

Auxiliary verbs

Auxiliary verbs are sometimes called *helping verbs* because they are needed to form many of the tenses. The most used auxiliary verbs are the verbs **to be**, **to do** and **to have**. For example: the auxiliary **to do** is needed to ask questions in the present and past simple tenses. **To be** is needed for the present and past continuous, and all the passive forms. The auxiliary **to have** is used in the present and past perfect tenses. Some tenses, like the present perfect continuous, need more than one auxiliary!

Here are some examples of the common auxiliary verbs in action:

- **Do** you like German food?
- **Does** your mother speak English?
- **Did** you come to school yesterday?
- Why **are** you talking? You should **be** listening to me!
- I **was** having a bath when you called!
- A new road **is being** built behind the school.
- **Have** you done your homework?
- My father **has** never visited the USA.
- How long **have** you **been** living in Germany?
- By this time next year I **will have been** learning English for 35 years!

Other common auxiliary verbs are: will, should, would, can, must, might, may, could (These verbs are often called *modal verbs*).

Contracted auxiliaries

The auxiliary verbs are very often contracted. For example, you can say **I'm playing tennis tomorrow**, instead of **I am playing tennis tomorrow**. The contracted form (which needs an apostrophe) is more likely to be used in spoken language*. So, for example, it would be a little unusual to ask your friend: **Why did you not call me yesterday?** More probable is: **Why didn't you call me ..?**

On the other hand, if you are doing a written report or essay, it is more usual to write the full form: **Why did America not join the war until 1941?** (instead of: **Why didn't America ..?**).

The short form itself often has two alternatives, which are equally usual and correct. For example:

- She's not going to the dance.

- She isn't going to the dance.
- I haven't seen him for ages.
- I've not seen him for ages.

* The full form is common in spoken language when the speaker wants to emphasize what she is saying. For example:

- Why don't you call him?
- I **have** called him.
- I **do not** want to see him again.