

Helping Verbs in English

This table includes a list of the helping verbs in English, as well as the basic function they each perform:

Verb	Function	Examples
be	Express tense and a sense of continuity	He is sleeping.
	Express tense and indicate the passive voice	They were seen.
can	Express ability	I can swim. Such things can help.
could	Express ability (in the past tense)	I could swim.
	Express possibility	That could help.
dare	Express willingness	Who dares enter here?
do	Express negation (requires the word <i>not</i>)	You do not understand.
	Ask a question	Do you want to go?
have	Express tense and a sense of completion	They have understood.
may	Ask permission	May I stay?
	Express possibility	That may take place.
might	Express possibility	We might give it a try.
must	Express a command	You must not mock me.
	Express confidence in a fact	It must have rained.
need	Express command/request	You need not water the grass.
ought	Express a command/request	You ought to play well.
shall	Express commitment	You shall not pass.
should	Express a request	You should listen.
	Express likelihood	That should help.
will	Express future tense	We will eat pie.
	Express confidence in a future occurrence	He will make that mistake every time.
would	Express future likelihood	Nothing would accomplish that.
	Express "future-in-the-past"	After 1990, we would do that again.
	Express habitual actions in the past	Back then we would always go there