

Addendum F
Verb Phrases and Auxiliaries
(Pages 20-23)

To understand the organization of common **verb phrases**, we need to be familiar with the English **auxiliary verbs** (or simply **auxiliaries**) on page 20.

At this point, we will consider the following auxiliaries:

Forms of the verb **to be**: *am, are, is was, were be, being, been*

Forms of the verb **to have**: *have, has, had* A few **modal** verbs: *will, shall, should*

(Sometimes, auxiliary verbs are referred to in kiddy-speak as “helping” verbs.)

Managing common verb phrases should not be a big deal. A prominent American publishing company once suggested a relatively simple definition: “Besides a main verb, a verb phrase includes one or more auxiliary verbs, sometimes called helping verbs ...” For example:

He **was reading** ...

The flight **will be departing** ...

Another American publisher has offered a similar definition: “Auxiliary verbs (also known as helping verbs) combine with other verbs (often called **main verbs**) to create *verb phrases*.” Three sentences that we saw on page 20 follow that pattern:

She **is editing** the report.

She **has edited** the report.

She **should have edited** the report.

A third publisher has given this example of a verb phrase:

I **should have come** to the review session.

As usual, some linguists and grammarians have concocted a variety of definitions that support their speculative notions. But for most people interested in learning how to write sentences in plain English, those definitions can create unnecessary complications. Here's one of them:

A **verb phrase** consists of a main verb plus one or more helping verbs, its complements, objects, or other modifiers, and functions syntactically as a verb.

You **should edit your own compositions**.

Under this definition, the verb phrase (VP) would include **everything** in the sentence except the subject — the pronoun *You* — which would be labeled a noun phrase (NP). Hmmm ...

Some authorities confuse matters further by offering mixed definitions:

verb phrase

1. a group of words including a verb and its complements, objects, or other modifiers that functions syntactically as a verb. In English a verb phrase combines with a noun or noun phrase acting as subject to form a simple sentence.
 2. a phrase consisting of a main verb and any auxiliaries but not including modifiers, objects, or complements.
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And the explanations suggested by some educators are completely misleading:

A verb phrase is the portion of a sentence that contains both the verb and either a direct or indirect object (the verb's dependents)... Verb phrases can consist of one to three linking verbs, and action verbs, and sometimes any complements (such as objects or direct objects).

Here is an example of how some linguists explain the organization of verb phrases in simple English sentences:

<https://linguisticanalysis.wordpress.com/2016/02/09/6-2-the-verb-phrase/>

NOTE: Unlike many of the linguistic tree diagrams, the models in the **Write Smart Blueprint** present the **relationships** at work in English sentences in ways that people can **apply directly** to the challenging process of **developing a clear, direct writing style**.

