

Helping (Auxiliary) Verbs

What are helping verbs?

Helping verbs are also called *auxiliary verbs*. They are used with other verbs called **main verbs** to help show a verb's tense, ask a question, or express a possible action or condition.

Examples:

- I **am** writing a book. (main verb: "writing")
- He **has** done the work. (main verb: "done")
- We **will** be there in a minute. (main verb: "be")
- **Would** you help me with this homework? (main verb: "help")
- **Can** you open the door? (main verb: "open")
- **Did** you visit New York last holiday? (main verb: "visit")
- **Do** you like chocolate? (main verb: "like")
- They **must** get there on time. (main verb: "get")

Here is a list of helping verbs in English:

- *be (am, are, is, was, were, being)* - used to show a verb tense; can also be a main verb
- *can*
- *could*
- *do (did, does, doing)*, - use to ask questions or make positive or negative statements; can also be a main verb
- *have (had, has, having)*, - used to show a verb tense; can also be a main verb
- *may*
- *might*
- *must*
- *shall*
- *should*
- *will*
- *would*

How do I know if a verb is a helping verb or a main verb?

Use the following test to help you know the difference:

1. If you can switch the subject and the verb, the verb is a **helping verb**.
If the verb can take *not* in the negative form, then it is a **helping verb**.

Examples

- **You are** going to travel to London. --
- **Are you** going to travel to London?
- You **are not** going to travel to London.

2. If you cannot switch the subject and the verb, the verb is a **main verb**.
If the verb cannot take *not* in the negative form, then it is a **main verb**.

Example:

- **You swim after school.**
- **Swim you** after school. - This does not work, because "swim" is a main verb.
- You **swim not** after school. - This does not work, because "swim" is a main verb.