

## 16b. Helping verbs and main verbs

Only certain combinations of helping verbs and main verbs make sense in English. The correct combinations are discussed in this section, after the following review of helping verbs and main verbs.

**Review.** Helping verbs always appear before main verbs.

HV	MV		HV	MV
We <i>will leave</i> for the picnic at noon. <i>Do you want</i> a ride?				

There are twenty-three helping verbs in English. Nine of them, called *modals*, function only as helping verbs. The others—forms of *do*, *have*, and *be*—function either as helping or as main verbs.

### HELPING VERBS

*Modals*: can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would

*Forms of do*: do, does, did

*Forms of have*: have, has, had

*Forms of be*: be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been

Every main verb has five forms (except *be*, which has eight). The following list shows these forms for the regular verb *help* and the irregular verb *give*. (See pp. 22–24 for a list of common irregular verbs.)

BASE FORM	help, give
-S FORM	helps, gives
PAST TENSE	helped, gave
PAST PARTICIPLE	helped, given
PRESENT PARTICIPLE	helping, giving

**Modal + base form.** After the modals *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, and *would*, use the base form of the verb.

- ▶ My cousin will ~~sends~~ us photographs from her wedding.

- ▶ We could <sup>Speak</sup> ~~spoke~~ Spanish when we were young.

**Do, does, or did + base form.** After helping verbs that are a form of *do*, use the base form of the verb.

- ▶ Mariko does not ~~wants~~ any more dessert.

- ▶ Did Janice <sup>buy</sup> ~~bought~~ the gift for Katherine?

**Have, has, or had + past participle.** To form one of the perfect tenses, use *have*, *has*, or *had* followed by a past participle (usually ending in *-ed*, *-d*, *-en*, *-n*, or *-t*). (See perfect tenses, p. 25.)

- ▶ Many churches have <sup>offered</sup> ~~offer~~ shelter to the homeless.

- ▶ An-Mei has not <sup>spoken</sup> ~~speaking~~ Chinese since she was a child.

**Form of be + present participle.** To express an action in progress, use *am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, *be*, or *been* followed by a present participle (the *-ing* form of the verb).

- ▶ Carlos is <sup>building</sup> ~~build~~ his house on a cliff overlooking the ocean.

- ▶ Uncle Roy was <sup>driving</sup> ~~driven~~ a brand new red Corvette.

The helping verbs *be* and *been* must be preceded by other helping verbs. See the progressive forms listed on page 25.

**CAUTION:** Certain verbs are not normally used in the progressive sense in English. In general, these verbs express a state of being or mental activity, not a dynamic action. Common examples are *appear*, *believe*, *have*, *hear*, *know*, *like*, *need*, *see*, *seem*, *taste*, *think*, *understand*, and *want*.

- ▶ I <sup>want</sup> ~~am wanting~~ to see August Wilson's *Fences* at Arena Stage.

**Form of be + past participle.** To form the passive voice, use *am, are, was, were, being, be, or been* followed by a past participle (usually ending in *-ed, -d, -en, -n, or -t*). When a sentence is written in the passive voice, the subject of the sentence receives the action instead of doing it. (See p. 26.)

- ▶ *Bleak House* was <sup>written</sup> ~~write~~ by Charles Dickens.
- ▶ The scientists were <sup>honored</sup> ~~honor~~ for their work with endangered species.

In the passive voice, the helping verb *be* must be preceded by a modal: Senator Dixon *will be defeated*. *Being* must be preceded by *am, is, are, was, or were*: The child *was being teased*. *Been* must be preceded by *have, has, or had*: I *have been invited* to a party.

**CAUTION:** Although they may seem to have passive meanings, verbs such as *occur, happen, sleep, die, and fall* may not be used to form the passive voice because they are intransitive. Only transitive verbs, those that take direct objects, may be used to form the passive voice.

- ▶ The earthquake ~~was~~ occurred last Friday.

### 16c. Omitted subjects, expletives, or verbs

Some languages allow omission of subjects, expletives, or verbs in certain contexts. English does not.

English requires a subject for all sentences except imperatives, in which the subject *you* is understood (*Give to the poor*). If your native language allows the omission of an explicit subject, be especially alert to this requirement in English.

- ▶ <sup>I have</sup> ~~Have~~ a large collection of baseball cards.
- ▶ My brother is very bright; <sup>he</sup> ~~could~~ read a book before he started school.

When the subject has been moved from its normal position before the verb, English sometimes requires an



expletive (*there* or *it*) at the beginning of the sentence or clause.

▶ As you know, <sup>there</sup> are many religious sects in India.

▶ <sup>It is</sup> healthy to eat fruit and grains.

The subjects of these sentences are *sects* and *to eat fruit and grains*.

Although some languages allow the omission of the verb when the meaning is clear without it, English does not.

▶ Powell Street in San Francisco <sup>is</sup> very steep.

### 16d. Repeated subjects or objects

English does not allow a subject to be repeated in its own clause. This is true even if a word group intervenes between the subject and the verb.

▶ The painting that had been stolen ~~it~~ was found.

The pronoun *it* repeats the subject *painting*.

In some languages an object is repeated later in the adjective clause in which it appears; in English, such repetitions are not allowed. Adjective clauses usually begin with *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, or *that*, and these words always serve a grammatical function within the clauses they introduce. Another word in the clause cannot also serve that same function.

▶ The puppy ran after the taxi that we were riding in, ~~it~~.

The relative pronoun *that* is the object of the preposition *in*, so the object *it* is not allowed.

Even when the relative pronoun has been omitted, do not add another word with its same function.

▶ The puppy ran after the taxi we were riding in, ~~it~~.

The relative pronoun *that* is understood.