

Making English Grammar Meaningful and Useful

Mini Lesson #4

Helping Verbs – 5 Grammatical Functions

The **purpose** of this lesson is to list the ways in which **Helping Verbs** are used in English tenses.

English is not a heavily inflected language. Instead, it makes use of **Helping Verbs**. **Helping Verbs** are verbs that have grammatical functions in subject-verb combinations without adding semantic meanings to the sentences in which they are found. **Chart #1** presents the helping verbs used in the 12 English tenses.

Chart #1 – English Helping Verbs

	Simple Tenses	Continuing Tenses	Before Tenses	Continuing Before Tenses
Future Tenses	will	will be	will have	will have been
Present Tenses	do does	am is are	have has	have been has been
Past Tenses	did	was were	had	had been

In spoken English, **Helping Verbs** are frequently reduced and contracted with other words, but they have 5 very important **Grammatical Functions**.

1. Helping Verbs indicate the **Kind of Tense** used in an utterance. Continuing Tenses use the verb 'BE' as helping verbs. Before tenses use the verb 'HAVE'. Simple tenses use the verb 'DO' in negatives and questions.
2. Helping Verbs indicate the **Time** – Past, Present or Future – when the events described by the verb took place.
3. English **Negative** utterances are formed by placing the word 'NOT' after the initial Helping Verb as illustrated in **Chart #2**. Frequently the Helping Verb and 'NOT' are contracted.

Chart #2 Using Helping Verbs in Negative Sentences

	Simple Tenses	Continuing Tenses	Before Tenses	Continuing Before Tenses
Future Tenses	I will not walk home.	I will not be walking home.	I will not have walked home.	I will not have been walking home.
Present Tenses	I do not walk home.	I am not walking home.	I have not walked home.	I have not been walking home.
Past Tenses	I did not walk home.	I was not walking home.	I had not walked home.	I had not been walking home.

4. English **Questions** are formed by inverting subject-verb word order. In nearly all cases, it is a Helping Verb that comes before the subject to form a question as illustrated in **Chart #3**.

Chart #3 Using Helping Verbs in Questions

	Simple Tenses	Continuing Tenses	Before Tenses	Continuing Before Tenses
Future Tenses	Will you walk home?	Will you be walking home?	Will you have walked home?	Will you have been walking home?
Present Tenses	Do you walk home?	Are you walking home?	Have you walked home?	Have you been walking home?
Past Tenses	Did you walk home?	Were you walking home?	Had you walked home?	Had you been walking home?

5. English requires sentences to have **Subjects-Verb Agreement** regarding singularity and plurality. In most instances, it is the Subject and the Helping Verb which must be in agreement.