

# Emphatic *do, does, did* and other auxiliaries.

## Adding emphasis by stressing the auxiliary

When we want to add emphasis to a verb, we often stress the auxiliary (say it louder), shown here by underlining. We do this especially when we want to correct what somebody thinks, or contrast it with something else - (contrastive emphasis).

- Continuous - *Why aren't you going to the party?*  
- *But I am going to the party!*  
- *I can't go to this one, but I am going to the one next week.*

- Perfect - *You haven't tidied your room!*  
- *I have tidied it! I did it this morning.*  
- *I know, but I have put my clothes away.*

- Modal - *Is it because you can't dance?*  
- *But I can dance! Just look!*  
- *I can't dance the paso doble, but I can dance the tango.*

**Note about contractions** - when using these emphatic forms we don't use contractions in positive forms, even when speaking informally.



But what about simple tenses?

As you know, we usually only use the auxiliary verb *do* to make the negative and question forms of present simple and past simple tenses, not in positive (affirmative) forms.

I work	He works
I don't work	He doesn't work
Do you work?	Does he work?

We worked	She worked
We didn't work	She didn't work
Did you work?	Did she work?

So when we want to add emphasis to present simple or past simple tenses, we need to add auxiliary *do*, remembering to use the main verb in First form. This is sometimes called *emphatic do*:

- Present simple - *She doesn't like cheese, does she?*  
- *But she does like cheese! In fact she loves it.*  
- *I don't like cottage cheese, but I do like blue cheese.*
- Past simple - *You said you would phone me!*  
- *I did phone you! But you didn't answer.*  
- *OK, I didn't phone you, but I did send you a text (SMS).*

And when you see forms of the auxiliary *do* in positive sentences in written English, it is always stressed.



Other times we add emphasis

We also use emphatic auxiliaries (including *do*) to stress that we feel strongly about something - (emotive emphasis)

- She does look good in that dress.*
- He is putting on a bit of weight.*
- Her English really has improved an awful lot.*
- You really must see this new film.*
- I did enjoy that party last night.*
- I never did understand what he saw in her.*

And we also use emphatic auxiliaries to confirm something we think is true, following it with a question tag.

- He does eat meat, doesn't he?*
- She is coming to the party, isn't she?*
- He has spoken to you about this, hasn't he?*
- You can work late tonight, can't you?*
- You did phone Jenny, didn't you.*

We use also use emphatic *do* in present simple to strengthen an imperative.

- Do stop going on about it, will you?*
- Do try this cake, it's delicious.*

And we can stress *do* and other auxiliaries in short answers.

- You don't like cheese, do you? - Yes, I do. Whatever gave you that idea?*
- Mark doesn't eat meat, does he? - Actually, he does nowadays.*
- You fancy Mark, don't you? - No, I don't! What, me and Mark? Don't be silly!*
- But you've been out with him, haven't you? - No, I haven't!*
- You're not telling the truth, are you? - Yes, I am.*
- But you're blushing, aren't you? - No, I'm not.*

We also use emphatic auxiliaries after *it*, when we are in some doubt as to whether the condition will be, or has been, fulfilled. This often happens when replying to someone, in which case short forms can be (and often are) used.

- A: *I don't think I'll be seeing Paul today.*
- B: *Well, if you do (see him), can you ask him to get in touch with me.*
- A: *I wonder if he's coming to tomorrow's meeting.*
- B: *Well, if he isn't (coming), he should have told us by now.*
- A: *Perhaps he's left a message with his assistant.*
- B: *If he has (left a message), she hasn't passed it on.*

**Negatives** - note that with negatives we stress the normal contracted negative form, except in 1st person singular in the present simple of the verb *to be*, and the present continuous of other verbs, where we stress *not*: - *No, she isn't* BUT *No, I'm not*.

**Trivial information** - Because *do* is not used in all forms of simple tenses, it is sometimes called the *dummy* auxiliary. And linguists sometimes refer to its use in questions, negatives and for emphasis as *do-support*.



Putting it into practice 1 - emphatic **do**

Note that in the following exercises there is not always one single correct answer, as emphasis is up to the speaker. So the 'answers' here are my interpretations.

**Exercise 1a** - Fill the gaps with present simple or past simple forms of the verbs in the box. Where you think it is appropriate, add emphatic **do, does** or **did**.

come · decide · **do** · get · give · go · have · look · meet · offer · see · travel

Dick doesn't have a car and **travels** (1) to work by bus every day. He doesn't have to wait very long for the bus, but he **does have** (2) to change buses once.

On Friday, the bus drivers **decided** (3) to go on strike for the day, so there were no buses. Now it was Saturday and Dick was working in his garden. His next-door neighbour Tom, leant over the garden fence.

'So you won't have managed to get to work yesterday, then?' - he said. 'Actually, I **did go** (4) to work,' said Dick, 'A colleague **offered** (5) me a lift.'

Then Tom's wife Marge came out to call Tom in for tea. 'Hello Dick', she said, 'I must say your garden **does look** (6) beautiful now you've added the pond and the waterfall. Did you do it all yourself?' - 'Well, I **did** (7) most of it myself, yes, but to be honest I **did get** (8) a bit of help from my brother, Harry.'

'Oh, was Harry here? **Do give** (9) him my regards next time you **see** (10) him, won't you.' - 'Will do', said Dick.

'My sister Betty has just popped round to see us, I think you **met** (11) her at our drinks party, didn't you? We're just about to have some tea. **Do come** (12) in and join us.' said Marge. - 'Love to', replied Dick, blushing slightly and hoping that Marge wouldn't notice.

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**Exercise 1b** - Fill the gaps with present or past forms of the verbs in the box. Where you think it is appropriate, add emphatic *do, does* or *did*.

enjoy · grow · happen · like (2) · make · need · see · seem · tell · think · want

When they got inside, Betty looked up, surprised. 'Oh. Hello Dick, long time no see.' - 'Yes, it **does seem** (1) a long time, doesn't it?', said Dick. 'You **do like** (2) tea, don't you Dick?', said Marge, 'Or perhaps you would prefer coffee.' - 'Tea's fine thanks.' - said Dick, a bit flustered.

They chatted about this and that for a while. Marge **thought** (3) it a bit cold for the time of year and was a bit worried about her tomatoes. 'Well', said her husband, 'I **did tell** (4) you not to plant them too early this year, but would you listen to me?' - 'Do you grow tomatoes in your garden Dick?' - Well I **do grow** (5) them as a rule, but I didn't have a lot of success last year, so I haven't bothered this year.'

Marge went through to the kitchen, taking Tom with her, saying she **needed** (6) his help with something.

Once they were alone, Betty said quietly to Tom, 'I **did enjoy** (7) our evening out that time after the drinks party, you know. I was sort of expecting you'd call.' - 'I **did want** (8) to', said Dick, 'but then one day I **saw** (9) you in town in a Ferrari, with a very rich-looking young man, which I must confess **did make** (10) me think that perhaps you were a bit out of my league.' - 'Oh, that was my boss, you idiot, no way would I go out with him. He's OK really, but he **does like** (11) to think he's God's gift to women! So let's forget about him, shall we? Now, unfortunately I'm a bit tied up for the next few days, but I **do happen** (12) to be free on Wednesday evening. What do you say? Dinner at my place?'

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Putting it into practice 2 - emphatic auxiliaries

Although we tend to talk about emphatic *do*, we shouldn't forget that we can emphasise all auxiliaries, including modals.

**Example** - Shes bought pasta instead of potatoes - 'I haven't bought any potatoes, but I have bought some pasta'.

**Exercise 2a** - Decide which is more appropriate, the stressed full version for emphasis, or the unstressed contraction.

- 1. Hi, Marcia. Wow, you've / *you have* finished your essay already. *You've* / You have been working hard, haven't you? As for mine, I've / *I have* hardly started writing it yet, although *I've* / I have done all my research.
- 2. Sammy, did you go to Pete's party last night? - No. *I'd* / I would have gone, but I'd / *I had* already agreed to look after Betty's children so that she could go.
- 3. If you're / *you are* not too busy, could you give me a hand with this? - Well, *I'm* / I am rather busy, actually. Can't you ask somebody else?
- 4. *I'm really* / I really am enjoying this soup, it's delicious! - I'm / *I am* so glad you like it.
- 5. If you're / *you are* not going to finish that cake, can I have it? - Hands off! *I'm* / I am going to finish it.
- 6. *You're* / You are coming to see us at the weekend, aren't you? I'll / *I will* be very disappointed if you don't. And after all, *mum's* / mum has baked a cake especially for the occasion.

**Note** - In the second part of Question 4, it is *so* that takes the emphasis.



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We can't always make contractions, in which case we can only stress with intonation.

**Exercise 2b** - In each question, underline the modal (in gray italics) if you think it would be appropriate to stress or emphasise it.

- 1. I don't have much time, but I suppose I *could* do it if it's really necessary.
- 2. I *can* help you with that if you like.
- 3. I *shall* be seeing him tomorrow, do you want me to give him a message?
- 4. Cinderella! You *shall* go to the ball!
- 5. But you *must* remember to leave before midnight.
- 6. As a rule, drivers *must* keep to the speed limit at all times.
- 7. You *should* ask your teacher if you can have an extension.
- 8. I *should* have told you earlier about this, but I forgot.
- 9. I *may* have left it at home, but I was sure I had brought it.
- 10. By the way, I *might* be a bit late this evening; I'm meeting a client.

**Note 1** - In Question 5, *must* is used as a strong personal instruction, but in Question 6 it is simply a general rule.

**Note 2** - In the last question, if I'm simply talking matter-of-factly about the possibility of being late, I wouldn't stress '*might*'. But if I want to say that the possibility is a very real one, then I would stress it, especially if I feel a bit bad about it or am making an excuse.



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Is there such a thing as an emphatic tense?

We don't use this term in EFL, but I recently came across it while looking at an online grammar glossary. This is a definition from EnglishPlus:

The two emphatic tenses [past and present] receive their name because they are used for emphasis.

But they then go on to say:

More commonly, however, they are used with the negative *not* and with questions when the normal order is inverted and part of the verb comes before the subject.

So in effect these are simply standard present and past simple tenses when the auxiliary *do* is present. I have to say the term *emphatic tense* makes no sense to me, because:

- it seems usually to be used for questions and negatives as well as for purely emphatic use, even though there isn't usually any particular emphasis in questions and negatives.
- it is only used for present and past simple tenses with the auxiliary *do*, but as we have seen, we can also emphasise *be* and *have* in continuous and perfect tenses in exactly the same way, not to mention modals, the only difference being that we don't have to add the auxiliary as it is already there.
- it has exactly the same time and aspect as a normal simple tense, so I can't see how it can be thought of as a separate tense.

So if you happen to come across the term *emphatic tense*, it's not some new tense your teachers have forgotten to tell you about, it's simply another name for standard present simple and past simple when the auxiliary *do* is included.

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Links

Emphatic *do*

- [CCC.net](#)
- [BBC Learning English 1](#)
- [BBC Learning English 2](#)

References to emphatic tenses

- [UsingEnglish.com](#)
- [English Plus](#)
- [Antimoon forum](#)



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