Verb To Be

Complex auxiliary chains, emphasis and formal BE

Complex auxiliary chains

The files have been checked. The files are being checked. The files should have been checked. Each form of BE has a specific place in a tense, aspect or passive construction.

BE TO, DUE TO and ABOUT TO

The minister is to visit tomorrow expresses a formal arrangement or instruction. The train is due to arrive at six gives an expected time. BE ABOUT TO describes an action on the point of happening.

Cleft sentences for focus

It was Eva who solved the problem. What we need is more time. BE connects the highlighted information to the rest of the message. Choose the cleft form according to the part you want to emphasise.

Formal subjunctive BE

It is essential that he be informed. Subjunctive BE does not change with the subject. SHOULD BE INFORMED is also common in British English. Some contexts allow an indicative; follow the requested meaning and register.

Study the pattern, then the meaning

Compare the examples. Identify the rule and explain why it fits the situation. Create a new example of your own, then check that its meaning and grammatical form agree.