

Introduction to modals

Form

The modal verbs are:

statement

can
may
will
shall
must

negative

can't / cannot
may not
won't / will not
shan't / shall not
mustn't / must not

statement

could
might
would
should

negative

couldn't / could not
mightn't / might not
wouldn't / would not
shouldn't / should not

All modal verbs:

- have only one form
I/you/he/she/it/we/they **may** write an e-mail.
- are followed by the bare infinitive
You **should call** Stella.
- do not have an infinitive

Semi-modals

There are also some phrases that we use like modals:

- ought to (ought not to)
- have to (don't have to)
- need to (don't need to / needn't)

Like modals, *ought to* doesn't change.

Have to and need to change for person and tense like normal verbs and have infinitives.

Watch out!

- We form questions with modal verbs like this:
✓ **Can you** understand what he's saying?
- We use modals with the passive voice like this:
✓ The address **should be written** clearly on the front of the envelope.

Ability

Use

Modal

Example

Ability now or generally

can

Can you use a fax machine?

Ability in the past

could

Tom **could** read when he was two years old.

Watch out!

We use *be able to* to form other tenses.

- ✓ It's useful **to be able to** order things by e-mail. (infinitive)
- ✓ Soon, I'll **be able to** speak Italian quite well. (future)
- ✓ **Have you been able to** speak English for a long time? (present perfect)

Permission

Use

Modal

Example

Asking for permission

can / could / may

Can / Could / May I use the phone?

Giving permission

can / may

You **can / may** send the fax when you like.

Watch out!

May is more polite than *could* and *could* is more polite than *can*.

Advice

Use

Modal

Example

Asking for and giving advice

should

Liam **ought to / should** watch less TV.

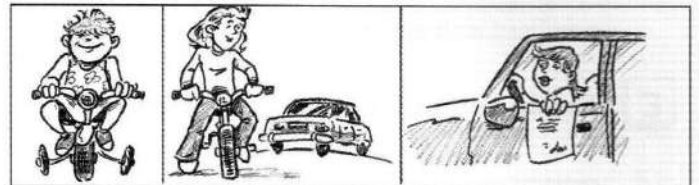
ought to

A Underline the mistake in each sentence and write the correct words.

- 1 My older brother can to ride a motorbike, but I can't.
- 2 He'll has his dinner early today because he's going out.
- 3 Do you can come to my party?
- 4 You should to see a doctor about your foot.
- 5 I couldn't bought any bread because the baker's was closed.
- 6 You needn't to do the washing-up. I've already done it.
- 7 The school ought listen to pupils' opinions.
- 8 People shouldn't to drop their rubbish in the street.

B Look at the pictures and complete the sentences using **can**, **could** or the correct form of **be able to**. You may have to use some negative forms.

Amy really loves playing chess and she
 (1) play very well. When
 she was a baby she (2)
 play chess. She thinks that when she's older,
 she'll (3) win the national
 championships!



Amy has (4) ride a bicycle
 since she was three. She wants to learn to drive
 when she grows up, though. When she's eighteen,
 she hopes she'll (5) do her
 driving test. She (6) drive a
 car now though. It's against the law!

C Write what they say using the word given.

- 1 Tony wants to borrow his friend's pencil. **could**
 'Could I borrow your pencil ?'
- 2 Alex wants to allow her friend to use her dictionary. **can**
 '..... ?'
- 3 Julie wants permission from her teacher to leave the classroom. **may**
 '..... ?'
- 4 Lou wants to wear his brother's new trainers. **can**
 '..... ?'
- 5 Terry wants to ask her boss for permission to take the day off work. **could**
 '..... ?'
- 6 Diane wants to use her dad's car this weekend. **can**
 '..... ?'
- 7 A teacher wants to give her students five extra minutes to finish the test. **may**
 '..... ?'

D Rewrite the sentences using *should* or *ought to* and the words in brackets. You may have to use some negative forms.

- 1 'I need to earn more money.' (a, **get**, job, new, you)
'You should/ought to get a new job'
- 2 'Brenda is angry about what I said.' (are, say, sorry, you, you)
.....
- 3 'Tom doesn't understand his homework.' (about, ask, it, he, his, teacher)
.....
- 4 'I'd like to learn to play the piano.' (having, lessons, start, you)
.....
- 5 'Tina is often tired at work.' (at, late, night, she, TV, watch)
.....
- 6 'I don't seem to have much energy at the moment.' (exercise, get, some, you)
.....

E Circle the correct word or phrase.



- 1 I've been having swimming lessons and now I **can** / **could** swim really well.
- 2 Please **could** / **should** I use your mobile phone? Mine doesn't have any power.
- 3 Sam **could** / **ought** to get a job instead of complaining about having no money.
- 4 Okay, yes – you **can** / **should** leave five minutes early today.
- 5 Do you think I **must** / **should** tell Michael the truth about what happened?
- 6 I **can't** / **couldn't** read until I was five years old.
- 7 I'm sorry, but you **can't** / **couldn't** leave your car there.
- 8 If you want to pass the exam, you **can** / **ought to** do some revision.
- 9 I know John lived in Tokyo, but I don't think he **can** / **may** speak Japanese.
- 10 Tracy **can** / **could** sing really well now that she's had a few lessons.

F Match to make sentences.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 There's a lot of washing-up; I think we should | A wait for their flight in the VIP area. |
| 2 It's getting quite late and we ought | B borrow some if you need it. |
| 3 I don't have much money, but you can | C to think about getting a taxi. |
| 4 It's amazing that Andrew could | D offer to do it. |
| 5 Passengers travelling in first class may | E walk when he was just six months old. |

For general information about modals, see Unit 19.

Obligation

Use	Modal	Example
Present or future obligation	<i>must / mustn't have to need to</i>	All visitors must turn off their mobile phones. You have to/need to press 'send'.
No present or future obligation	<i>don't have to don't need to needn't</i>	You don't have to/don't need to/needn't pay to send an e-mail.
Past obligation	<i>had to</i>	Yesterday, Sam had to buy more stamps.
No past obligation	<i>didn't have to didn't need to</i>	I learnt a little Italian, but everyone spoke English, so I didn't have to/didn't need to use it.

Helpful hints

In spoken English, *have to* is more common than *must*. *Must* is often used in written notices and instructions.

✓ 'We **have to** pay the phone bill today,' Rita said.

✓ Passengers **must** turn off all mobile phones.

Watch out!

Mustn't and *don't have to* do not mean the same.

✓ You **mustn't** do that! (= Don't do that!)

✓ You **don't have to** do that. (= You can do that if you want to, but it's not necessary.)

Probability and possibility

Use	Modal	Example
Present strong probability	<i>must can't couldn't</i>	The phone is ringing – it must be Simon. This letter can't/couldn't be from Japan because it's got a French stamp.
Present and future probability	<i>should ought to</i>	We ought to/should hear from Cheryl this weekend.
Present and future possibility	<i>could may might</i>	I'm not sure what language it is – it could/may/might be Polish.

Helpful hints

We often use *must*, *can't* and *couldn't* for probability when we have some evidence for our opinion.

✓ I just rang Paul, but there's no answer. He **must** be out.

Watch out!

To talk about possibility and probability about the past, we use a modal and the perfect infinitive. See Unit 22.

A Choose the sentence (A, B or C) which means the same as the first sentence.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 We have to pay the electricity bill before Friday.
A We can pay it if we want to.
B We must pay it.
C We've already paid it.</p> <p>2 You don't need to buy me a birthday present.
A You must buy me a birthday present.
B It's not necessary to buy me a birthday present.
C You mustn't buy me a birthday present.</p> <p>3 I have to do some work on my project this evening.
A I haven't got time to do the work.
B I've already done the work.
C I need to do the work.</p> <p>4 Lenny didn't have to see the head teacher after all.
A It wasn't necessary for Lenny to see the head teacher.
B Lenny went to see the head teacher.
C Lenny is waiting to see the head teacher.</p> | <p>5 Students mustn't run in school buildings.
A They can run if they want to.
B Students don't like running.
C Running isn't allowed.</p> <p>6 All passengers must fasten their seatbelts.
A They have to fasten their seatbelts now.
B They don't have to fasten their seatbelts.
C They can fasten their seatbelts.</p> <p>7 Mr Reed had to go to the police station to answer some questions.
A Mr Reed was able to go to the police station.
B Mr Reed forgot to go to the police station.
C Mr Reed was obliged to go to the police station.</p> <p>8 It's kind of you to offer to help, but you really don't need to.
A I don't want you to help me.
B Your help isn't necessary.
C You won't be able to help me.</p> |
|--|--|

B Circle the correct word or phrase.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 'Smoking isn't allowed in the airport.'
You mustn't / don't have to smoke in the airport.</p> <p>2 'It's not necessary to come to the train station to meet me.'
You have to / don't have to meet her at the train station.</p> <p>3 'We were forced to wait for over two hours in the rain.'
They had to / didn't need to wait for over two hours in the rain.</p> <p>4 'The instructions tell you to write in pencil.'
You must / needn't write in pencil.</p> | <p>5 'You can contact us by either phone or e-mail.'
You mustn't / don't have to phone them.</p> <p>6 'In my country, you can carry your passport with you if you want, but it's not necessary.'
In her country, you don't need to / mustn't carry your passport with you.</p> <p>7 'My grandfather was made to start work when he was just fourteen years old.'
He had to / must start work when he was just fourteen years old.</p> <p>8 'It's not necessary to book a hotel; you can stay in our spare room.'
You mustn't / don't have to stay in a hotel.</p> |
|---|---|

C Complete using the correct form of **have to**. You may have to use some negative forms.

- 1 Jade can't come out tonight. She look after her little brother.
- 2 I didn't have enough money, so I borrow some from Yuri.
- 3 It's raining really hard, but luckily we go out this evening.
- 4 To start the laptop you press the power button.
- 5 Robbie worked last weekend, but I
- 6you go to piano lessons when you were younger?

D Match the sentences with the explanations. You have to use some of the explanations more than once.

- 1 'Someone is at the door. It must be Mrs Johnson from next door.'
- 2 'Lena might not know where the cinema is.'
- 3 'Dad should know what the capital of New Zealand is.'
- 4 'Greg can't be in the final! He's a terrible player!'
- 5 'The dog is wet. It must be raining outside.'
- 6 'We may go to the Canary Islands for Easter.'
- 7 'Ken must like that film. He's seen it six times!'
- 8 'Barry ought to be able to cook Chinese food. He lived there for two years.'

- A I'm almost certain.
 B It's probable.
 C Maybe / Perhaps.

E Rewrite the sentences using the words given.

- 1 You're expecting David to ring. The phone rings. **must**
 '.....'
- 2 Anna is a better runner than Rula. You think Anna will probably win the race tomorrow.
should
 '.....'
- 3 A letter arrives. It's possible that it's from your cousin, Janice. **could**
 '.....'
- 4 There's a knock at the door. Your mum says it might be Colin, but you know Colin is
 on holiday. **can't**
 '.....'
- 5 You see someone wearing a costume. You think there's a strong probability that she's
 going to a fancy-dress party. **must**
 '.....'
- 6 Your sister is looking for her hairbrush. You think it's possible that it's in the living
 room. **might**
 '.....'
- 7 You're waiting for Harriet to arrive. You think she'll probably be there in half an
 hour. **should**
 '.....'
- 8 You're talking about why James seems to be sad. You think it's possible he's in trouble
 at school. **could**
 '.....'