

The verb to be

English Grammar · A1

am / is / are

The verb to be

am	is	are
with I	he / she / it	you / we / they
<i>I am</i>	<i>she is</i>	<i>they are</i>

The verb to be: reference card grid

The verb “to be” means “is / am / are.” It changes according to the subject and has three forms:

- **I → am**
- **he / she / it → is**
- **you / we / they → are**

I am a student.

I am a student.

She is happy.

She is happy.

They are from China.

They are from China.

Note: Common spoken contractions: I’m, you’re, he’s, she’s, it’s, we’re, they’re.

Negation and Interrogative

Negation: Add **not** after the be verb (often contracted).

He is not a teacher.

He is not a teacher. (= He isn’t a teacher.)

Interrogative: Place the be verb **before the subject**.

Are you ready?

Are you ready?

Short answers: **Yes, I am.** / **No, I’m not.**

Note: Negative contractions: is not → isn’t, are not → aren’t; but am not is only contracted to I’m not (there is no ~amn’t~).

Common Errors

- × ~He busy.~ → ✓ He **is** busy. — In Chinese, “He is very busy” can exist without a verb, but an English sentence must have a verb. Use be to link when the predicative is an adjective or noun and there are no other verbs in the sentence (He **is** busy); do not add be if the sentence already contains an ordinary verb (I go to school).
- × ~I am go to school.~ → ✓ I go to school. — Do not use be and ordinary verbs together; “go” alone suffices for “to go.”
- × ~They is my friends.~ → ✓ They **are** my friends. — Plural subjects (you / we / they) take are.
- × ~I am agree.~ → ✓ I agree. — agree is itself a verb; do not add am before it.
- × ~Are you ready? — Yes, I’m.~ → ✓ Yes, I **am**. — Contractions cannot be used at the end of affirmative short answers (say Yes, I am); however, negative short answers typically end with a negative contraction (No, he isn’t / No, I can’t; first person is No, I’m not, as there is no amn’t).