

MODAL VERBS

The verbs *can, could, may, might, will, would, shall, should, must* and *ought* are called 'modal verbs'. They are used before the infinitives of other verbs, and add certain kinds of meaning connected with certainty or with obligation and freedom to act. *Need* and *dare* can sometimes be used like modal verbs, and the expression *had better* is also used like a modal verb.

1 Rules for Modal Verbs

- Modal verbs have no -s in the third person singular.
I must He must He ~~musts~~
- They always form their negative and interrogative according to the auxiliary pattern.
Will not Ought not
Will he...? Ought he...?
- They have no proper past tenses; four past forms exist: *could, might, would, should*, but they have only a restricted use.
She ~~musted~~ study very hard.
- They can be used with the past participle to show past modality:
[modal] + [have] + [past participle]
They should have seen him.
He must have gone away.
- Modal verbs have no infinitives or participles and therefore cannot be used in the continuous tense.
- They can be used with the -ing form to show continuous modality
[modal] + [be] + [verb-ing]
He might be working late.
- All modal verbs except *ought* are followed by the bare infinitive.
You should pay but You ought to pay
- We can use *be able to, be allowed to* and *have [got] to* after modals:
[modal] + [phrase]
I will be able to... She might not be allowed to... They should have to...
- Many Modal Verbs cannot be used in the future tenses.
He ~~will~~ can go with us.

2 CONTRACTIONS

"would" is often contracted into "--'d" ("I'd", "we'd", "she'd", etc.)
"will" is contracted into "--'ll" ("I'll", "you'll", "they'll", etc.).

After all modal verbs, the word "not" of the negative can be contracted into "--n't" ("wouldn't", "shouldn't", etc.).

Exceptions : "will not" becomes "won't". "Can not" can also be written "cannot"; in its contracted form, the "n" is not doubled: "can't".

3 Use and Meaning of Modal Verbs

CAN is used to express:

- a. ability: *-She can speak four languages.*
-Can you drive?

You can also use to be able

- b. permission: *-You can park your car over there.*
-We can't wear jeans at work.

You can also use may/could

- c. request: *-Can you make a little less noise, please. I am trying to work.*

-Can you tell me the time, please?

could is more polite

- d. possibility: *-Smoking can cause cancer.*

-You can get stamps from the local newsagent.

You can also use could

- e. polite offers /requests for help: *-Can I help you with those bags?*
-Can you help me with this box?

could is more polite

COULD is used to express:

- a. past ability *-She could play the piano when she was four years old.*
-I couldn't hear what they were saying.

You can also use be able to

- b. permission *-Could I speak to Mr Davis, please?*
-Could I smoke?

You can also use can/may

- c. possibility *-We could go to the cinema on Saturday.*
-You couldn't have left it on the bus, could you?

You can also use might/may

- d. suggestion *-We could go for a drink after work, tomorrow, if you like.*

-You could always try his home number.

You can also use might

- e. polite request *-Could you lend me \$10?*
-Could you possibly turn that music down a little, please?

You can also use would /can is less polite

MAY is used to express:

- a. possibility *-He may have missed his train.*
-The cause of the accident may never be discovered

You can also use might/could
b. permission -Yes, you may go swimming, but be home by 5.
-May I come in?

You can also use can
c. wishes and hopes -May she rest in peace.
-May God be with you.

d. request -May I borrow your eraser?
-May I make a phone call?

You can also use can/ might/could

MIGHT is used to express:

a. past possibility -I brought him some sandwiches because I thought he might be hungry.

You can also use could

b. possibility -I might come and visit you in America next year, if I have enough money.

-Don't go any closer, it mightn't be safe.

You can also use could/may

c. permission -Might I ask a question?

-I wonder if I might have a quick look at your newspaper.

You can also use could/may

d. suggestion -I thought we might go to the zoo on Saturday.

-You might try asking your uncle for a job.

You can also use could

SHALL is used to express:

a. future (dated) with "I" and "we"

-I shall be late home tonight.

-Shall we be able to get this finished today, do you think?

b. suggestion with 'I' and 'we'

-I'm cold, shall I close the window?

- Shall we go for dinner tonight?

c. certainty -He is determined that you shall succeed.

-Candidates shall remain in their seats until all the papers have been collected.

SHOULD is used to express:

a. advice -You should stop worrying about it

-Should I call him and apologize?

b. recommendation -There should be an investigation into the cause of the disaster.

c. probability -She should have arrived.

-You should find this guidebook helpful.

d. possibility - If you should change your mind, do let me know.

-In case you should need any help, here's my number.

e. expectations -We should arrive before dark.

-I should have finished the book by Friday.

f. condition (after 'if' or 'when')

- *If I were asked to work extra hours, I should resign.*
- g. polite requests with 'I' and 'we'
 - *I should like to call my lawyer.*
 - *We should be grateful for your help.*
- h. suggestion after that
 - *She recommended that I should take some time off.*
 - *In order that training should be effective, it must be planned systematically.*

WILL is used to express:

- a. future - *Sara will be 5 years old next month.*
 - *I will see him tomorrow.*
 - b. willingness - *I will check this letter for you, if you want.*
 - *They won't lend us any more money.*
 - c. request - *Will you send this letter for me, please?*
 - *You will water the plants while I am away, won't you?*
- Would is more polite

WOULD is used to express:

- a. past of will - *He told me he would be here before 8:00.*
- b. past intention - *They promised that they would help.*
 - *I asked him to move his car, but he said he wouldn't.*
- c. polite requests and offers - *Would you open the door for me, please?*
 - *Would you like a sandwich?*

You can also use could

- d. choice (would rather/ sooner)
 - *I would rather go early and get home before it gets dark.*
 - *Which would you sooner do-go swimming or play tennis?*
- e. advice - *I wouldn't worry, if I were you.*
 - *If I were you I would be careful.*

MUST is used to express:

- a. necessity - *You must take these pills every day.*
 - *Must you leave so soon?*
 - b. probability - *Jim has been driving all day- he must be tired.*
 - *You must be joking.*
- You can also use might, may
- c. deduction - *He arrived on time. He must have come by taxi.*
 - *Bill has not come to work for several days. He must be ill.*
 - e. recommendation - *You must take some time off and get some rest.*
 - *You mustn't eat so much. It's bad for your health.*

You can also use should

OUGHT is used to express:

- a. recommendation/ advisability - *We ought to tidy up before we go home.*
 - *We ought not/ oughtn't to have agreed*

without knowing what it would cost.

You can also use should

- b. probability -He *ought to be home by 7.*
-If you show your receipt, there *ought not to be any difficulty getting your money back.*

You can also use should

HAVE TO is used to express:

- a. certainty -*That has to be Jerry. They said he was tall with red hair.*
You can also use must /have got to

- b. advice or recommendation -*You simply have to get a new job.*
-*You've got to try this recipe-it's delicious.*

- c. necessity -*She has to read four books for this literature class.*

HAD BETTER is used to express:

- a. recommendation/advice -*You had better go to the doctor about your cough.*
-*It's late. You had better hurry up.*
- b. warning -*You had better help me. If you don't, there'll be trouble.*
-*You had better not do that again.*

USED TO is used to express:

- past actions -*I used to smoke, but I gave up a couple of years ago.*
-*I didn't use/used not to like him much when we were at school.*

NEED is used to express:

- (un)necessity -*You need not/needn't finish that work today.*
-*All you need bring are sheets.*
-*Need I come tomorrow?*

DARE is used to express:

- bravery -*Dare you tell him the news?*
-*He did not dare/ dared not (to) say what he thought.*

Exercise 1: Choose the right answer.

- I wonder if I might have a little more cheese.
a. permission b. ability c. possibility
- You should try to work harder.
a. obligation b. necessity c. recommendation
- I will be able to speak good French in a few months.
a. request b. ability c. deduction