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Helping verbs (sometimes called *auxiliary verbs*) are, as the name suggests, verbs that help another verb. They provide support and add additional meaning. Here are some examples of helping verbs in sentences:

- By 1967, about 500 U.S. citizens **had** received heart transplants.
 - While *received* could function on its own as a complete thought here, the helping verb *had* emphasizes the distance in time of the date in the opening phrase.
- Better immunosuppression management in transplant operations **has** yielded better results.
 - This time, the helping verb adds clarity to the main verb *yielded*. Without it, the sentence would be difficult to understand.
- Researchers **are** finding that propranolol is effective in the treatment of heartbeat irregularities.
 - The helping verb *are* adds immediacy to the verb *finding*.

Let's look at some more examples to examine exactly what these verbs do. Take a look at the sentence "I have finished my dinner." Here, the main verb is *finish*, and the helping verb *have* helps to express tense. Let's look at two more examples:

- Do you want tea?
 - *Do* is a helping verb accompanying the main verb *want*, used here to form a question.
- He has given his all.
 - *Has* is a helping verb used in expressing the tense of *given*.

A list of verbs that (can) function as helping verbs in English is as follows:

- *be* (and all its forms)
- *can*, *could*

- *dare*
- *do* (and all its forms)
- *have* (and all its forms)
- *may, might, must*
- *need*
- *ought*
- *shall, should*
- *will, would*

The negative forms of these words (*can't, don't, won't*, etc.) are also helping verbs.

Practice

Identify the helping verbs in the sentences below:

1. Do you want Tim's shift tonight?
2. Cassandra couldn't afford to give up.
3. Richard was exercising when Barbara finally found him.

Click to Show Answer

1. **Do** you want Tim's shift tonight? (*Do* accompanies *want*. In this sentence, it is used to make a question.)
2. Cassandra **couldn't** afford to give up. (*Couldn't* helps *afford*. In this sentence, it indicates how possible the verb *afford* is.)
3. Richard **was** exercising when Barbara finally found him. (*Was* accompanies *exercising*. In this sentence, it is used to indicate the tense.)

The following table shows examples of the helping verbs in standard English. Some helping verbs have more than one example as they can be used in multiple ways.

Helping Verb	Examples
be	He is sleeping. They were seen.
can	I can swim. Such things can help.
could	I could swim. That could help.
dare	How dare you!
do	You did not understand.
have	They have understood.
may	May I stay? That may take place.
might	We might give it a try.
must	You must not mock me. It must have rained.

need	You need not water the grass.
ought	You ought to play well.
shall	You shall not pass.
should	You should listen. That should help.
will	We will eat pie. The sun will rise tomorrow at 6:03. He will make that mistake every time.
would	Nothing would accomplish that. After 1990, we would do that again. Back then we would always go there

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