Auxiliary Verbs

Do On its own, the verb "do" can mean "to complete an action or task." For example, "I do a dance" or "he does his homework." However, when used as an auxiliary verb, "do" can add one of three things.

Emphasis

Adding the verb "do" to a sentence emphasizes the main verb, like insisting that it is true. For example, if someone thought I couldn't speak English, I might say "No, I do speak English." Rather than simply stating that I speak English, using the auxiliary "do" stresses the fact that I speak English as it contradicts with what someone assumed.

Question Formation

We use the auxiliary verb "do" when forming a question, such as "Do you speak English?" In English, we switch the subject and verb when asking a question, but it doesn't make sense to say "Speak you English?" Therefore, we use the auxiliary verb "do" to arrange the question.

Negation

The auxiliary verb "do" can also negate something, or show that it is not true, when it is combined with "not". For example, in the sentence "I don't speak English," the word "not" modifies "do" to negate the verb "speak." It is not correct in English to say "I speak not English," so instead we use the auxiliary "do."

Auxiliary Verbs

Have As a standalone verb, "have" indicates possession, such as saying "I have a house" or "She has brown hair." However, as an auxiliary verb we use "have" with the participle of another verb to indicate the perfect aspect.

Perfect Aspect

The perfect aspect shows that a verb has taken place in the past, but still connects to the present somehow.

The auxiliary verb "have" can be conjugated the same as any other verb. Its forms include have, has, had, and having, and they can all be negated with "not." Here are some examples with those other forms:

She has not seen the newest episode yet. → This sentence is in the present perfect tense, showing that the action of seeing the episode has taken place in the past but connects with the present— or in this case, the action of not seeing the episode.

Having heard the good news, the child jumped up and down in excitement. → This sentence is in the simple past, and the perfect construction "having heard" functions like an adjective, meaning it describes the child who is jumping.

I wish that he had been more careful with that laptop; he dropped it as soon as he bought it! → This sentence is in the past perfect tense, also called pluperfect. Not only did the action of "being careful" take place in the past, but it is in the past of the past; first he was "not careful", then he dropped the laptop, and now in the present the speaker is "wishing" something different had happened.

Auxiliary Verbs

Be

The verb "be" is the first thing any English student will learn. It indicates basic existence, which can include position ("The cup is on the table"), nationality ("I am American"), occupation ("They are a teacher"), and a whole host of other things. As an auxiliary verb, "be" is used to indicate the progressive aspect or to show the object of a verb such as in passive voice.

Progressive Aspect

Progressive verbs are constructed with the auxiliary verb "be" and the -ing form of the verb to indicate that the action is taking place immediately or is not fully completed yet. For example, if I say "I call my friends on Fridays" I am speaking generally, but if I say "I am calling my friends right now" it means I am currently or just about to be in the middle of calling them.

You can also use the progressive aspect to emphasize a verb. For example, if I say "I am calling my friends today," that doesn't mean that I'm going to spend the whole day on the phone with them. It just emphasizes that I actively intend to call my friends.

Indication of Object

When used with participles, the auxiliary verb "be" indicates the object of a verb. For example, "The car was driven by my father." This uses the passive voice. Generally the passive voice is not used very often (though I used it just now!), as it is less clear and engaging for the reader, but from time to time you can encounter it.

Practice

Practice activity **Select the correct option to fill in the gap.**

1. It may surprise you, but actually he **(does / has)** know a lot about Malaysian history.
2. **(Do / Have)** you know the name of your professor?
3. He can't talk right now, he **(is / has)** attending a meeting.
4. This novel **(was / does)** written by E. M. Forster.
5. I would have told you about the accident sooner if I **(did / had)** known, but I only just learned about it.
6. **(Have / Do)** they ever eaten at a sushi restaurant before?
7. They **(are / have)** arriving tomorrow morning.
8. She **(does / has)** not look like her sister at all.
9. He sent a thank-you note to his friend after **(having / being)** received the birthday gift.
10. You know how the old saying goes: Rome **(wasn't / doesn't)** built in a day!

Answers 1. does, 2. Do, 3. is, 4. was, 5. had, 6. Have, 7. are, 8. does, 9. having, 10. wasn't