

Introduction to Verbs (Part I)

1) Classes of verbs

A- There are two classes of verbs in English:

- The auxiliary verbs (auxiliaries): *to be, to have, to do; can, could, may, might, must, ought, shall, should, will, would; to need, to dare* and *used*.
- All other verbs, which we may call ordinary verbs: *to work, to sing, to pray*.

B- *be, have, do, need* and *dare* have infinitives and participles like ordinary verbs, but *can, could, may, might, must, ought, shall, should, will* and *would* have neither infinitives nor participles and therefore have only a restricted number of forms.

.... It is helpful to consider ordinary verbs before; most of whose tenses are formed with auxiliaries.

2) Affirmative contractions

-The auxiliaries **be, have, will, would** are contracted as follows:

am 'm / have 've / will 'll / is 's / has 's / would 'd / are 're / had 'd

-Note that **'s** can be **is** or **has** and **'d** can be **had** or **would**:

He's going = He is going.

He's gone = He has gone.

He'd paid = He had paid.

He'd like a drink = He would like a drink.

-These contractions are used after pronouns, **here, there**, some question words and short nouns:

Here's your pen/ The twins 've arrived / The car'd broken down.

-Affirmative contractions are not used at the end of sentences:

You aren't in a hurry but I am. (I'm would not be possible here.)

- **shall/should, was** and **were** are not written in a contracted form but are often contracted in speech to /ʃl, ʃəd, wəz/ and /wɜ(r)/.

3) Negative contractions

The auxiliaries **be, have, will, would, shall, should, do** are contracted as follows:

am not 'm not

is not isn't or 's not

are not aren't or 're not

I'm not going and Tom isn't going/Tom's not going.

We aren't going/We're not going.

-have not and **has not** contract to **haven't** and **hasn't**, but in perfect tenses **'ve not** and **'s not** are also possible:

We haven't seen him/We've not seen him.

He hasn't/He 's not come yet.

-will not contracts to **won't**, though **'ll not** is also possible, **shall not** contracts to **shan't**:

I won't go/I'll not go till I hear and I shan't hear till tomorrow.

-Other verb forms are contracted in the usual way by adding **n't**.

-Negative contractions can come at the end of a sentence: *I saw it but he didn't.*

- In English, a negative sentence can have only one negative expression in it. Two negative expressions give the sentence an affirmative meaning:

Nobody did nothing means that everyone did something.

-So, *never, no* (adjective), *none, nobody, no one, nothing, hardly, hardly ever* etc. are used with an affirmative verb. We can say:

He didn't eat anything or He ate nothing.

He doesn't ever complain or He never complains.

We haven't seen anyone or We have seen no one.

They didn't speak much or They hardly spoke at all/They hardly ever spoke.

4) Auxiliary verbs

A) Auxiliaries and modal auxiliaries

Principal auxiliaries	Modal auxiliaries	Semi-modals
to be	can could	to need
to have	may might	to dare
to do	must had to	used
	ought	
	shall should	
	will would	

-Auxiliaries help to form a tense or an expression, hence the name.

-They combine with present or past participles or with infinitives to form the tenses of ordinary verbs: *I am coming. He has finished. I didn't see them.*

-They combine with infinitives to indicate *permission, possibility, obligation, deduction* etc.

He can speak French.

You may go.

We must hurry.

B) Auxiliaries: forms and patterns

-1- be, have and do (the principal auxiliaries)

Infinitive	Present tense	Past tense	Past participle
to be	am, is, are	was	been
to have	have, has	had	had
to do	do, does	did	done

- In the negative and interrogative, be and do follow the auxiliary pattern:

Negative, verb + **not**: *He isn't coming. It did not matter.*

Interrogative, subject + verb: *Was he waiting? Does she see us?*

- have normally follows the auxiliary pattern:

Has he (got) to go?

...but sometimes uses do/did forms:

Does he have to go?

- be takes the full infinitive:

They are to wait for us at the station.

- have takes the full infinitive except in two constructions (see 119 A. 120).

- do takes the bare infinitive: *Did he write?*

- be, have and do, when used as auxiliaries, require a participle or infinitive, though in answers, comments etc. this is often understood but not mentioned:

Have you seen it? ~ Yes, I have (seen it).

- be, have and do can also be used as ordinary verbs with independent meanings; i.e. **have** can mean 'possess', **do** can mean 'perform/occupy oneself' etc.

.....**be** or **have** or **do** can then be the only verb in a sentence:

He is lazy.

He has no job.

He does nothing.

.....**do** is then conjugated with **do/did**: *What do you do in the evenings?*

.....and **have** can be conjugated in either way: *Have you (got) time? /Do you have time?*

-2- can, could, may, might, must, ought, will, would, shall and should (the modal auxiliaries)

-Modal verbs have no final 's' in the third person singular:

I must, he must

I can, he can

-They always form their negative and interrogative according to the auxiliary pattern:

will not ought not. . .

will he . . . ? ought he . . . ?

A PRACTICAL ENGLISH GRAMMAR/FIRST YEAR

-They have no proper past tenses; four past forms exist, **could, might should, would**, but they have only a restricted use.

-Modal verbs have no infinitives or participles and therefore cannot be used in the continuous tenses. All modal verbs except *ought* are followed by the bare infinitive:

You should pay but You ought to pay.

-A modal verb always requires an infinitive, though sometimes this is understood but not mentioned:

Can you understand? — Yes, I can (understand).

-need, dare and used (the semi-modals), when used as auxiliaries, *need* and *dare* can conform to the modal ' pattern. They then take the bare infinitive:

He need not wait.

.....But they can also use the do/did forms, and then take the full infinitive with to:

He doesn't dare to interrupt. They didn't need to wait.

-need and dare can also be used as ordinary verbs, and are then inflected and have the usual participles:

He needs help.

They dared me to jump.

-used, sometimes referred to as used to is used only in the past. For its negative and interrogative it usually follows the auxiliary pattern:

used not

/usedn't to go.

.....But though technically used has no infinitive, the forms didn't use to and did he/she etc. use to? are quite often heard.

5) be, have, do

A) be as an auxiliary verb:

.....*Form and use in the formation of tenses:*

Form

-Principal parts: be, was, been, Gerund/present participle: being

- Present tense:

Affirmative

Negative

Interrogative

I am/I'm

I am not/I'm not

am!? are you

-Alternative negative contractions: you aren't, he isn't etc. Negative interrogative: am I not/aren't? is he not/isn't he? etc.

- Past tense:

Affirmative

Negative

Interrogative

/ was I was not/wasn't was I?
-Negative interrogative: was I not/wasn't I? were you not/weren't you?
was he not/wasn't he? etc.

-The forms are the same when be is used as an ordinary verb. Other tenses follow the rules for ordinary verbs. But be is not normally used in the continuous form except in the passive.

Use to form tenses

-be is used in continuous active forms: *He is working/will be working etc.*, and in all passive forms: *He was followed/is being/allowed.*

.....Note that be can be used in the continuous forms in the passive:

Active: *They are carrying him.*

Passive: *He is being carried.*

- be + infinitive:

-The be + infinitive construction, e.g. / *am to go*, is extremely important and can be used in the following ways:

- To convey orders or instructions:

No one is to leave this building without the permission of the police.

(no one must leave) / *He is to stay here till we return, (he must stay).*

.....This is a rather impersonal way of giving instructions and is chiefly used with **the third person**. When used with **you** it often implies that the speaker is passing on instructions issued by someone else. The difference between (a) *Stay here, Tom* and b) *You are to stay here, Tom* is that in (a) the speaker himself is ordering Tom to stay, while in (b) he may be merely conveying to Tom the wishes of another person. This distinction disappears of course in indirect speech, and the be + infinitive construction is an extremely useful way of expressing indirect commands, particularly when the introductory verb is in the present tense:

He says, Wait till I come. = *He says that we are to wait till he comes.*

.....or when there is a clause in front of the imperative:

He said, 'If I fall asleep at the wheel wake me up.' = *He said that if he fell asleep at the wheel she was to wake him up.*

- It is also used in reporting requests for instructions: *Where shall I put it, sir?' he asked*
= *He asked where he was to put it.*

- To convey a plan: *She is to be married next month.*

The expedition is to start in a week's time.

...This construction is very much used in newspapers:

The Prime Minister is to make a statement tomorrow.

...In the headlines, the verb be is often omitted to save space:

The Prime Minister to make statement tomorrow.

.....The first of these doesn't tell us whether the plan was carried out or not. The second is used for an unfulfilled plan, i.e. one which was not carried out:

The Lord Mayor was to have laid the foundation stone but he was taken ill last night so the Lady Mayoress is doing it instead.

-was/were + infinitive can express an idea of destiny:

He received a blow on the head. It didn't worry him at the time but it was to be very troublesome later, (turned out to be/proved troublesome)

They said goodbye, little knowing that they were never to meet again. (were destined never to meet)

-be about + infinitive expresses the immediate future:

They are about to start. (They are just going to start/They are on the point of starting.)

.... just can be added to make the future even more immediate:

They are just about to leave.

.... Similarly in the past:

He was just about to dive when he saw the shark.

... be on the point of + gerund has the same meaning as be about + infinitive, but is a shade more immediate.

B) be as an ordinary verb:

Form

-*be* to denote existence, *be* + adjective:

-1- **be** is the verb normally used to denote the existence of, or to give information about, a person or thing:

Tom is a carpenter.

The dog is in the garden.

Malta is an island.

The roads were rough and narrow.

Gold is a metal.

Peter was tall and fair.

-2- **be** is used to express physical or mental condition:

He was excited/calm.

They will be happy/unhappy.

-With certain adjectives, e.g. quiet/noisy, good/bad, wise/foolish, it is possible to use the

continuous form of be, e.g. *Tom is being foolish*, to imply that the subject is showing this quality at this time.

... Compare *Tom is being foolish*, which means Tom is talking or acting foolishly now, with *Tom is foolish*, which means that Tom always acts or talks foolishly. Similarly, *The children are being quiet* means they are playing quietly now, but *The children are quiet* might mean that they usually play quietly.

-Other adjectives include: annoying generous/mean cautious/rash helpful/unhelpful clever/stupid irritating, difficult, mysterious, economical/extravagant optimistic/pessimistic, formal polite funny selfish/unselfish.

... With some of these, e.g. stupid, difficult, funny, polite, the continuous " form may imply that the subject is deliberately acting in this way:

You are being stupid may mean You are not trying to understand.

He is being difficult usually means He is raising unnecessary 'objections.

He is being funny usually means He is only joking. Don't ' believe him.

She is just being polite probably means She is only pretending to admire your car/house etc.

-be is used for age:

How old are you? ~ I'm ten/I am ten years old. (not I'm ten years}

How old is the tower? ~ It is 400 years old. (years old must be used when giving the age of things.)

-Size and weight are expressed by be:

*How tall are you?/What is your height? ~ I am 1'65 metres. *

How high are we flow? - We're about 20,000 feet.

What is your weight? or What do you weigh/How much do you weigh? ~ I am 65 kilos or / weigh 65 kilos.

-be is used for prices:

How much is this melon? or What does this melon cost? ~ It's £1.

The best seats are (= cost) £25.

..... Ignore is/are, there was/were etc.

a-When a noun representing an indefinite person or thing is the subject of the verb be we normally use a there + be + noun construction. We can say:

A policeman is at the door but *There is a policeman at the door* should be more usual.

This means that, though there appears to be the subject, the real subject is noun that follows the verb, and if this noun is plural the verb must plural too:

There are two policemen at the door.

-In the above sentences, both constructions (noun + be and there + be + noun) are possible. But when be is used to mean exist/happen, the 'there' construction is necessary:

There is a mistake/There are mistakes in this translation.

.....these sentences could not be rewritten: *A mistake is/Mistakes are* etc.

B-In the following examples, (R) is placed after the example when the there construction is replaceable by noun/pronoun + verb:

There have been several break-ins this year.

There will be plenty of room for everyone.

There were hundreds of people on the beach. (R)

.....there can be used similarly with someone/anyone/no one/Something etc.:

There's someone on the phone for you. (R)

C- there + be + something/nothing/anything + adjective is also possible:

Is there anything wrong (with your car)? (R) ~

No, there's nothing wrong with it. (R) There's something odd/strange about this letter.

D- A noun or someone/something etc. could be followed by a relative clause:

There's a film I want to see. There's something I must say. or by an infinitive:

There's nothing to do. (nothing that we can do/must do)

E- The there construction can be used with another auxiliary + be:

There must be no doubt about this. There may be a letter for me. or with seem + be, appear + be: There seems to be something wrong here.

F- there used as above is always unstressed.

... Be careful not to confuse there used in this way with there, stressed, used as an adverb:

There's a man I want to see. (He is standing by the door.)

Compare with:

There's a man I want to see. (This man exists.)

- it is and there is compared for uses of it is. Some examples may help to prevent confusion between the two forms:

..... it is + adjective; there is + noun:

It is foggy or There is a fog.

It was very wet or There was a lot of rain.

It won't be very sunny or There won't be much sun.

-it is, there is of distance and time:

It is a long way to York.

A PRACTICAL ENGLISH GRAMMAR/FIRST YEAR

There is a long way still to go. (We have many miles still to go.)

It is time to go home. (We always start home at six and it is six, now

There is time for us to go home and come back here again before the film starts. (That amount of time exists.)

-it is, used for identity, and there is + noun/pronoun:

There is someone at the door. I think it's the man to read the meter

There's a key here. Is it the key of the safe?

It is the grandmother who makes the decisions, (the grandmother, not any other member of the family)

... and there's the grandmother, who lives in the granny-flat. (the grandmother exists)