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helping verbs

We will give you the basic idea of helping verbs here. As the use of helping verbs gets complicated and extensive, we will let you go to another, more detailed source, such as a grammar handbook, for all the information on helping verbs, all the tenses you can create with them, and how to use them.

When we conjugate verbs (Chapter 10 page 133), we indicate *when* something takes place. If we want more complicated indications of time, we use helping verbs. For example, we might use the simple past tense:

I **worked** in the garden, and then you called on the telephone. —PAST TENSE

But if your friend called *while* you were working in your garden, you would say:

I **had been working** in the garden when you called on the telephone. —PAST PERFECT
CONTINUOUS TENSE

To create that past perfect continuous tense, you need the helping verbs “had been.”

Helping verbs help the main verb in the sentence to convey precisely the time something happens.

We have 23 helping verbs in English. We categorize them into two groups:

- Forms of *have*, *do*, and *be*;
- Modal verbs

Have, do, be

We use *have*, *do*, and *be* to more precisely define the time we are talking about in the sentence.



When we use *have*, *do*, and *be*, we conjugate them just as we would any other verb.

I have been working in the garden all day.

She has been working in her garden all day.

I had been working in the garden all day.

She had been working in the garden all day.

Modals

The other 9 helping verbs we call modals.

We use modals to express more precisely the meaning of the main verb in the sentence.

We don't conjugate the modals when we use them as helping verbs.

We have nine modals in English:

can	shall
could	should
may	will
might	would
must	

For example:

You should help your sister with her homework.

You must help your sister with her homework.

You will help your sister with her homework.

The main verb in the sentence, “help,” needs some help from a helping verb to express more precisely what we are talking about.