

# THE FUNCTIONS OF BE IN ENGLISH

by Alice C. Pack

## Present forms

I am  
He (She, It) is  
You (They, We) are

## Past forms

I (He, She, It) was  
You (They, We) were

### I-A. BE as the main verb:

#### 1. Verb alone followed by a locative.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Locative</u>
He	is	here.
He	was	there.
I	am	in the kitchen.
I	was	in the backyard.

#### 2. With a modal and verb. (Use base form of BE after a modal.)

	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Modal</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Locative</u>
	He	will	be	there.
He said	he	would	be	here.
	I	can	be	there.
	They	should	be	here.

#### 3. With the auxiliary HAVE. (Use past participle of BE [been] after HAVE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Locative</u>
	<u>HAVE</u>	<u>(P. P.)</u>	
He	has	been	here.
I	have	been	there.
She	had	been	there before he arrived.

#### 4. With both a modal and HAVE. (Use base form of HAVE after a modal and past participle of BE [been] after HAVE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Modal</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Locative</u>
		<u>HAVE</u>	<u>(P. P.)</u>	
He	could	have	been	here.
She	might	have	been	in the kitchen.
They	must	have	been	there.
I	should	have	been	there.

### B. BE followed by a noun:

#### 1. Verb alone.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Noun</u>
He	is	a doctor.
She	was	a nurse.
They	are	missionaries.
I	am	a secretary.

2. With a modal. (Use base form of BE after a modal.)

Subject	Modal	Verb	Noun
He	will	be	a doctor.
She	can	be	a nurse.
He	must	be	a missionary.
They	should	be	teachers.

3. With the auxiliary HAVE. (Use past participle of BE [been] after HAVE

Subject	Auxiliary	Verb	Noun
	HAVE	(P. P.)	
He	has	been	a doctor.
She	has	been	a nurse.
I	have	been	a missionary.
They	have	been	teachers.

4. With both a modal and HAVE. (Use base form of HAVE after a modal and past participle of BE [been] after HAVE.)

Subject	Modal	Auxiliary	Verb	Noun
		HAVE	(P. P.)	
He	could	have	been	a doctor.
She	might	have	been	a nurse.
I	should	have	been	a missionary.
They	must	have	been	teachers.

C. BE followed by a modifier (adjective).

1. Verb alone.

Subject	Verb	Modifier
He	was	sick.
She	is	small.
They	are	happy.
I	am	grateful.
You	were	wise.

2. Verb with a modal. (Use base form of verb [be] after a modal.)

Subject	Modal	Verb	Modifier
He	could	be	sick.
She	may	be	small.
They	will	be	happy.
I	should	be	grateful.

3. Verb with the auxiliary HAVE. (Use past participle of verb [been] after HAVE.)

Subject	Auxiliary	Verb	Modifier
	HAVE	(P. P.)	
He	has	been	sick.
She	has	been	small all her life
They	have	been	happy.
You	have	been	wise.

4. Verb with both modal and HAVE. (Use base form of HAVE after a modal and past participle of verb [been] after HAVE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Modal</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u> HAVE	<u>Verb</u> (P. P.)	<u>Modifier</u>
He	could	have	been	sick.
She	might	have	been	small when she was younger.
They	must	have	been	happy.
I	should	have	been	grateful

5. With the auxiliary BE. (Use -ing form of verb [being] after BE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u> BE	<u>Verb</u> -ing form	<u>Modifier</u>
He	is	being	bad.
She	is	being	good.

(The auxiliary BE and verb BE are seldom used together.)

6. With a modal and BE as auxiliary. (Use base form of BE after the modal, the -ing form of BE [being] after the auxiliary BE, and the past participle of the verb after the passive BE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Modal</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u> BE	<u>Passive BE</u> (-ing form)	<u>Verb</u> (P. P.)
The food	might	be	being	eaten right now.
The lesson	might	be	being	completed now.
They	might	be	being	beaten now.

7. With a modal and HAVE and BE as auxiliaries. (Use base form of HAVE after modals, past participle of BE after HAVE, -ing form of BE after the auxiliary BE, and the past participle of the verb after the passive BE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Modal</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u> HAVE	<u>Auxiliary</u> BE (P. P.)	<u>Passive BE</u> (-ing form)	<u>Verb</u> (P. P.)
The food	could	have	been	being	eaten while we were in the other room.
The lesson	might	have	been	being	finished while he was gone.
They	could	have	been	being	beaten when the best player was resting.

(Note: This is the longest verb group possible in English.)

## II. BE as an auxiliary to the main verb.

1. Verb with BE. (Use -ing form of verb after BE as an auxiliary).

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u> BE	<u>Verb</u> (-ing form)
I	am	cooking.
He	is	swimming.
She	is	reading.
They	are	listening to some music.
You	are	working on this lesson.
They	were	sleeping.

2. Verb with a modal and BE. (Use base form of BE after modal and -ing form of verb after BE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Modal</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u> BE	<u>Verb</u> (-ing form)
He	could	be	swimming.
She	must	be	reading.
They	might	be	listening to some music.
They	may	be	sleeping.

3. Verb with a modal and HAVE and BE as auxiliaries. (Use past participle of BE [been] after HAVE and -ing form of verb after BE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Modal</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u> HAVE	<u>Auxiliary</u> BE (P. P.)	<u>Verb</u> (-ing form)
He	could	have	been	swimming.
She	must	have	been	reading.
They	may	have	been	listening.
They	might	have	been	sleeping.
You	should	have	been	working.

III. BE as part of the transformation into the passive. (BE is followed by the past participle when used in the passive.)

1. Verb alone. (Use past participle of verb after BE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>BE (passive)</u>	<u>Verb (P. P.)</u>
The food	was	eaten.
The lesson	was	completed.
They	were	beaten.

2. Verb with a modal. (Use base form of BE after modal and past participle of verb after BE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Modal</u>	<u>Passive</u> BE	<u>Verb</u> (P. P.)
The food	must	be	eaten.
The lesson	could	be	completed.
They	might	be	beaten.

3. With HAVE as an auxiliary. (use past participle of BE [been] after HAVE and past participle of verb after passive BE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u> HAVE	<u>Passive</u> BE (P. P.)	<u>Verb</u> (P. P.)
The food	has	been	eaten.
The lesson	had	been	completed.
They	have	been	beaten.

4. With BE as an auxiliary. (Use -ing form of BE [being] after auxiliary BE and the past participle of the verb after passive BE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u> BE	<u>Passive BE</u> (-ing form)	<u>Verb</u> (P. P.)
The food	was	being	eaten.
The lesson	was	being	completed.
They	were	being	beaten.

5. With a modal and HAVE as auxiliary. (Use base form of HAVE after a modal and past participle of BE [been] after HAVE and the past participle of the verb after passive BE.)

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Modal</u>	<u>Auxiliary</u> <u>HAVE</u>	<u>Passive</u> <u>BE (P.P.)</u>	<u>Verb</u> <u>(P.P.)</u>
The food	could	have	been	eaten.
The lesson	might	have	been	completed.
They	must	have	been	beaten.

THE FUNCTIONS OF HAVE IN ENGLISH will appear in the next issue of the TESL REPORTER THE FUNCTIONS OF DO IN ENGLISH and THE FUNCTIONS OF CAN AND WILL IN ENGLISH will appear in future editions.