Verbs: Modals and Auxiliaries

An auxiliary is a helping verb. It is used with a main verb to form a verb phrase. For example,

- She was calling her friend.

Here the word calling is the main verb and the word was is an auxiliary verb.

The words be, have, do, can, could, may, might, shall, should, must, will, would, used, need, dare, ought are called auxiliaries.

The verbs be, have and do are often referred to as primary auxiliaries. They have a grammatical function in a sentence.

The rest in the above list are called modal auxiliaries, which are also known as modals. They express attitude like permission, possibility, etc.

Note the forms of the primary auxiliaries.

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<th>Auxiliary verbs</th>
<th>Present tense</th>
<th>Past tense</th>
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<tr>
<td>be</td>
<td>am, is, are</td>
<td>was, were</td>
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<tr>
<td>do</td>
<td>do, does</td>
<td>did</td>
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<tr>
<td>have</td>
<td>has, have</td>
<td>had</td>
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The table below illustrates the application of these primary verbs.

<table>
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<th>Primary auxiliary</th>
<th>Function</th>
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<td>be</td>
<td>used in the formation of continuous tenses</td>
<td>She is sewing a dress. I am leaving tomorrow.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>in sentences where the action is more important than the subject</td>
<td>The missing child was found.</td>
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when followed by an infinitive, it is used to indicate a plan or an arrangement

| have | used to form the perfect tenses | The carpenter has worked well. |
|      | used with the infinitive to indicate some kind of obligation | I had to work that day. |

| do | used to form the negative and interrogative of the simple present and the simple past | He doesn’t work at all. Did you work that day? |
|    | in the imperative form, it makes the statement more forceful | Do sit down quietly. |

**Note**

When *have* is used in the sense of take or receive, *do* is used to form questions or negatives. For example,

- Do you have cereals for breakfast?

**A. Choose the correct auxiliary from those given in brackets.**

1. Harry __________ go to the party. *(has/have)*
2. We __________ going to party tonight. *(was/are)*
3. I __________ finished my homework. *(have/am)*
4. We __________ to visit that place in the morning. *(was/had)*
5. __________ you want some coffee? *(do/have)*
6. I ____________ not like you. (do/am)
7. I ____________ want you to pass your exam. (had/do)
8. He speaks faster than she ____________ (do/does)
9. You ____________ to see the doctor immediately. (are/was)
10. This house ____________ made of wood. (is/have)

Let us look at the functions of modal auxiliaries.

◆ **Can** usually expresses potential or ability. It is also used to indicate permission. For example,
  • Ram **can** bake a cake. (ability)
  • **Can** you break this door? (ability)
  • The doctor said, ‘You **can** play basketball again.’ (permission)

◆ **Could** is used as the past tense of **can** in indirect speech. It is used to indicate ability in the past. **Could** is also used to suggest a weak possibility in the future. For example,
  • Rob said that he **could** solve the problem. (ability in indirect speech)
  • He **could** drive a car when he was young. (ability in the past)
  • She **could** leave on Friday. (weak possibility)

◆ **May** is usually used when we ask for permission. It is also used to express a wish or to indicate a strong possibility. For example,
  • **May** I borrow your copy of *Julius Caesar*? (permission)
  • **May** you always prosper! (wish)
  • There **may** be a road block today. (possibility)

◆ **Might** is used as the past equivalent of **may**. It suggests a weak possibility. For example,
  • We **might** leave town next week.

◆ **Shall/Should** is used in the second and third person to express a promise or even a threat.
  • You **should** receive your wages tomorrow. (promise)
  • He **shall** not remain the captain anymore. (threat)
  • Which pen **should** I buy? (seeking advice)
◆ Will is used in the second and third person to express simple future time. Would is used to make polite requests. For example,
  • You will not speak.
  • He will come here.
  • Would you like to have a cup of tea? (polite request)

Will is used in the first person to express willingness, determination, promise, habit, intention or even a threat.
  • I will do the work. (willingness)
  • I will achieve my goal. (determination)
  • We will help you. (promise)
  • He will watch TV for hours. (habit)
  • I will go to meet her today. (intention)
  • We will sue him. (threat)

B. Fill in the blanks with shall, should, will or would.

1. We __________________ be delighted to meet your son.
2. I am sorry. I __________________ behave better next time.
3. You __________________ be ashamed of yourself.
4. You __________________ not lie.
5. I __________________ call your parents today.
6. You __________________ try to lose weight.
7. You __________________ be promoted to the next rank if you succeed.
8. I __________________ never go to Chennai.
9. You __________________ do as you are told.
10. I __________________ be much obliged to you for all the kindness you have shown.
11. I __________________ certainly help you.
12. You __________________ apologise for your behaviour.

Now learn some more modals.

◆ Must expresses necessity or obligation. For example,
  • We must reach on time.
It can express fixed determination. For example,

- I must be allowed to express my wish.

- **Ought** expresses moral obligation and desirability. It is always followed by *to + verb*. For example,
  - We ought to put in our best effort.
  - We ought to win.

It can be used to indicate present or future time. For example,

- I ought to apologise to him.

- **Used to** indicates a discontinued habit. For example,
  - We used to go swimming in the evenings.

- **Need** denotes necessity or obligation. For example,
  - We need to visit this place once.

  It is commonly used in negatives and interrogatives.
  - He need not give up studies.

  **Need** as a finite verb means **want** or **require**.
  - He does not need your money.

- **Dare** means **be bold enough to**. It is commonly used in interrogatives and negative sentences. For example,
  - How dare you argue with me?

**Note**

*Used to* also works as an adjective, meaning accustomed. For example, I am used to studying in candle light.

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**C. Fill in the blanks with ought, have, has, must or may.**

1. ____________ you enjoy a prosperous life!
2. I have no information about this. Your father ____________ be knowing.
3. We ____________ obey the rules.
4. I ____________ to reach the airport by 6 a.m.
5. It ____________ rain this evening.
6. He ____________ be on his way to the parliament by now.
7. He ____________ to reach his new office on time.
8. I ____________ to complete this task today.
9. We ____________ be careful while driving.
D. Choose the correct alternatives to fill in the blanks.

1. ____________ you like another cup of coffee? (would/shall/should)
2. Kartik ____________ to play football before he took up rugby. (used/is used/was used)
3. ____________ you show me the way to the nearest post office? (may/might/could)
4. He said he ____________ be thirty next month. (could/should/would)
5. I was afraid that he ____________ turn down my offer. (may/might/must)
6. If you ____________ see him, ask him to meet me. (would/shall/should)
7. My teacher said, ‘You ____________ use my telephone whenever you need to.’ (might/may/should)
8. I ran as fast as my legs ____________ carry me. (can/could/may)
9. I don’t think we ____________ execute this plan. (may/should/would)
10. This ____________ to be done with care. (need/needs/have)

E. The highlighted auxiliaries have been wrongly used in this conversation. Correct them.

Rahul: Hi, Pankaj! I just got into town and heard that you were in bed with a broken leg. It shouldn’t be true!

Pankaj: Good to hear from you, Rahul. I am much better now. A week ago I wouldn’t walk without crutches. Now I am walk slowly.

Rahul: I haven’t believe it when I was told that you of all people was met with an accident. You are such a careful driver. When do you think you must join work?

Pankaj: The doctor says that I ought to be well enough to go back at the end of the week. I used to be fairly agile by then! He says that I will start with a stroll around the park and gradually increase the pace. Soon I can be jogging and jigging once more! In fact, it shall be sooner than you may imagine.