique, though, in that it is very often used in the continuous form when talking about one's or someone else's health, as in:

• "I**'m not feeling** well at all."

• "**Are** you **feeling** OK, John?"

Certain sense verbs also function as **action verbs** in other contexts, and these can take the

continuous form. For example:

• “I **was feeling** gently around the table in the dark.”

• “The guards **are sounding** the alarm!”

• “What’s that delicious food I **am smelling**?”

• “He **was looking** across the table at me.”

• “Birds **have been appearing** out of nowhere.”

• “He **is tasting** the soup to decide whether it need salt.”

Verbs of emotion

Verbs that describe our emotions about something are also considered stative. These **transitive verbs** take nouns, noun phrases, **gerunds**, and sometimes **infinitives** as their objects. Here are some common examples using stative verbs of emotion:

- “She **likes** old movies.”
- “My son **loves** to read.”
- “I **enjoy** walking along the beach.”
- “I **hate** to eat dinner alone.”
- “The kids **dislike** sharing their toys.”
- “I **prefer** salad to French fries.”

- "I **don't mind** eating vegetables."

Most of the time, a verb of emotion can take either a gerund or an infinitive with little to no difference in meaning. However, an infinitive sometimes refers to a potential activity, while a gerund refers to an activity in general.

Other verbs of emotion, such as *enjoy* or *don't mind*, **can't** take the infinitive at all:

✖ "I **enjoy to play** tennis." (incorrect)
✔ "I **enjoy playing** tennis." (correct)

✖ "I **don't mind to work** on my own." (incorrect)
✔ "I **don't mind working** on my own." (correct)

Using the continuous form

As with the sense verbs, we can sometimes use verbs of emotion in the continuous form to describe an ongoing but temporary sensation. However, such uses are generally quite informal. For example:

• "We **are loving** this neighborhood."

• "I**'m liking** our chances of winning the championship."

• "I**'m hating** the second season of this show."

Although *enjoy* is a verb of emotion, it is often used in the continuous form and is not considered informal. For instance:

• “He **is enjoying** his newfound wealth.”

• “**Are** you **enjoying** your meal?”

However, there are still some verbs of emotion that generally **do not** take a continuous form, as in:

✖ “She **is preferring** her old school.” (incorrect)

Verbs of possession and attribution

Possession and attribution are static actions, not dynamic ones. Verbs that refer to ownership are considered stative and do not take the continuous form. For example:

- “I **have** a large house.”
- “She **owns** three cars.”
- “That stereo **belongs** to me.”
- “They **have** a large family.”
- “He **holds** several postgraduate degrees.”
- “She **possesses** a great wealth of knowledge.”

Using the continuous form

We often find some of these verbs used in the continuous forms, but their meanings are different and they are functioning as action verbs instead, as in:

• “You**’re not holding** on to the hammer tight enough!” (*Hold* means “to grip with one’s hands” in this context.)

• “He thinks that a ghost **is possessing** him.” (*Possess* means “to gain control or power over” in this context.)

• “She**’s having** a baby in a few months.” (*Have* means “to give birth to” in this context.)

• “They**’re having** a party next door.” (*Have* means “to arrange or carry out” in this context.)

However, if the verb is indicating possession or attribution, we cannot use it in a continuous form:

- ✖ “I **am having** a large house.” (incorrect)
- ✖ “She **is owning** three cars.” (incorrect)
- ✖ “That stereo **is belonging** to me.” (incorrect)
- ✖ “They **are having** a large family.” (incorrect)
- ✖ “He **is holding** several postgraduate degrees.” (incorrect)
- ✖ “She **is possessing** a great wealth of knowledge.” (incorrect)

Verbs of cognition

Verbs of mental cognition, such as *understand, know, recognize,*, or *think*, are generally used as stative verbs and do not take continuous forms. For example:

✔ “I **understand** the issue.” (correct)

✖ “I **am understanding** the issue.” (incorrect)

✔ “She **knows** Janet very well.” (correct)

✖ “She **is knowing** Janet very well.” (incorrect)

Using the continuous form

Some verbs of cognition can be stative or dynamic, depending on the context. If they can correctly be used in a continuous form, they are expressing a dynamic action. For example:

• “I **consider** my options before I make a decision.”

✔ “I **am considering** my options before I make a decision.” (correct—action verb)

• “I **consider** myself a rational person.”

✖ “I **am considering** myself a rational person.” (incorrect—stative verb)

• “They **thought** of an answer.”

✔ “They **were thinking** of an answer.” (correct—action verb)

The stative verb *understand*, however, has some informal uses in which the continuous form is often considered acceptable, as in:

• “I’m sorry, I**’m not understanding** your question.”

• **Am** I **understanding** you correctly?”

Verbs of states or qualities

Besides the linking verb *be* and the verbs of the senses, we can use other verbs, such as *weigh*, *depend, involve, owe*, or *consist*, to describe the state or qualities of something. For example:

✔ "He **weighs** 160 pounds." (correct)

✖ "He **is weighing** 160 pounds." (incorrect)

✖ "This report **involves** multiple sites across the world." (correct)

✖ "This report **is involving** multiple sites across the world." (incorrect)

✔ "Your happiness **depends** on doing something you enjoy." (correct)

✖ "Your happiness **is depending** on doing something you enjoy." (incorrect)

✔ "John **owes** me 20 dollars!" (correct)

✖ "John **is owing** me 20 dollars!" (incorrect)

✔ "The book **consists** of research from several prominent scientists." (correct)

✖ "The book **is consisting** of research from several prominent scientists." (incorrect)

Using the continuous form

Some of these verbs can be dynamic or stative, depending on the context and the way they are used. When the verb is describing an attribute of the subject, it functions as stative verb (as we saw above). When the verb describes an action taken by the subject, though, it is

functioning as an action verb, as in:

• "He **is weighing** each bag before delivery."

• "I **am involving** a number of people in this project."

The **phrasal verb** *depend on*, however, is always stative, but we often find it being used in the continuous form, especially when its subject is a person. For instance:

• "We **are depending** on you to get this done in time."

Continuous Forms vs. Gerunds

With so much emphasis placed on whether or not a stative verb is able to use one of the continuous forms, it is important to distinguish between **continuous forms** and **gerunds**.

The continuous (or progressive) forms refer to six specific verb tenses: **present continuous tense**, **present perfect continuous tense**, **past continuous tense**, **past perfect continuous tense**, **future continuous tense**, and **future perfect continuous tense**. These all use the **present participles** of verbs to express an action that is continuously (or **progressively**) happening. Generally speaking, only **action verbs** can take the continuous forms. (Although, as we've seen above, there are many exceptions to and interpretations of this rule.)

Gerunds, on the other hand, refer to the "-ing" form of the verb when it is used as a noun. When a gerund takes additional information as part of its **predicate**, the entire phrase (known as a **gerund phrase**) functions as a noun. Any verb, even a stative one, can be used as a gerund. For example:

• "**Knowing your own weaknesses** will help you become stronger."

• "I enjoy **being in Paris**."

• "What I like most is **reading in a quiet room**."

• "**Loving one's work** is a rare but wonderful accomplishment."

Because the gerund and present participle of a verb look identical, it can often be confusing to determine how a verb is behaving. However, just remember that if the verb and its constituent parts are functioning as a noun would in a sentence, then it is a gerund; if it is describing an action that the subject is performing, then it is a present participle used to create a continuous tense.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is the function of a stative verb?

a) To describe a dynamic action taken by the subject

b) To describe a condition that must be met for something to happen

c) To describe the subject's state of being

d) To modify the meaning of other verbs

2. **In general**, which of the following is something a stative verb **cannot** do? a) Be used as a gerund

b) Be used in a continuous form
c) Be used in the future tense
d) Take a direct object

3. Which of the following **cannot** be used as a stative verb?
a) think
b) seem
c) exercise
d) have

4. Which of the following is **not** another name for stative verbs?
a) State verbs
b) Non-continuous verbs
c) Non-progressive verbs
d) Non-finite verbs

5. True or False: The linking verb *be* is **always** considered a stative verb?
a) True
b) False

Linking Verbs

Definition

Linking verbs (also known as **copulas** or **copular verbs**) are used to describe the state of being of the subject of a clause. Unlike **action verbs** (also called **dynamic verbs**), they connect the subject to the predicate of the clause without expressing any action.

To be

The verb *to be* is the most common linking verb. Unique among English verbs, *be* has eight different conjugations: *be, am, is, are, was, were, been,* and *being*. It can link the subject to an adjective (known as a **predicative adjective**) that describes it, or to a noun, noun phrase, or pronoun that renames it. These are collectively known as **subject complements**.

General descriptions

We can use nearly any adjective after *be* to describe the subject. For example:

- "You **are *wrong***."
- "It **is *cold*** today."
- "It **was *hot*** yesterday."
- "The team **is *terrible*** this year."
- "They **were *fortunate*** to have won."

• “She has **been *so stubborn***.”

• “He **is *really annoying***.”

Physical or emotional sensations

Be is very often used to describe a sensation belonging to the subject. These can be physical, as in:

• “I **am *cold***.”

• “We **are *thirsty***.”

• “They **were *tired***.”

Be can also describe emotional sensations:

• “He **is *sad***.”

• “He has **been *anxious*** lately.”

• “I can tell that you **are *upset***.”

Precise physical descriptions

Be is also used for specific physical descriptions of the subject, such as exact age, weight, or height.

Age

When we describe a subject's age, we can express it simply as a number, as in:

• "I **am *32***."

• "Our daughter **is *one***."

We can also use a unit of time between the number and the adjective *old*, as in:

• "I **am *32 years old***."

• "Our daughter **is *one week old***."

(However, we cannot use only the number and *years* or the number and *old*—"I am 32 years" and "Our daughter is one old" are both incorrect.)

Height

For height, we usually use the number, the unit, and the adjective *tall* all together, as in:

• "They **are *five feet tall***."

• "He **is *two meters tall***."

If we are using feet and inches as our units, there are a number of ways that we can write the sentence without using the adjective *tall*. These are especially prevalent in informal English. For example:

• "He **is** ***six foot***."

• "She **is** ***five foot three***."

• "I **am** ***five feet, three inches***."

Weight

When describing the subject's weight with *be*, we only use the number + the unit of measurement, as in:

• "I **am** ***185 pounds***."

• "This brick **is** ***four kilograms***."

With prepositional phrases

A linking verb can also be followed by a **prepositional phrase** that acts as an adjective to describe the subject. These usually describe the subject's location, though they can be used to provide other descriptions as well. For example:

• "John **is** ***in the other room***." (John is physically located in the other room.)

• "I will **be** ***away from the office*** this week." (I will not be present in the office this week.)

• "They **are** ***against this plan***." (They do not agree with or support this plan.)

Renaming the subject

We can also follow the linking verb *be* with a predicate noun, noun phrase, or pronoun that renames or re-identifies the subject. These add a descriptive element, without directly functioning as adjectives. For example:

• "She **is** *a bully*."

• "That**'s** *him*; that**'s** *the man we were looking for*."

• "They **are** *a lost cause*."

• "I have **been** *a mess* lately."

Be as an auxiliary verb

We must be careful not to confuse how *be* functions as a linking verb with how it functions as an **auxiliary verb**. When it is used as an auxiliary, *be* is no longer an independent verb describing the subject of the sentence. Instead, it helps other verbs to create the continuous tenses or to change the voice of the writing.

Creating verb tenses

Be frequently functions as an auxiliary verb by combining with the **present participle** of a verb to form one of the continuous tenses. For example:

• “I ***am*** **listening** to you.” (**present continuous tense**)

• “She ***was*** **working** very hard.” (**past continuous tense**)

• “They **will *be* waiting** for you at the airport.” (**future continuous tense**)

Passive voice

We can also use *be* as an auxiliary to create the **passive voice**. For example:

• “The book ***was*** **written** by an anonymous author.”

• “The victory **will *be* savored** for years.”

• “The hospitals ***were*** **built** in 1805.”

Sense verbs

Certain verbs are used to indicate perceptions, opinions, or bodily sensations. These are known as **verbs of the senses**, or “**sense verbs**” for short. The sense verbs are:

• **taste**
• **smell**
• **sound**
• **seem**
• **feel**
• **look**

• **appear**

Sense verbs merely relate the means by which the speaker has arrived at such a sensation about the subject. When we use them like this, they are functioning as linking verbs (rather than **action verbs**) and we pair them with predicative adjectives. (However, unlike *be*, we do not follow sense verbs with predicative nouns, noun phrases, or pronouns.)

For example:

• "I **feel *terrible*** today." (A feeling inside of being very unwell.)

• "You **sound *tired***." (A perception of tiredness in your voice.)

• "She didn't **sound *Italian***." (An opinion based on the way her voice sounds.)

• "You **look *fabulous*** today." (This is my opinion when I look at you.)

• "He doesn't **look *very happy***." (This is my opinion based on what he looks like. Note that the adverb *very* is modifying the adjective *happy*, not the verb *look*.)

• "This doesn't **feel *right***." (An opinion or perception of something not being as it should.)

• "The car **appears *OK***, but I'll have to drive it to be sure." (From what I can see, the car looks like it's in good condition.)

• "That **smells *nice***." (Sensation of a pleasant aroma.)

• "This milk **tastes *funny****." (Sensation of an odd or unpleasant taste.)

(**The adjective funny has two meanings. It can describe something that makes you laugh,*

or something that is strange, unpleasant, dubious, or not as it should be. It carries the latter meaning in the above example.)

If any of these verbs were used as action verbs, they could no longer be followed by an adjective—they would instead be modified by an adverb. For example:

• "I **felt *gently*** around the table in the dark." (Describes the action of feeling with one's hand.)

• "He **looked *quickly*** to the right." (Describes the action of looking in a certain direction.)

• "The car **appeared *out of nowhere***." (Describes the action of coming into sight, using a **prepositional phrase** as an adverb.)

• "Yes, you **heard *right***!" (*Right* in this case is an adverb meaning "accurately or correctly.")

Verbs of progression

Verbs that show progression, growth, or development are also often used as linking verbs. *Become* is a prime example of this kind of verb—it links an adjective that describes a development or progression by the subject. Here are some other verbs that can function as linking verbs in a similar way:

• **get**
• **grow**
• **prove**

• **remain**
• **turn**

As with the sense verbs, these can be followed by an adjective that describes the subject. For example:

• "The crowd **grew *quiet***."
• "The kids are **becoming *restless***."
• "I hope you **get *well*** soon."
• "Try to **remain *upbeat***."
• "Hopefully things don't **turn *ugly***."

These verbs can sometimes be followed by nouns, noun phrases, or pronouns that rename or re-identify the subject, as in:

• "The leader **became *a dictator*** after so many years in power."
• "He'll always **remain *my friend***."
• "They have **proven *valuable allies***."

Linking verbs vs. action verbs

The verbs *be*, *seem*, and *become* are always used as linking verbs (except when *be* is an **auxiliary verb**, as we looked at already). However, the other linking verbs all have the

capacity to behave as action verbs in a sentence. Sometimes it is tricky to know whether a verb is functioning as a linking verb or as an action verb, but there are ways that we can be sure.

Checking the predicate

The predicate of a linking verb is, by definition, an adjective, noun, noun phrase, or pronoun that directly describes, renames, or re-identifies the subject of the clause.

If we want to see if a verb is functioning as a linking verb, we can simply check whether the predicate that follows is describing the subject. If it is, then it is a linking verb; if it is not, then it is functioning as an action verb. For example:

• "He **looked** *unwell yesterday*." (Linking verb—the predicate *unwell yesterday* describes the subject of the clause, *he*.)

• "He **looked** *quickly to the right*." (Action verb—the predicate *quickly to the right* describes the action of the verb.)

• "I hope you **get** *better soon*." (Linking verb—the predicate *better soon* describes the subject of the clause, *you*.)

• "Would you please **get** *a glass of water* for me?" (Action verb—the predicate *a glass of water* is the direct object of the verb.)

Replacing the verb with *be*

If we are still not certain about the kind of verb we're dealing with, we can also try replacing the verb in question with *be*. Because *be* is only a linking verb when it functions on its own, the resulting sentence will only make sense if the original verb was also a linking verb.

Let's look at the two sets of examples above, this time replacing the verb in each case with *be*:

• "He **looked** unwell yesterday."

• "He **was** unwell yesterday." (The sentence makes sense, so the verb *looked* was a linking verb.)

• "He **looked** *quickly to the right*."

• "He **was** *quickly to the right*." (The sentence no longer makes sense, so the verb *looked* was an action verb.)

• "I hope you **get** *better soon*."

• "I hope you **are** *better soon*." (The sentence makes sense, so the verb *get* was a linking verb.)

• "Would you please **get** *a glass of water* for me?"

• "Would you please **are** *a glass of water* for me?" (The sentence no longer makes sense, so the verb *get* was an action verb.)

Sources of confusion – Good vs. Well

A common stumbling block for native speakers and learners of English alike is the correct usage of *good* versus *well*.

In most instances, *good* is an attributive adjective directly describing a noun, while *well* is an adverb describing a verb, adjective, or other adverb. For example:

• "He is a *good driver*."

• "She *writes well*."

We cannot use *good* and *well* interchangeably in these instances, and we can see immediately that the following would be incorrect:

✖ "He is a **well** driver."

✖ "She writes **good**."

However, *well* can also function as a predicative adjective, where it usually means "healthy" or "not ill." We use it in this sense after linking verbs such as *be*, *get*, or the sense verbs we looked above:

• "Jenny **looks *well*** lately."

• "**Get *well*** soon!"

In these examples, *well* does not modify the verbs, but rather describes the subjects of the clauses (implied in the second example).

Good can be used as a predicative adjective as well, meaning "of a high or satisfactory quality." This can be used after linking verbs to talk about an opinion of something, an

emotional state, or general well-being (as opposed to physical health, specifically).
For example:

• "The movie **was *good***." (opinion of the quality of the movie)

• "I'm **feeling *good*** about my chances!" (emotional state)

• "Janet **looks *good*** lately." (opinion of Janet's appearance)

• A: "How are you, Bob?" B: "I**'m *good***, thanks!" (general well-being)

The last example is perfectly correct, and it is very frequently used as a stock response to the question "How are you?" You could also say "I'm well," and no one is likely to take issue with it. However, if someone asks how you are after an illness or injury, for instance, it would be better to respond with "I'm well."

If saying "I'm good" still does not sound quite right to you, you could also say "I am *doing well*," in which case *well* is used adverbially once more.

You can learn more about such adjective/adverb oddities in the **irregular adverbs** section of the chapter on **Adverbs**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is described or modified by the predicate of a linking verb?

a) The verb

b) The direct object of the verb

c) The subject of the verb
d) The clause

2. A prepositional phrase that follows a linking verb does which of the following?

a) Acts as an adverb modifying the verb
b) Acts as an adjective modifying the subject
c) Acts as an adjective modifying the direct object of the verb
d) Acts as an adverb modifying the entire clause

3. Which of the following can be the predicate of a linking verb of the **senses**?

a) A predicative adjective
b) A predicate noun
c) An adverb
d) A prepositional phrase

4. Which of the following can be the predicate of a linking verb of **progression**?

a) A predicative adjective
b) A predicate noun
c) An adverb
d) A & B
e) A & C
f) B & C

5. What **kind** of linking verb is used in the following sentence?
"I'm not sure why, but David seems a bit unhappy today."

a) *To be*
b) Sense verb
c) Verb of progression
d) None of the above

6. If we are unsure whether a verb is an action verb or a linking verb, which **kind** of verb can we use as a subsitute to check?

a) *To be*
b) Sense verb
c) Verb of progression
d) None of the above

Light Verbs

Definition

Light verbs (also known as **delexical verbs, thin verbs, semantically weak verbs**, or **empty verbs**) are verbs that do not carry unique meaning on their own, but instead rely on another word or words that follow them to become meaningful.

Because of this, light verbs can have a great variety of meanings, depending on the word(s) with which they are paired. Sometimes, the meaning of different light verbs can overlap if they share a common **predicate**.

Common examples of light verbs include *do, have, make, get, take,* and *give*, though there are others that can work the same way.

Using Light Verbs

Light verbs function by pairing with a word or words (usually, but not always, a noun or noun phrase) to achieve their meaning. The verb itself does not contribute very much meaning to the sentence; rather, we know what is meant by the word it's paired with. For example:

- "***Do*** your **homework**!"
- "We ***did*** some **jumping jacks** to warm up."
- "I hope you ***do*** **well** on your exam."
- "Why don't we ***have*** **something** to eat?"
- "I ***took*** a **shower** before breakfast."
- "She's ***taking*** a **nap** right now."
- "Do you ***take*** **sugar** in your coffee?"
- "***Give*** me a **break**!"

• "***Give*** your father a **kiss** before you go to bed."

• "I ***get*** so many **emails** every day."

• "Let's try to ***get warm*** by the fire."

• "Stop ***making*** such a **fuss**!"

• "Be sure to ***make*** your **bed** after you get up in the morning."

In each of these examples, the verb itself does not describe a specific, unique action. We only know what's happening because of the word or words that are collocated with the verb.

Shared meaning

In some cases, we can even use different light verbs to achieve the same or very similar meaning; this is particularly true for the verbs *have* and *take*. For example:

• "I'm going to ***have*** a **shower**."

• "I'm going to ***take*** a **shower**."

• "OK, everyone, let's ***have*** **lunch**!"

• "OK, everyone, let's ***take*** **lunch**!"

• "She's ***having*** a **nap** right now."

• "She's ***taking*** a **nap** right now."

However, this can also occur with other light verbs. For instance:

• “Be sure to ***take*** a **bow** at the end of the performance.”
• “Be sure to ***make*** a **bow** at the end of the performance.”
• “Will you ***get*** a **photo** of all of us together?”
• “Will you ***take*** a **photo** of all of us together?”
• “Did you ***get*** some **breakfast**?”
• “Did you ***have*** some **breakfast**?”

Full Verbs and Auxiliary Verbs

Most verbs carry a unique semantic meaning of their own, and they do not rely on any additional predicate information to make sense. When contrasted with **light verbs**, these are sometimes known as **full verbs** or **heavy** verbs.

Auxiliary verbs, meanwhile, are similar to light verbs in that they do not carry meaning on their own; however, unlike light verbs, these work with other verbs to create a complete, unique meaning. Auxiliary verbs are used to create different verb **tenses**, to make a verb negative, or to express **modality**—that is, to assert (or deny) possibility, likelihood, ability, permission, obligation, or future intention.

Certain **light verbs** function as full verbs depending on how they are used; likewise, *do* and *have* can function as either auxiliary verbs or light verbs. For example:

• “Let’s ***take*** some lunch to a park.” (full verb, meaning “bring to a place”)
• “Let’s all ***take*** a **break**.” (light verb, reliant on *break* for meaning)

• “I like to ***make*** toy figurines in my spare time.” (full verb, meaning “to create or assemble”)
• “I’m afraid I ***made*** a terrible **mistake** in hiring him.” (light verb, reliant on *mistake* for meaning)
• “***Did*** you see the game last night?” (auxiliary verb, serves to modify the verb *see* to create an interrogative sentence)
• “John ***did*** a few **jobs** for me this summer.” (light verb, dependent on the noun *jobs* for meaning)
• “She ***had*** heard the rumors already.” (auxiliary verb, serves to modify the verb *heard* to create the **past perfect tense**)
• “She ***had*** a **snooze** after lunch.” (light verb, dependent on the noun *snooze* for meaning)

Common Light Verbs

Unfortunately, the only way to become familiar with the various meanings and uses of light verbs is to study them in a dictionary or to come across them in day-to-day speech and writing.

Below, we’ll look at some examples using four particularly common light verbs that have a variety of different meanings—*do, make*, *get*, and *take*. Each sentence will be accompanied by an explanation of the light verb’s meaning.

Do

Do is used for general actions; these actions are dictated by the word or words that follow *do*.

• "You can play if you ***do*** your **homework**." (**finish or complete** your homework)

• "Will you please ***do*** the **dishes**?" (**wash** the dishes)

• "Will you please ***do*** the **washing up**?" (This is a British English expression with the same meaning as "do the dishes.")

• "I hope you ***do*** **well** on your exam." (**perform** well; in this context, **do** relies on an adverb for its meaning)

• "He was always willing to ***do*** someone a **favor**." (**give or perform** a favor)

• "My husband always ***does*** the **cooking**." (**prepare and cook food**)

• "I'm trying to avoid ***doing*** the **ironing**." (**iron** clothes)

• "John, will you ***do*** the **dusting**?" (**clean the dust** from the furniture and around the house)

• "It always falls on me to ***do*** the **housework**." (**clean and tidy up** around the house)

• "She has to ***do*** her **hair** before we go." (**style** her hair)

• "I hope you can continue to ***do*** **business** together." (**engage in or perform** business activities)

Make

As a light verb, *make* carries the general meaning of "create" or "assemble"; the specific meaning comes from what accompanies the verb.

- "I ***made*** many **mistakes** in my exam." (**commit** errors)
- "Be sure to ***make*** your **bed** after you get up in the morning." (**put in order or neaten** the sheets, covers, and pillows on one's bed)
- "After years of fighting, they decided to ***make*** **peace**." (**achieve, arrange, produce, or attain** a state of peace)
- "My mother is going to ***make*** a **chocolate cake** tonight." (**prepare and/or bake** a cake)
- "I just need to ***make*** **dinner**." (**prepare and cook** dinner)
- "I ***made*** **friends** with my new neighbors." (**earn or acquire** the friendship of the neighbors)
- "You need to ***make*** a **decision**." (**form or arrive at** a decision)
- "The neighbors ***make*** so much **noise**." (**create** a lot of noise)
- "He ***made*** an excellent **speech** at his brother's wedding." (**orally perform or deliver** a speech)
- "Have you ***made*** any **plans** for the summer yet?" (**form or establish** plans)
- "He called the restaurant and ***made*** a **reservation** for four." (**arrange or establish** a reservation)

• “You would ***make*** a great **teacher**!” (**be suited for the role of** a teacher)

• “He really ***made*** a good **impression** at the job interview yesterday.” (**achieve or produce** a good impression)

• “I will ***make*** an **exception** this time.” (**allow** an exception)

• “This doesn’t ***make*** any **sense** to me.” (**to be coherent or intelligible**)

• “***Make* it** a priority to turn off the gas before you go out.” (**establish** it as a priority)

• “I’m ***making*** a **fortune** in my new job.” (**earn** a large amount of money)

• “It will ***make*** a big **difference** to the house if we paint all the rooms white.” (**create or amount to** a significant difference)

Get

Get is a particularly versatile verb. For example, it can mean any of the following depending on the context: *fetch, obtain, understand, answer, receive, hit, be, become, hear, understand, earn, buy, win, secure, reach/arrive at, cause, convince, open*, or *succeed*.

We are entirely dependent upon what is collocated with *get* to know which meaning it carries:

• “I ***get*** so many **emails** every day.” (**receive** emails)

• “I ***got* good grades** on my exams.” (**obtain/earn** good grades)

• “How do you ***get*** to the **station** from here?” (**reach/arrive at** the station)

• “I ***got*** a really **good price** for the car I sold.” (**obtain** a good price)

• “We managed to ***get*** an **excellent deal**.” (**secure** an excellent deal)

• “He didn’t laugh at the joke because he didn’t ***get*** **it**.” (**understand** it (the joke))

• “I didn’t ***get*** the **job** because I didn’t have the right qualifications.” (**succeed in obtaining** the job)

• “**How much** do you ***get*** per month in your new job?” (**earn** what amount?)

• “Did you ***get*** these **shoes** at the new mall?” (**buy** the shoes)

• “She ***got*** a **medal** for coming in first.” (**win/be awarded** a medal)

• “I can’t ***get*** the **children** to go to bed early.” (**convince or force** the children)

• “I finally ***got*** the **computer** to work again after it had crashed.” (**cause** the computer to work)

• “Can you ***get*** the **phone**, please?” (**answer** the phone)

• “My hands are full; could you ***get*** the **door** for me?” (**open** the door)

• “Sorry, I didn’t ***get*** your **name**.” (**hear/understand** your name)

• “I ***got*** really **sick** while I was on vacation, but I’m feeling a lot better now.” (**became** sick)

• “He ***got*** **arrested** for robbing a bank.” (**was** arrested)

• “The bullet ***got*** **him** in the head.” (**hit** him)

Take

As a light verb, *take* broadly means *have*, *obtain*, or *use*, but it has some other specific meanings in certain circumstances:

• “Let’s all ***take*** a **break**.” (**have** a brief rest)

• “Would you like to ***take*** a **walk**?” (**engage in** a walk)

• “We’ll ***take*** a **taxi** home.” (**use** a taxi to travel)

• “I have to ***take*** the **bus** into town.” (**use** the bus to travel)

• “Don’t forget to ***take*** your **medicine**.” (**ingest** your medicine)

• “He’s ***taking*** an **exam** in the morning.” (**complete** an exam)

• “Will you ***take*** **notes** for me in class today?” (**write** notes)

• “He’s been so sick that we’ve had to ***take*** his **temperature** every hour.” (**obtain** (through measurement) his temperature)

• “It might not work, but I’m willing to ***take*** that **chance**.” (**behave or act** in a risky way)

• “Hey, come here and ***take*** a **look** at this!” (**examine or view** this)

• “We’ll just have to ***take*** your **word** for it.” (**trust in** what you say)

• “She ***took*** a seat near the back.” (**assume occupancy** of a seat)

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following do light verbs rely on for their meaning?

a) The subject
b) The predicate
c) The full verb
d) The auxiliary verb

2. Identify the light verb in the following sentence:

“I’m hoping to train with the Olympic squad this summer, but I am not sure they will take me.”

a) hoping
b) train
c) am
d) will
e) take

3. Which of the following is **not** another name for light verbs? a) delexical verbs

b) hollow verbs
c) empty verbs
d) thin verbs

4. True or False: Sometimes different light verbs can have the same meaning if they have the same predicate.
a) True
b) False

5. Which of the following can be both a **light verb** and an **auxiliary verb**?
a) have
b) get
c) make
d) take

Phrasal Verbs

Definition

Phrasal verbs are verb phrases that have idiomatic meanings—that is, their meaning is not obvious from the individual words that make up the phrase. Because of this, we have to learn what they mean by understanding them in context.

In this section, we'll look at how phrasal verbs are formed and how they are distinct from prepositional verbs, and then look at a list of common phrasal verb examples.

Constructing Phrasal Verbs – Particles vs. Prepositions

Phrasal verbs are made up of a verb + a **preposition** or an adverbial **particle**, and their meaning is uniquely tied to each particular combination.

A particle is very similar to a preposition—in fact, they are almost always identical in appearance. (There are a few words that will only function as particles in verb phrases: *away, back, out, backward, forward, upward,* and *downward*.)

However, particles are used more like adverbs, modifying and uniquely expanding the meaning of the verbs they are paired with. For this reason, particles are sometimes referred to as adverbial particles, or even just adverbs. The key difference between particles and prepositions, however, is that particles do not (and cannot) introduce a **prepositional phrase**, while the preposition in a phrasal verb always will.

Below, we'll look at some examples of phrasal verbs that use particles, prepositions, and combinations of both.

Particle Phrasal Verbs

• “My table *takes up* too much room.” (The table occupies too much space.)

Takes up is made up of the verb *take* + *up*. *Up* changes the meaning of the verb, but it does not introduce a prepositional phrase expressing direction, location, time, or possession— therefore, it is functioning as a particle.

• “Please **look over** the proposal and let me know what you think.” (Please quickly examine the proposal.)

Again, the particle *over* is changing the meaning of the verb *look*, but it is not introducing a prepositional phrase.

Here are some other examples of phrasal verbs formed with particles:

• “I can’t believe that you’re **giving up**!” (I’m surprised that you’re going to stop trying.)

• “There will always be setbacks that we have to **allow for**.” (We always have to consider and be ready for possible setbacks.)

• “We have to wait for the fire to **die down** before we can enter the building.” (We have to wait for the fire to become less intense.)

• “The plane **took off** an hour late.” (The plane rose into the air and began to fly later than scheduled.)

• “She is always **making up** excuses.” (She is always inventing excuses that are not true.)

• “When I am on the bus, I always **give up** my seat to the elderly.” (I vacate my seat and give it to an older passenger.)

Preposition Phrasal Verbs

As we've seen, a phrasal verb can be formed from a preposition when that preposition acts as the head of a prepositional phrase, followed immediately by its object. For example:

• "He has been **looking *after*** *his mother*." (He has been caring for his mother.)

• "I **came *across*** *that old watch* of mine when I was cleaning out the drawers." (I found my old watch unexpectedly.)

• "Stop **picking *on*** *your brother* like that!" (Stop teasing or harassing your brother in that way.)

We can see that, in each of the above, the phrasal verb is comprised of a verb + a preposition—the preposition always forms a prepositional phrase with the object of the phrasal verb.

Particle-prepositional phrasal verbs

Some phrasal verbs have both a particle and a preposition. These are sometimes known as particle-prepositional phrasal verbs. All three elements—verb, particle, and preposition— act together to form a unique meaning.

For example:

• "She **comes <u>across</u> *as*** *a really confident person*." (She gives the impression of being confident by the way she acts.)

In this context, *across* functions as a particle, while *as* functions as a preposition, introducing the prepositional phrase *as a really confident person*.

• "You're going too fast, so I can't **keep <u>up</u> *with*** *you*."

The phrasal verb here is made up of the verb *keep* + the particle *up* + the preposition *with*. *Up* changes the meaning of the verb *keep*, while *with* introduces the prepositional phrase *with you*.

Let's look at some other examples.

• "I'll make sure that she doesn't **get <u>away</u> *with*** *her plan*." (I'll make sure she is caught and/or punished.)

• "A substitute teacher has been **filling <u>in</u> *for*** *Mr. Davis* all week." (The substitute teacher is taking the place of Mr. Davis.)

• "I've been trying to **cut <u>back</u> *on*** *junk food* lately." (I'm trying not to eat as much junk food as I had been before.)

Differentiating prepositional and particle verb phrases

Intransitive verbs

Because a preposition in a phrasal verb must always form a prepositional phrase, the phrasal verb must be transitive because it requires a direct object. Therefore, if a phrasal verb is **intransitive**, we can assume that it is formed from a verb and a **particle**. For example:

• "Please don't **give up**."

• "I know you want me to lie, but I just wasn't **brought up** that way."

• "I hope that my idea **came across** well."

None of the above phrasal verbs has a direct object, and so each one is intransitive and a particle phrasal verb.

Transitive verbs

When phrasal verbs are **transitive**, they always take direct objects. This can make it difficult to tell whether a particle or prepositional phrasal verb is being used. However, there is a quick test that we can perform to be sure. First, we substitute a **personal pronoun** for the object of the phrasal verb. If it can be arranged *before* the particle/preposition and still make sense, then a particle is being used; if it has to come after to make sense, then a preposition is being used. Phrasal verbs that can be divided by objects are commonly referred to as being **separable**; those that cannot be divided are known as being **inseparable**.

Let's look at this in one of our previous examples:

• “Please **look over** *the proposal* and let me know what you think.”

It might seem as though *over* does in fact introduce a prepositional phrase: *over the proposal*. However, if we substitute the personal pronoun *it* for *the proposal*, we can see that the object can come immediately after the verb:

• “Please **look *it* over** and let me know what you think.”

Therefore, *look over* is a particle phrasal verb and is considered separable.

Let’s look at another example to see when this **can’t** be done:

• “He has been **looking after** *his mother*.”

Using the personal pronoun *her* instead of *his mother*, the sentence now reads:

• “He has been **looking after** *her*.”

Now let’s try rearranging it in the sentence:

✖ “He has been **looking *her* after**.” (incorrect)

We can see that the sentence no longer makes sense: the object, *her*, must follow the phrasal verb and form a prepositional phrase to be logically complete. Therefore, *look after* is a prepositional phrasal verb and is inseparable.

Transitive and Intransitive Phrasal Verbs

Finally, some phrasal verbs can be both transitive and intransitive, depending on which idiomatic meaning is being used.

Consider these sets of examples that use the same phrasal verb:

• "I was a bit of a skinny kid, but I **filled out** nicely during high school." (**Intransitive**, meaning "to become larger or fuller in one's figure.")
• "Make sure that you **fill out** the form correctly." (**Transitive**, meaning "to complete (a document) by providing the required information.")
• "The two friends **made up** after their bitter argument." (**Intransitive**, meaning "to reconcile or resolve a quarrel.")
• "Please stop **making up** excuses." (**Transitive**, meaning "to fabricate or invent.")

Prepositional verbs vs. phrasal verbs

Sometimes, a **prepositional verb** may be mistaken for a phrasal verb. Although both combinations appear to be very similar, you can differentiate them by examining their meaning. Prepositional verbs use the literal meanings of verbs, whereas phrasal verbs tend to be idiomatic.

For example, the meaning of the verb *ask* doesn't change when combined with the preposition *for*; however, it changes dramatically when combined with the particle *out*:

• "Kelly **asked *for*** a raise." (The literal meaning of *to ask* is *to inquire*. Kelly *inquired* about a raise, making it a prepositional verb.)
• "Kelly **asked *out*** Chad." (*Ask out* means *to invite someone on a date*, making it an idiomatic phrasal verb.)

We can see this difference even more clearly with a set of examples that use the same verb-preposition pairing:

• "They **sailed *through*** *the waters* with plenty of time to spare."

• "They **sailed *through*** *their exams* with plenty of time to spare."

Both examples use the verb *sail* + the preposition *through*. However, because the first sentence uses the **literal** meaning of *sail*, we know it is a prepositional verb—the preposition is merely describing the movement of the verb, without changing the meaning of the verb itself. If, for instance, we change the sentence to "They **sailed *along*** *the coast*," the meaning of *sail* does not change.

The verb phrase of the second sentence, however, has the **idiomatic** meaning of "to complete with ease and speed." It can only have this meaning if *sail* and *through* are paired together. Changing the preposition would also completely change the meaning of the verb phrase; therefore, it is functioning as a phrasal verb in this context.

Recognizing Common Phrasal Verbs

The only way to truly feel comfortable with phrasal verbs is to recognize them in everyday writing and speech, understand their unique meanings, and then begin to use them in the same way in your own writing and speech.

With that in mind, head to the section on **Common Phrasal Verbs** to see an extensive list of examples of common phrasal verbs as they are used in both spoken and written English.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following is **not** a component of a phrasal verb?

a) verb
b) particle
c) participle
d) preposition

2. What is the primary difference between prepositional verbs and phrasal verbs?

a) Prepositional verbs have a literal meaning; phrasal verbs have an idiomatic meaning.
b) Prepositional verbs have an idiomatic meaning; phrasal verbs have a literal meaning.
c) Prepositional verbs are always transitive; phrasal verbs are always intransitive.
d) Prepositional verbs are always separable; phrasal verbs are always inseparable.

3. What do *prepositions* do that *particles* **cannot** do in phrasal verbs?

a) Come after the object of the verb
b) Create a unique meaning of the verb
c) Make the phrasal verb transitive
d) Introduce a prepositional phrase

4. Identify the **phrasal verb** in the following sentence.

“It appears to me that you have thoroughly mucked up the case again.”

a) appears to
b) have thoroughly
c) mucked up
d) case again

5. Which of the following **can** be separable in a sentence?

a) intransitive phrasal verbs
b) transitive particle phrasal verbs
c) transitive prepositional phrasal verbs
d) particle-prepositional phrasal verbs

Common Phrasal Verbs

Learning common phrasal verbs

As we saw when we looked at how **phrasal verbs** are formed, their meanings tend to be completely idiomatic—you cannot guess what they mean simply by looking at their individual components.

Unfortunately, the only way to learn phrasal verbs is by encountering them in speech and writing, until you become familiar enough with them that you are able to use them yourself.

Below, we'll look at an extensive list of example sentences that use common verbs to create various **phrasal verbs**. The meaning of each phrasal verb will be beside each sentence, but remember: phrasal verbs often have several completely unrelated meanings. It's best to check a reliable dictionary to learn their other meanings.

This is also not by any means an **exhaustive** list—there are several hundred different phrasal verbs in English. For one of the largest dictionaries of idioms and phrasal verbs, go to The Free Dictionary's **Collection of Idioms and Phrases** at idioms.thefreedictionary.com.

Phrasal verbs with *be*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
be about to	To intend to do or be near to doing something in the immediate future	"Hi Johnny, I **was about to** call you."
be after (someone)	To be hunting, looking for, and/or chasing after (someone)	"The police **are after** a man who robbed a bank yesterday."
be after (something)	To want (something) from someone	"He's being so nice to me these days. He **is after** something, for sure."

be down to	To have an amount of something reduced to a lower or minimal number	"After months of dieting, I **am down to** 190 pounds." "I **am down to** my last dollar."
be down to	To be the result of or primarily caused by something	"A large number of diseases **are down to** genetic traits."
be down with	To be suffering from, as a disease or illness	"I can't go to work today because I **am down with** the flu."
be in	To be present in a given location	"I'm afraid Molly **is not in** at the moment." "I will let you know as soon as the doctor **is in**."
be into	To like something very much; to be particularly enthusiastic about something	"I**'m really into** this band right now."

be over	To be finished, ended, or complete	"The worst **is over**. He should start to recover in a few days." "It**'s over** between us; we can't see each other anymore."
be out of	To no longer have something	"Sorry, but we **are out of** coffee at the moment."
be up	To be at a higher level	"The price of gas **is up** again."
be up	To be occurring, especially in reference to strange or noteworthy events	"Something **is up**; the staff are all acting strange."
be up	To be awake and out of bed	"John**'s not up** yet. He's still sleeping."
be up against	To meet or contend with difficulties or impediments	"I**'m up against** a lot of competition these days."
be up to	To be someone's decision or responsibility	"For now, the planning stage **is up to** you."

be up to	To be in the midst of doing or planning	“I am going to see what the children **are up to**.”
be up to	To be capable of doing (something) competently	“We’ll have to fire him. He **isn’t up to** the job.”

Phrasal Verbs with *come*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
come across	To find unexpectedly	“I **came across** that old watch of mine when I was cleaning out the drawers.”
come across	To give a certain impression through the way one acts	“She **comes across** as a really confident person.”
come into	To acquire, especially through inheritance or chance	“John has been buying some flashy cars lately. He must have **come into** a bit of money.”
come up with	To think of, develop, or invent	“I’m finding it difficult to **come up with** new ideas.”

come up against	To meet and be forced to deal with some impediment, obstacle, or difficulty	"We've **come up against** several political and legal problems."
come down with	To catch or become infected with, as a virus or disease	"I don't feel very well today. I think I've **come down with** the flu."
come (a)round	To change one's mind about and agree to something after some persuasion or time	"Your father doesn't want you to have a dog, but give him a day or two and I'm sure he'll **come (a)round**."
come back to	To be recalled in one's memory	"I couldn't remember her name, but after a few minutes it **came back to** me."

Phrasal Verbs with *get*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence

get over	To recover from or feel better about some sad or traumatic event	“I can’t seem to **get over** the death of my cat. I feel sadder as the days go by.”
get over	To believe, understand, or no longer be surprised by something	“I can’t **get over** the way she spoke to me. She has no manners whatsoever.”
get on	To have an easy, friendly relationship with someone; to be on good terms with someone	“My husband and I **get on** so well together.”
get away	To escape, as from trouble, danger, or pursuit	“The police tried to catch the bank robbers but they managed to **get away**.”
get away with	To avoid blame, responsibility, or conviction for some wrongdoing	“The criminal **got away with** the crime. There wasn’t enough evidence to convict him.”
get out of	To find a way of avoiding having to do, confront, or deal with something	“How can I **get out of** this mess I'm in.”

get (a)round to	To find the time to do or complete something that one has been meaning to do	"I still haven't **gotten (a)round to** fixing the broken shutter."
get back	To return, usually home	"What time did you **get back** last night?"
get rid of	To dispose of something that is no longer needed or wanted	"I want to **get rid of** that old mattress."
get through to	To make contact with someone, especially by phone	"I can't **get through to** Sally. Her phone has been busy all morning."
get through to	To make someone understand or comprehend something	"It is difficult to **get through to** him—he never listens to a word you say."
get through to	To advance to a higher stage in a competition	"We won in overtime and managed to **get through to** the finals."

Phrasal Verbs with *give*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
give away	To donate something; to bestow something upon someone	"He's a generous man. He **gives away** half of his salary to charity each month."
give away	To present the bride to the groom, traditionally by the bride's father	"In some countries, it is the custom for the father of the bride to **give** his daughter **away** at the wedding."
give back	To return something to someone	"Can you **give back** that book I lent you?"
give in (to something)	To surrender (to) or stop resisting (something)	"No matter how much they try to get you to accept a lower offer, don't **give in**." "If you are on a diet, it's hard not to **give in to** temptation."
give in	To collapse	"The floor **gave in** after the flood."

give out	To distribute to others	“Can you **give out** these books to the rest of the class please?”
give up	To relinquish one’s position to someone else	“When I am on the bus, I rarely see anyone **give up** their seat to the elderly.”
give up	To stop doing something, often permanently	“The doctor has told me to **give up** smoking.”
give up	To abandon	“After searching for hours on end, the mountain rescue team finally **gave up** all hope of finding the missing hikers.

Phrasal Verbs with *look*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
look into	To investigate	“The police are **looking into** reports of a robbery last night.”

look up	To find or seek information, as from a list or some reference source	"Can you **look up** John's phone number for me please?"
look forward to	To anticipate with pleasure or excitement	"I am **looking forward to** seeing my family again after six months of living abroad."
look out	To pay attention to or be careful of something, especially danger	"**Look out**, there's a car coming!"
look after	To take care of or be responsible for someone or something	"Can you **look after** my cat while I'm away?"
look down on	To regard as inferior	"My neighbors **look down on** us because we have less money."
look on	To observe as a spectator	"The crowd **looked on** as the firemen tried to put out the fire."
look over	To examine or inspect	"He carefully **looked over** the contract before signing it."

look up to	To admire and respect	"She really **looks up to** her boss. He has taught her many things."

Phrasal Verbs with *break*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
break down	To stop functioning	"My car **broke down** on the highway today."
break down	To become very emotionally upset; to begin crying	"She **broke down** when she was told her cat had died."
break up	To end a romantic relationship	"Have you heard the news? Sally and John **broke up**."
break into	To force entry	"Burglars **broke into** my house last night."
break away from	To become free from some restriction or restraint	"The police caught one of the burglars, but he managed to **break away from** them."

break out	To escape from some confinement or imprisonment	"The other burglar was put in prison, but he managed to **break out**."
break out	To appear or begin suddenly and spread quickly	"An epidemic of flu has **broken out**."
break out in	To have a large amount of something, usually a skin condition, appear suddenly and spread quickly	"My face has **broken out in** pimples, and I look terrible."
break even	To achieve a result with no loss or gain in profit	"The company **broke even** this year."

Phrasal Verbs with *pick*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
pick up	To go and collect someone or something, especially by car	"Can you **pick up** the children after school?"

pick up	To receive, as a radio signal	"My cell phone never **picks up** a signal when I'm in the house."
pick up	To attempt to find or become acquainted with someone for romantic or sexual purposes	"He always wants to go **pick up** girls at bars."
pick on	To deliberately harass or tease someone	"You're always **picking on** me, and I wish you would stop."
pick on	To select or choose someone	"The teacher always **picks on** Jane. She never gives the other students a chance to answer."

Phrasal Verbs with *put*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
put out	To extinguish something, such as a flame	"We have to **put out** the fire before it spreads to the rest of the house."
put out	To put an animal outside the house	"Would you **put** the cat **out** for a while?"

put (someone/oneself) out	To inconvenience someone or oneself on someone else's behalf	"It would be great if you could do this for me, but don't **put** yourself **out**."
put (someone) up	To host (someone) in one's house	"I can **put** you **up** for the weekend, but no longer than that."
put up with	To tolerate	"He couldn't **put up with** her any longer."
put up with	To make something available to be sold	"They've **put up** their house for sale."
put in	To spend or invest, especially time	"He **puts in** 12 hours at work every day."
put off	To delay doing or commencing something	"See if you can **put** the meeting **off** for an hour. We still need more time."
put (someone) off	To make someone uninterested in or disinclined to do something	"The sight of the octopus really **put** me **off** my food."

put aside/away	To save for future use	"I've **put away/aside** enough money to retire early."
put aside for	To reserve something for someone until a later time	"Could you **put** this blouse **aside for** me."
put through to	To connect someone with another person, usually via telephone	"Could you **put** me **through to** the manager please?"
put through	To subject someone to something unpleasant or undesirable	"This job has **put** me **through** so much already."
put away	To store in or return to the proper location	"Can you please **put away** all those books lying around?"
put down	To mock, belittle, or make to appear foolish	"She's always **putting** her boyfriend **down**."
put down	To euthanize an animal	"Our poor cat is so old that we have to have him **put down**."
put on	To add to or increase the amount of	"I've **put on** a lot of weight recently."

put on	To pretend or act	“He seems angry, but I know he’s just **putting** it **on**.”
put (someone) on	To deceive or tease someone	“I really thought I had won the prize. I can’t believe he was **putting** me **on** the whole time!”
put down	To pass a telephone to someone	“Give me one second, and I’ll **put** him **on**.”

Phrasal Verbs with *run*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
run into	To encounter someone by chance	“I **ran into** an old friend of mine yesterday while I was out shopping.”
run out of	To exhaust the supply of something	“We’ve **run out of** coffee again. Could you get some on your way home?”

run up	To accrue or accumulate, especially indebtedness	“He **ran up** a huge bill at dinner.”
run away with	To hurriedly leave with someone else, as to elope	“His husband **ran away with** the secretary.”
run over	To hit someone or something with a vehicle, usually a car	“He’s still very upset after **running over** the cat last night.”
run through	To quickly discuss, summarize, or outline	“OK, can we just **run through** the main points again?”
run to	To immediately seek assistance from someone	“He always **runs to** his mother whenever he’s in trouble.”
run on	To be powered by	“Those new cars **run on** electricity, but they are so expensive.”
run up against	To encounter an obstacle, difficulty, or problem	“The company **ran up against** some problems initially, but now things are operating smoothly.”

Phrasal Verbs with *take*

Phrasal Verb	Definition	Example sentence
take up	To begin, especially a hobby or pastime	"I'm thinking of **taking up** a new hobby."
take up	To occupy, such as space or time	"I'm going to buy a smaller table. This **takes up** too much room."
take up	Of clothes, to shorten or tighten	"My new pants are too long for me. I'm going to have to them **taken up** a bit."
take to	To have a newfound liking or appreciation for	"The boss has really **taken to** the new intern."
take out	To obtain a legal agreement, such as insurance or a financial loan	"I've **taken out** an insurance policy on my house."
take over	To obtain control of	"The company has been **taken over** by a Spanish corporation."

take off	To leave the ground and begin flight	"You've just missed the plane: it **took off** a few minutes ago."
take off	To remove an article of clothing	"**Take off** your jacket. It's hot in here."
take off	To become successful or popular	"Business has really **taken off** this year."
take off	To not go to work or school for a certain period of time	"I'm really tired. I'm going to **take** a day **off** tomorrow."
takes after	To be similar in character or appearance to a close relative	"He **takes after** his father in his love of tennis."
take back	To return something to the place where it was purchased	"My new cell phone doesn't work. I'm going to **take** it **back** tomorrow and ask for a refund."
take on	To recruit or employ	"Why don't you apply for a job at the new phone company? They are **taking on** new staff."
take on		

	To agree or commit to doing something	"I've **taken on** too much work. How will I ever find the time to finish it all?"
take in	To give shelter and/or assistance	"She's a very kind person. She always **takes in** stray dogs that she finds in the street."

As we said already, there are hundreds of different phrasal verbs in English. If you would like to learn more about the different meanings of phrasal verbs, as well as some interesting idioms and proverbs, go to The Free Dictionary's **Collection of Idioms and Phrases** at idioms.thefreedictionary.com.

Conditional Verbs

Definition

Conditional verbs are constructions of verbs that are used in **conditional sentences**. Conditional sentences express something that might happen, depending on whether or not a particular condition is met. The word *if* is commonly used with one of the verbs to denote such a condition in conditional sentences.

Here are some examples of conditional verbs being used in sentences.

• "The leaves **will fall** if the wind **blows**."

• "If you **drive** on this road for 20 miles, you **will reach** your destination."

• "If only the striker **had shot** the ball earlier, he **would have scored** a goal."

• "If you **do** your chores, you **can have** an ice cream cone later."

• "You **can get** a good grade if you **study** very hard."

Constructing conditional verbs

Conditional verbs are typically formed when a clause in the sentence contains the word *if*, and the action of the sentence depends on the condition established by this clause. **Modal auxiliary verbs** (such as *can, will, would, shall, should*, and *could*) are often used to help indicate the tense and intention of the verbs in the conditional or resulting clause(s). For example

• "If you **see** the desert, it ***could*** **mean** that you ***have*** **gone** too far.

• "If you **see** her, you ***can*** **tell** her I **said** 'Hello.'"

• "If I ***could*** **be** anyone in history, I ***would*** **be** Leonardo da Vinci."

Tenses

Conditional verbs can be in the past, present, or future tense. Which tense they take depends on whether the sentence is referring to a condition or possible result in the past, the present, or the future. Conditional sentences often feature a mix of tenses depending on the

relationship between the condition and the result.

Past tense

The past tense is used for conditional verbs when the sentence refers to an action or event that might have happened in the past depending on a hypothetical past condition. For example:

• "She **would have succeeded** if she **had tried** harder."

• "The cake **would have been** ready if the baker **had hurried** up a little bit more."

Present simple tense

A conditional sentence that is only in the present simple tense refers to something that always happens when a condition is met. For example:

• "The television **turns** on if you **press** the power button."

• "The car **moves** faster if you **press** the pedal down harder."

Future tense

The future tense is used to describe hypothetical future results. It is often used with conditions in the present tense to describe what might happen. For example:

• "If our team wins the World Series, it **will be** amazing."

• “The sheep **will escape** if the fence is left unlocked.”

Types of Conditionals

There are different types of conditionals that express a range of hypothetical information depending on the combination of verb tenses used in the conditional sentence.

Zero conditional

The zero conditional refers to conditional sentences in which the “if clause” and the main clause both contain conditional verbs that are in the simple present tense. It is used to talk about facts that are always true.

First conditional

First conditional sentences contain a conditional verb in the simple present tense in the “if clause,” and a future tense verb preceded by the auxiliary verb *will* in the main clause. First conditional sentences explain a hypothetical result in the future depending on a non-real condition in the present.

Second conditional

Second conditional sentences include a simple past tense verb in the “if clause” and a future tense verb in the main clause, preceded by the auxiliary verb *would*. These sentences refer

to things that would happen in the future if something else happens.

Third conditional

Third conditional sentences have a past perfect verb in the "if clause" and have a past participle verb in the main clause, preceded by the auxiliary verbs *would have*. Third conditional sentences describe a hypothetical situation or condition in the past that might have led to a different outcome in the present.

If you want to learn more about these types of sentences, see the **Conditional Sentences** section in the chapter on **Sentences**.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which word in the following sentence is a conditional verb? "If clouds form on the horizon, it will likely rain."

a) likely
b) If
c) form
d) will
e) rain
f) A,B,&C
g) C,D,&E

2. The conditional verbs in the following sentence are in which tense? “The pie will taste delicious if you make it properly.”

a) past
b) present
c) future
d) A & B
e) B & C
f) None of the above

3. Which set of conditional verbs is in the past tense?

a) had played
b) will run
c) is walking
d) will drive

4. Which word in the following sentence is **not** a conditional verb?

“The band will have played for three hours if it plays for another 20 minutes.”

a) will
b) if
c) have
d) played

5. Identify the conditional verbs in the following sentence.

"If everything goes according to plan, the group will arrive on Tuesday."

a) everything, goes, plan

b) goes, then, will

c) according, will, arrive,

d) goes, will, arrive

Causative Verbs

Definition

Causative verbs indicate that a person, place, or thing is causing an action or an event to happen. Causative verbs are followed by a noun or pronoun and a non-causative verb in either the infinitive or base form; these non-causative verbs describe the action that the subject has caused to happen.

Examples of causative verbs include the words ***enable, cause, have, force, let, keep, hold, got*** and ***require***. Here are some examples of causative verbs being used in sentences.

• "He **let** his dog run through the field."

• "You **got** to go to the basketball game last night?"

• "The bigger house **enabled** the family to have more room for their belongings."

• “The new dress code **forced** the students to wear different shoes.”

• “The landlord **kept** his property to rent out to many different tenants.”

Tense

Because the non-causative verb is always in the infinitive form, the tense of the sentence depends on the conjugation of the causative verb. Causative verbs can take the **past**, **present**, or **future tense**. Here are some examples of each:

Past

• “The woman **caused** the accident to occur by driving carelessly.”

• “The law **required** a person to obtain a permit before hunting on public land.”

Present

• “The store **holds** certain items on layaway to sell to particular customers at a later date.”

• “They **get** a tax break on any purchases related to the business.”

Future

• “The manager of the store **will *force*** her employees to work shorter hours in order to cut costs.”

• “They **will *allow*** the company to install more solar panels on their roof.”

Causative verbs with other verbs in the sentence

As previously mentioned, the non-causative verbs that follow causative verbs explain the action that is being caused in the sentence. Depending on the causative verb that’s used, these non-causative verbs will either be in the infinitive or base form of the verb, or, in certain circumstances, the past participle form.

Infinitives

Infinitives are base-form verbs that are preceded by the **particle** *to*—for example, *to run, to see, to climb,* etc. The majority of causative verbs are paired with infinitives to complete their meaning, as in:

• “He **forced** himself *to train* harder.”

• “The woman **holds on** to her past memories *to remember* all the good times she had.”

• “The government is **requiring** all citizens *to carry* identification at all times.”

Base form

Base-form verbs appear exactly as they would in the infinitive, except they are not preceded by the word *to*—they are not conjugated for tense in any way. Only three causative verbs pair with the base form of the verb instead of an infinitive: ***have, make***, and ***let***. For example:

• "They **let** the light *stay* on until morning."

• "Albert **made** people *remove* their shoes when entering his house."

• "She **had** him *prepare* lots of finger foods before the guests arrived."

There is an exception to these, however: when we use the **passive voice** with *make*, it will take the infinitive rather than the base form, as in:

• "I'm sorry, but I **was made** *to report* my suspicions to police."

• "Employees **are often made** *to feel* responsible for the company's financial woes."

Past participles

Uniquely, the causative verbs *have* and *get* are also able to take the **past participle** of non-causative verbs if they themselves are in the past tense. For example:

• "My mother **had** the car *cleaned* after our soccer practice."

• "John's drinking problem finally **got** him *fired*."

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following words is a causative verb?

a) climb
b) enable
c) manage
d) face

2. Identify the causative verb in the following sentence:

"They kept their snowblower to use whenever it snowed outside."

a) snowed
b) whenever
c) to use
d) kept

3. Which of the following is **not** a causative verb?

a) bounce
b) have
c) let
d) force

4. The causative verb in this sentence is in what tense?

“The couple forced themselves to save money so they could buy their dream home.”

a) base

b) present

b) past

d) future

5. True or false: Causative verbs require another verb in a sentence?

a) true

b) false

Factitive Verbs

Definition

Factitive verbs are used to indicate the resulting condition or state (known as the **object complement**) of a person, place, or thing (the **direct object**) caused by the action of the verb. Examples of factitive verbs include *elect, appoint, make, choose, deem, assign, name, select, judge,* and *designate*. Here are some examples of factitive verbs used in sentences:

• “The populace **elected** him president of the United States.”

• “The committee **named** Mr. Fuller chairman of the board.”

• “The jury **judged** the defendant not guilty.”

• “She **deemed** him a person of high quality.”

• “The group **designated** Marshall leader from then on.”

• “The coach **made** Timothy point guard.”

Direct Objects and Object Complements

Factitive verbs have both direct objects and object complements. Direct objects are phrases, clauses, nouns, and pronouns that directly receive the action of the verb.

Object complements are adjectives, nouns, or pronouns that follow direct objects in order to indicate what the direct object's new state is. In other words, object complements reveal what the direct object has become.

Factitive verbs always indicate that the direct object has been changed or placed into a new condition, state, or category as indicated by the object complement.

To understand this concept, consider the following sentence:

• “The company **appointed** *the most experienced employee* manager.”

In this sentence, *appointed* is the factitive verb, *the most experienced employee* is the direct object, and *manager* is the object complement. *Appointed* is a factitive verb because it indicates that someone is having his or her status changed. *The most experienced employee* is the direct object because he or she is receiving the action of the verb, while *manager* is

the object complement because it indicates what the direct object has become.

Here is another example:

• "The team **made** *the star quarterback* the new captain."

In this sentence, *made* is a factitive verb acting directly upon *the star quarterback*, its direct object. *The new captain* is the object complement, indicating what *the star quarterback* was designated as.

Role in sentences

Factitive verbs serve the purpose of helping to answer the question of how a person, place, or thing was changed. For example, consider the following sentence, which does not have a factitive verb:

✖ "The school hired Mrs. McMillian principal."

In this sentence, the verb *hired* is not sufficient to convey all of the intended information. However, the following sentence uses a factitive verb to make it clear:

✔ "The school **appointed** Mrs. McMillian principal."

By changing *hired* to the factitive verb *appointed*, it becomes clear that *Mrs. McMillian* (the direct object) was made principal. Thus, the factitive verb *appointed* successfully serves its role in the sentence. Here are two more comparisons of sentences to illustrate this concept:

✖ "The organization **brought in** Brad Ryan chief executive officer." (non-factitive)

✔ “The organization **named** Brad Ryan chief executive officer.” (factitive)

The addition of a factitive verb reveals the status or characteristic being given to someone or something. In this case, *Brad Ryan* is being given the status of *chief executive officer*. The non-factitive verb **brought in** does not indicate this change at all, so the meaning of the sentence becomes incomplete or obscure.

✖ “The builder **constructed** the house more modern.” (non-factitive)

✔ “The builder **made** the house more modern.” (factitive)

Once again, the non-factitive verb *constructed* describes a straightforward action, and so is unsuited to indicating a categorical change in something. By using *made*, we can clearly see the intended relationship between the direct object, *house*, and the object complement, *more modern*.

Difference from linking and causative verbs

Factitive verbs are similar to linking and causative verbs. However, there are some important differences.

Linking verbs

Linking verbs link a subject to a noun or adjective that describes it. Linking verbs include

words such as *appear, seem,* and *become,* as well as various forms of *be*. For example:

• “She **appears** cold.”

• “He **is** a very tall man.”

• “The group **seems** interested in the discussion”

Linking verbs and factitive verbs both tie a subject to another part of speech that provides more information about it. However, unlike factitive verbs, linking verbs do not reveal that a person, place, or thing is being made, named, or deemed something else. Instead, they only add information about the subject as it already exists.

Causative verbs

Causative verbs require that another action be mentioned in the sentence, thus forcing the sentence to have at least one other verb. *Enable, cause, have, force, let, keep, hold, and require* are all examples of causative verbs. Here are some examples of causative verbs being used in sentences:

• “She was **required** *to bring* a pen and paper to her physics class.”

• “His mom **let** him *go sledding* on his snow day.”

• “The parents **forced** their child *to tie* his shoes.”

Like linking verbs, causative verbs also tie a subject to other parts of the sentence that reveal more about the subject. In this way, they serve a similar function to factitive verbs.

However, unlike factitive verbs, causative verbs simply cause another action to be described in the sentence. They do not describe a change in the subject's category, status, or characteristics like factitive verbs do.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following words is **not** a factitive verb?

a) elect
b) assign
c) jump
d) appoint

2. Identify the factitive verb in the following sentence:
"The board of trustees met on Friday and appointed Ralph leader."
a) leader
b) met
c) trustees
d) appointed

3. What is the direct object of the factitive verb in the following sentence?
"Americans elected Abraham Lincoln president in the year 1860."

a) Abraham Lincoln
b) Americans
c) president
d) the year 1860

4. Which of the following words is a factitive verb?

a) be
b) designate
c) swim
d) sing

5. In what way are linking verbs different from factitive verbs?

a) Linking verbs reveal an action.
b) Linking verbs sometimes take an object complement.
c) Linking verbs do not reveal that a person, place, or thing is being made or deemed something else.
d) Linking verbs link a subject to another part of the sentence.

Reflexive Verbs

Definition

Reflexive verbs are verbs whose subjects are also their direct objects—that is, the action of the verb is both committed and received by the same person or thing. Reflexive verbs are sometimes identified as being in the "**middle voice**" (as opposed to the **active voice** or the **passive voice**).

Identifying reflexive verbs

Verbs with reflexive pronouns

Reflexive verbs can most easily be identified by the use of **reflexive pronouns**, which are used as the direct object and refer back to the subject of the sentence.

For example:

• "I accidentally **burned *myself*** with the hairdryer." (*Myself* refers to the subject, *I*.)

• "The baby is **smiling at *herself*** in the mirror." (*Herself* refers to the subject, *the baby*.)

• "The problem seems to have **worked *itself* out** in the end." (*Itself* refers to the subject, *the problem*.)

When the same verb is paired with an object that is **not** a reflexive pronoun, then the verb is no longer considered reflexive.

For example, consider how the first two examples change if we use non-reflexive pronouns:

• "I accidentally **burned *him**** with the hairdryer." (*Him* refers to a second person who is

not the subject, *I*.)

• "The baby is **smiling at *her*** in the mirror." (*Her* refers to a second person who is not the subject, *the baby*.)

(*When the subject is *I*, we might be tempted to use the personal pronoun *me*, as in, "I accidentally **burned *me*** with the hairdryer," but this is grammatically incorrect.)

In the third example, it would not make sense to use a different pronoun because the subject, *the problem*, is inanimate and cannot have agency over a separate direct object.

Reflexive verbs with implied objects

Certain reflexive verbs can also have reflexive pronouns as direct objects that are implied and therefore omitted from the sentence. For example:

• "My father is **shaving** in the bathroom." (with the reflexive pronoun *himself* implied)

• "She always **stretches** before doing yoga." (with the reflexive pronoun *herself* implied)

• "Children, please **keep** quiet!" (with the reflexive the pronoun *yourselves* implied)

Intransitive verbs in the "middle" voice

While the majority of reflexive verbs are **transitive**, with reflexive pronouns as their objects, certain **intransitive verbs** can be used to modify a subject (usually an inanimate object) that is also the receiver of the action. In the middle voice, this type of verb does **not**

take a reflexive pronoun (or any direct object). For example:

• "*My sister's lunch* **is cooking** on the stove." (*Cook* is an intransitive verb indicating **what** is being cooked.)

• "*This car* **doesn't drive** smoothly anymore." (*Drive* is an intransitive verb indicating **what** is being driven.)

• "*Her engagement ring* **broke** in half." (*Break* is an intransitive verb indicating **what** is being broken.)

We can see that the subjects of these examples (*my sister's lunch, this car,* and *her engagement ring*) are also the recipients of the action in each sentence, even though the verbs are intransitive and do not take direct objects.

Changes in meaning with reflexive verbs

Most of the time, a verb's meaning is not inherently different when it becomes reflexive. However, there are some instances in which reflexive verbs have slightly different meanings from standard transitive verbs. For example:

• "He decided to **apply *himself*** to the work at hand." (reflexive verb, meaning "to engage in something with great diligence and persistence")

• "She **applied *pressure*** to the wound." (non-reflexive verb, meaning "to bring into contact with")

• "They **found *themselves*** without a leader." (reflexive verb, meaning "to perceive oneself

to be in a specific place or condition")

• "We **found *the solution*** we were looking for." (non-reflexive verb, meaning "to come upon, discover, or ascertain")

• "Please, **help *yourself*** to the food." (reflexive verb, meaning "to serve or provide oneself with")

• "Please **help *your brother*** with his homework." (non-reflexive verb, meaning "to give assistance to")

We must be careful whenever we make a verb reflexive, as there is no rule to know when or if a verb's meaning might be altered.

Quiz

(answers start on page 610)

1. Which of the following distinguishes **reflexive verbs** from non-reflexive verbs?

a) They do not take a direct object

b) The agents of their action are also the recipients of their action

c) The agents of their action are implied in a sentence

d) They are always transitive

2. Which of the following is the **most obvious** indication that a verb is reflexive?

a) It has a possessive personal pronoun as a direct object

b) It is intransitive but in the middle voice

c) The direct object is implied and omitted
d) The direct object is a reflexive pronoun

3. Which of the following determines whether a verb's meaning will change when it is used reflexively?
a) If a reflexive pronoun is the only direct object possible
b) If the verb is used intransitively in the middle voice
c) If the reflexive pronoun is implied and omitted
d) There is no rule that determines if its meaning will change

4. Which of the following sentences uses a reflexive verb?
a) "I don't know why, but I love washing in the river when we're camping."
b) "My brother never stops helping others."
c) "The kids are all out swimming today."
d) "Paul seems fine, but John said he hurt him during football practice."

Adjectives

Definition

Adjectives are used almost exclusively to modify nouns, as well as any phrase or part of speech functioning as a noun. For example: