

How to conjugate verbs in English - Part I

It is easy to conjugate verbs in English. You just need to know how to conjugate auxiliary verbs. Auxiliary verbs are sometimes called helping verbs. There are two kinds of auxiliary verbs: primary auxiliaries and modal auxiliaries. Primary auxiliaries can serve as the main verb in a sentence. Examples are: *is, am, are, was, were, has, have, had, do, does* and *did*.

Modal auxiliaries cannot act as main verbs. They are used with other verbs to express ideas such as necessity, obligation, possibility, certainty, willingness etc.

Except for the simple present and simple past tenses, all other tenses in English use auxiliary verbs. By learning these simple steps, you can easily conjugate verbs in English.

Step 1

Identify the main verb in the sentence. This is the first thing you need to do. Verbs are action words. They say what somebody or something does / did / will do. Examples are: *work, play, act, stop, run, walk, wait* etc.

Step 2

Decide on the time of the action. Did the action take place in the past? Then the verb has to be in the past. If the sentence is about something that happens at the moment of speaking, then it has to be in the present tense. If it is about something that has to take place in the future, then the verb has to be in the future tense.

If the sentence is about something that happens regularly, use the simple present tense. The simple present tense does not use an auxiliary verb in the affirmative form. Examples are:

I like coffee.

She adores her kids.

My parents work in education.

Note the marker -s when the subject is a singular noun or third person pronoun.

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If the sentence is about something that is happening at the time of speaking, use the present continuous tense.

I am working.

She is writing.

They are playing.

If the sentence is about something that happened at a specific point of time in the past, use the simple past tense.

I slept for twelve hours.

She went to school.

Susie visited us last week.

Use the present perfect tense to talk about recent actions and events whose effect is still felt in the present. Perfect tenses are also used when we mention the duration of the action.

They have lived here for ten years.

I have worked with kids before.