

Helping Verbs

First we learned about action verbs. Next came the linking verbs. Now we are onto the last type of verbs that we'll be studying - helping verbs.

Helping verbs - Helping verbs do just what their name suggests...they *help* the main verb in a sentence. What do they help *with*? Several things: they can show tense (which indicates when an action happened), ability, intention, or possibility.

A main verb plus a helping verb(s) is called a **verb phrase**. The main verb in a verb phrase is always the last one. **The main verb can be an action verb or a linking verb, but it can never be a helping verb.**

The most common helping verbs are:

am is are was were be being been
have has had do does did
could would should may might must
can will shall

Helping verbs will be followed by a main verb. The helpers often change the *time* that something occurs.

- We **will eat** lunch at noon. (“will” (HV) “eat” (MV): this will happen in the future)
- We **are eating** lunch. (“are” (HV) “eating” (MV): this is happening right now)
- We **were eating** lunch earlier. (“were” (HV) “eating” (MV): this happened in the past)

Helping verbs allow us to create really complex ideas:

- We **could have eaten** lunch at noon. (“could” and “have” (HV); “eaten” (MV))
 - *The opportunity was there, but we decided not to eat.*
- We **should have eaten** lunch at noon. (“should” and “have” (HV); “eaten” (MV))
 - *The opportunity may have been there, but we didn't, and now we regret it.*
- We **would have eaten** lunch at noon. (“would” and “have” (HV); “eaten” (MV))
 - *We planned on eating at noon, but something kept us from doing it.*

WARNING! The orange verbs above can be tricky! Depending on how they are used in the sentence, they can be a linking verb **or** a helping verb. So how can you tell which it is? Here's the key: *If there is a verb following the orange ones, then the orange verb is a helping verb. If the orange verb is by itself in the sentence, then it's a linking verb.*

- Kerry **was** happy about her grades. (“was” is by itself - it's a *linking verb*)
- Kerry **was bragging** about her grades. (“was” is a *HV* because another verb follows it - “bragging”)
- The bulldog **is** sweet. (“is” is by itself - it's a *linking verb*)
- The bulldog **is licking** the boy's face. (“is” is a *HV* because another verb follows it - “licking”)

WARNING! A verb phrase only contains verbs - a main verb and its helping verbs. BUT, lots of times adverbs will appear in the middle of a verb phrase. Just be aware that there may be sneaky words in a verb phrase that are not verbs themselves.

We could not have eaten lunch at noon.

(“not” is an adverb and is *not* part of the verb phrase)

We should never have eaten lunch at noon.

(“never” is an adverb and is *never* part of the verb phrase)

We would often eat lunch at noon.

(“often” is an adverb and is *never* part of the verb phrase)

We would sometimes eat lunch at noon.

(“sometimes” is an adverb and is *never* part of the verb phrase)