LEXICAL VERBS AND AUXILIARY VERB

In class one, we looked at the elements of a sentence and explained that a sentence is made up of a subject and a predicate. The subject is the person or thing performing the action that the sentence is talking about. Everything else in the sentence is the predicate; for example:

*I love you madly.*

In this sentence, *I* is the subject because I am the person doing the loving, and *love you madly* is the predicate. If you look at the predicate, you will see that it begins with a verb - in this case, the verb *love*. All sentences must include a verb, because the verb tells us what action the subject is performing.

Many sentences, but not all, contain an object - a person or thing that is being acted upon. In this case, the object is *you*. And many sentences also contain other information, presented in various types of grammatical phrases - in this case, the word *madly* is an adverbial phrase. But objects and adverbial phrases are not needed to make a sentence and we won’t cover them here.

Main verbs can take five forms, which indicate things like tense and aspect. They are the base, present, present participle, past and past participle:

**Base:** laugh  
**Present (-s):** laughs  
**Present participle (-ing):** laughing  
**Past:** laughed  
**Past participle (-ed):** laughed

This pattern of forms, in which the past and the past participle is the same, applies to all regular verbs. (Apart from the verb ‘to be’, which is highly irregular, irregular verbs tend to differ in the past and the past participle; for example, ‘write’ has ‘wrote’ for the past and ‘written’ for the past participle.)

The form the verb is in tells us whether it is **finite** or **non-finite**. A verb is **finite** if it displays tense and **non-finite** if it does not. We know that the present tense uses the base and present forms and the past tense use the past form. Therefore, the base, present and past forms are all finite forms of the verb.

The **non-finite forms are the present participle, past participle and infinitive**. The infinitive is a form of the verb that does not show person, tense or aspect. It usually takes the form ‘to laugh’ and ‘to write’, but the ‘to’ is not always present. For example, the sentence *I must write* uses the infinite of the verb ‘to write’. When “to” is not used this is called “bare infinitive”.

The issue of finite and non-finite verbs is crucial because it takes us to the last requirement of a sentence - it must have a finite verb; that is, it must show tense. Phrases that do not contain a finite verb leave us hanging; for example:

*Writing the book* (present participle)
*Written the book* (past participle)
*To write the book* (infinitive)

Even by adding a subject, you cannot make a meaningful sentence; for example: *You writing the book*. Contrast these with the verb forms that are finite:

*You write the book* or *Write the book!* (base form)
*She writes the book*. (present form)
*She wrote the book*. (past form)

### II. 1 LEXICAL VERB OR FULL VERB

In linguistics a **lexical verb** or **full verb** is a member of an open class of verbs that includes all verbs except auxiliary verbs. Lexical verbs typically express action, state, or other predicate meaning. The verb phrase of a sentence is generally headed by a lexical verb. It is the main verb of the sentence.

Example: Charlie raises his hand.

### II.2 AUXILIARY VERBS OR HELPING VERBS

Just as the name implies, helping verbs, sometimes called auxiliary verbs, help out the main verb in a sentence. They accomplish this by giving more detail to how time is portrayed in a sentence. For this reason, they are used in [verb conjugation] to show the progressive and the perfect tenses of verbs.

On their own, helping verbs don’t show meaning in that they don’t communicate much when they stand alone. There sole purpose to help the main verb, which provides the real meaning.

Helping verbs help explain the sometimes complicated nuances of meaning. For example, they can show expectation, probability, obligation, potential, and directions. Though this may sound complicated, it’s really not. There aren’t that many helping verbs in the English language. They all fall into one of two groups: primary helping verbs and modal helping verbs.

#### II.2.1 Primary helping verbs

The primary helping verbs are be, do, and have. They’re called primary because they can help main verbs or they can actually be the main verb. Here are some examples of the primary verbs being used as helping verbs.

1. **“Be” verbs.** The term “be verbs” is a little deceiving because they include more than the word “be.” They help show a state of being or a state of existing. Sounds a little boring doesn’t it? Well, they don’t show any action, that’s for sure. That’s why expressive writing discourages using a lot of “be” verbs. Here is a list of “be” verb forms: am, is, are, was, were, been, being, be.

   And here are a few used in sentences:
Katy is watching television. (this shows a continuous tense.)
The other children are playing outside. (this example shows the passive tense.)

ATTENTION:
Be has characteristics of both lexical and auxiliary verbs. As a lexical verb, it can be inflected with tense and person, and be can be the main verb of a sentence. However, be also shares some auxiliary NICE properties such as negation, inversion, code and emphasis.
Examples:
Charlie is a clever student.
Charlie is the troublemaker.
Charlie has been to the Principal's twice already.
Why don't you be more considerate? Note the "do" support!

Be as an auxiliary verb is used with progressive, passive. The auxiliary be has NICE (negation, inversion, code and emphasis) properties.
Examples:
Charlie was raising his hand.
The teacher didn't think Charlie was raising his hand, but he was.
Charlie was told to sit down.
Charlie was being kept in the Principal's office. (aux + ger.-part. + past part.)
You are not to tell anyone. *(You are being not tell anyone.)*
Are we to be here all day?

2. Have. The helping verb have is used to make perfect tenses. The perfect tense shows action that is already completed.
I have finished washing the dishes. (Dish washing is complete!)

3. Do. The verb “do” can perform a variety of functions:
   • To make negatives: I do not care for broccoli.
   • To ask questions: Do you like broccoli?
   • To show emphasis: I do you want you to eat your broccoli.
   • To stand for a main verb: Sam like broccoli more than Carmen does.

II.2.2 Modal helping verbs
Modal helping verbs help “modify” the main verb so that is changes the meaning somewhat. A modal auxiliary verb gives more information about the function of the main verb that it governs. Modals have a wide variety of communicative functions, but these functions can generally be related to a scale ranging from possibility (“may”) to necessity (“must”), in terms of one of the following types of modality:

✓ epistemic modality, concerned with the theoretical possibility of propositions being true or not true (including likelihood and certainty)
  Example: You must be starving. ("It is necessarily the case that you are starving.")

✓ deontic modality, concerned with possibility and necessity in terms of freedom to act (including permission and duty)
  Example: You must leave now. ("You are required to leave now.")
An ambiguous case is *You must speak Spanish.*

This may be intended epistemically ("It is surely the case that you speak Spanish", e.g. after having lived in Spain for a long time), or deontically ("It is a requirement that you speak Spanish", e.g. if you want to get a job in Spain).

Here are the modal verbs:

1. **WOULD** has three alternative uses:
   - past tense combined with habitual aspect (*Last summer I would run every day*)
   - conditional mood for a present or future action (*If I could, I would do it now / next week*). In the first person, intentional modality may also be present.
   - past tense, prospective aspect for an action occurring after the past viewpoint (*After I graduated in 1990, I would work in industry for the next ten years*)
   The negative form *would not* + verb negates the main verb, but in the conditional and intentional mood in the first person the intentional modality may also be negated to indicate negative intention.

2. **WILL** has a number of different uses involving tense, aspect, and modality:
   - It can express aspect alone, without implying futurity: In "He will make mistakes, won't he?", the reference is to a tendency in the past, present, and future and as such expresses habitual aspect.
   - It can express either of two types of modality alone, again without implying futurity: In "That will be John at the door", there is an implication of present time and probabilistic mode, while "You will do it right now" implies obligatory mode.
   - It can express both intentional modality and futurity, as in "I will do it."
   - It can express futurity without modality: "The sun will die in a few billion years."
   As with *would*, the negative form *will not* negates the main verb but in the intentional mode may also indicate negative intentionality.
   In each case the time of viewpoint can be placed in the past by replacing *will* with *would*.

3. **SHALL** indicates futurity or intention in the first person (*I shall go*); for the other persons, it indicates obligation, often negative as in *you shall not lie*, but this usage is old-fashioned.

4. **MUST** can be used either for near-certainty mode (*He must understand it by now*) or for obligatory mode (*You must do that*). The past tense form *must have understood* applies only to the near-certainty mode; expressing obligation in the past requires the lexical construction *had to* + verb.

5. **HAD BETTER** indicates obligatory mode (*He had better do that soon*). There is no corresponding past tense form.

6. **SHOULD** has several uses:
present or future tense combined with possibility mode: *If he should be here already, ...*; *If he should arrive tomorrow, ...*

mild obligatory mode in the present or future tense: *He should do that now / next week*. The past tense can be substituted by using the form *He should have done that*, with a morphological change to the main verb.

probabilistic mode in the present or future tense: *This approach should work*. The corresponding past tense form *should have worked* implies impersonal obligation rather than probability.

7. **MAY** can indicate either the mode of possibility or that of permission:

- possibility in the present or future: *He may be there already, He may arrive tomorrow*. The form *He may have arrived*, with a morphological change to the main verb, indicates not just the mode of possibility but also the aspectual feature of viewing a past event from a present viewpoint. This form applies only to this possibility usage.

- permission in the present or future: *You may go now / next week*. There is no corresponding way to indicate the presence of permission in the past.

8. **CAN** has several uses:

- present ability: *I can swim*. The past tense is expressed by *I could swim*.

- present permission (in informal speech): *You can go now*. In the past tense one can use *could* (*When I was a child, according to my parents' rules I could swim once a week*).

- present moderate probability (seldom used): *That can be true*. There is no past form, since the more common *that could be true* conveys the same (present) tense.

9. **MIGHT** conveys slight likelihood in the present or future (*He might be there already, he might arrive tomorrow*). It can also convey slight advisability (*You might try that*). The past can be substituted using the form *might have* + morphologically altered main verb.

10. **COULD** is used in several ways:

- mild permission or advisability in the present: *You could do that*. The equivalent past form is *could have* + morphologically altered main verb (*you could have done that*).

- permission in the past: *She said I could graduate in one more year*.

- ability in the past: *I could swim when I was five years old*.

- slight probability in the present: *That could be Mary at the door*. The past tense equivalent is *That could have been Mary at the door yesterday*, with a morphologically altered main verb.

- conditional ability: *I could do that if I knew how to swim*. In the past one can say *I could have done that if I had known how to swim*.

- slight intention in the present: *I could do that for you (and maybe I will)*. There is no past equivalent.

11. **NEED**: *Need* can be used as a present tense modal auxiliary, indicating necessity, that is invariant for person/number in questions and negatives only: *Need he go?, He need not go*. The corresponding past tense constructions are *Need he have gone?, He need not have gone*. 


12. **DARE**: *Dare* can be used as a present tense modal auxiliary that is invariant for person/number in questions and negatives only: *Dare he go?, He dare not go.*