

Main Verbs and Helping Verbs

In many sentences a single word is all that is needed to express action or state of being. In other sentences the verb consists of a main verb and one or more helping verbs. A *helping verb* (also called an *auxiliary verb*) helps the *main verb* to express action or a state of being.

EXAMPLES The kitten **curled** up in his lap.

The kitten **has curled** up in his lap. [*Has* is the helping verb. *Curled* is the main verb.]

EXERCISE A For each of the following sentences, underline each main verb once and each helping verb twice. Some sentences have more than one helping verb, and some sentences do not have any.

Example 1. Farmers in that region may have already harvested their wheat.

1. My grandfather has traveled to Europe many times.
2. You must have heard all that noise last night!
3. Those children are wearing their seat belts.
4. The moon had risen early that evening.
5. Does Simon play the trumpet in the band?
6. Broccoli, carrots, and squash are all vegetables.
7. Which way did he run?
8. The cat should not be sitting on the kitchen counter.
9. Do you want some of these carrots?
10. Would you please call me first thing in the morning?

EXERCISE B Complete each of the sentences by writing one or more helping verbs on the line provided.

Example 1. David should be doing his homework right now.

11. He _____ been sleeping instead of studying.
12. We _____ practice our skit at my house tonight.
13. _____ you come over after dinner for about an hour?
14. We probably _____ not drive very far in this snow.
15. My brother _____ take four people in his car.
16. _____ you know how to sew on a button?
17. My sister taught me to do that, but I _____ not remember.
18. _____ you planning to do anything special during the winter holidays?
19. We certainly _____ arrived early if we had known the theater would be so crowded.
20. By the time we found our seats, the curtain _____ already risen.

Verb Phrases

Together, the main verb and its helping verb or verbs are called a *verb phrase*.

EXAMPLES We **will study** Brazil.

Forest tribes **have been living** in Brazil for thousands of years.

Sometimes a verb phrase is interrupted by another part of speech.

EXAMPLE **Did you learn** about the Portuguese settlers in Brazil? [The verb phrase *Did learn* is separated by the pronoun *you*.]

EXERCISE A Underline the verb phrase in each of the following sentences. Then, underline the helping verb or verbs a second time.

Example 1. What role did the Portuguese play in Brazil's history?

1. Portugal had claimed possession of Brazil in the year 1500.
2. The Portuguese settlers must have arrived soon after.
3. They may have been looking for gold.
4. Was gold ever discovered?
5. Cacao beans and sugar cane could be harvested.
6. Large plantations were established by the Portuguese settlers.
7. The settlers and the native tribes did not remain friendly.
8. Some Indians may have been enslaved as plantation workers.
9. Brazil has become a leader in agriculture.
10. Coffee may be one of the most important crops in Brazil.

EXERCISE B Underline all the verb phrases that appear in the following paragraph. Be sure to include all the helping verbs.

Example [1] People have relied on rubber products for many decades.

[11] Latex, a milky-white substance that is used in the production of rubber, is produced by the rubber trees of the Amazon rain forest. [12] Diagonal cuts are made in the trees by rubber tappers. [13] Then a small cup is carefully placed beneath each cut. [14] Rubber tappers must cut all the trees on a rubber tree trail before the latex is flowing too freely. [15] Rubber trees can often be spaced one hundred yards apart, and a rubber tapper may walk several miles before dawn; later that same day, the rubber tapper will repeat the journey through the forest so that he may collect the cups of latex.