



Italian verbs that can have two auxiliaries

Let's start with an example using the verb *cambiare*.

Marcella ha cambiato la borsa perché quella che aveva era troppo piccola (Marcella has changed her bag because the one she had was too small)

Marcella è molto cambiata ultimamente, non capisco cosa le sia successo (Marcella has changed a lot lately, I really don't understand what has happened to her).

These two examples show that the use of *essere* or *avere* depends on the specific use of the verb. In the first sentence, **the verb is followed by an object** and this makes it transitive, so the verb needs *avere* as auxiliary. In the second sentence, there is **no object after the verb**, so the verb is intransitive and takes *essere* as auxiliary.

As a general rule, we can say that the verbs that have two auxiliaries take *avere* if the action expressed by the verb is **not reflected on the subject** but it is performed on something or somebody else (transitive verb), while they take *essere* if the action expressed by the verb is **reflected on the subject itself** (intransitive verb).

For example, referring to the two sentences above, in the sentence using *avere* as auxiliary Maria has changed an object (the bag), so her action has an impact on something different than herself, while in the sentence using *essere* as auxiliary the action expressed by the verb is actually happening to Maria herself, it's her who has changed.

These grammar explanations can be quite obscure, so let me give you more examples using the most common Italian verbs that have both auxiliaries: *cominciare*, *iniziare*, *finire*, *crescere*, *passare*.

Cominciare

La scuola è cominciata presto quest'anno (School has started early this year)

Marco ha cominciato la scuola superiore la scorsa settimana (Marco started high school last week)

Iniziare

Lo spettacolo è iniziato alle dieci e mezza (The show started at 10.30)

Mia figlia ha iniziato a suonare il pianoforte quando aveva dieci anni (My daughter started playing the piano when she was ten)

Finire

Il loro matrimonio è finito malissimo, mi dispiace molto (Their marriage ended very badly, I am really sad)

Ho finito di studiare presto e adesso vado al mare (I finished studying early and I'm going to the beach now)

Crescere

Tuo figlio è cresciuto tantissimo! Sembra già un uomo (Your son has grown so much! He looks like a man)

Quella donna ha cresciuto quattro figli da sola, la ammiro molto (That lady has raised four children as a single mom, I really admire her)

Here is **a list of some of the most common verbs that can have both auxiliaries**: *aumentare, diminuire, salire, scendere, migliorare, peggiorare, cambiare, cominciare, finire, iniziare, terminare, crescere, volare, suonare, cuocere, guarire, passare, sfumare, affogare, annegare, avanzare, esplodere, invecchiare, schizzare, fallire*.

Please note: there are other verbs that can have both auxiliaries and those are **the verbs that are used to express the weather** (*piovere, nevicare, tuonare, tempestare* and *grandinare*). In this case, the use of *essere* or *avere* doesn't have anything to do with the meaning of the sentence, they can be used both and the meaning always stays the same. So you can say: *ieri è nevicato* or *ieri ha nevicato* and both sentences are correct.

