

VERBS (2)

Modal Verbs (03)

Modal Verbs: in context

2 min

What are modal verbs?



She *can* swim.



He *should* go to the doctor.

Modal verbs are a small group of verbs, which are very different from normal verbs.

Common Modal Verbs and their Particularities

28 min

Which verbs are common modal verbs?

Can, could, may, might, should, must, shall, will, would

How are modal verbs different from other verbs?

- They do not take "s" in the third person: he can, she must, it could
- They use "not" in the negative form: they may not, we should not
- They cannot be used in the past or in the future tenses
- There is no "to" after them: I can do, you must see

Which modal verb do we use and when?

Modal Verb	Use	Example
Can	Capacity Permission/request	I <i>can</i> drive. <i>Can</i> I use your phone please?
Could	Capacity in the past (past of 'can') Polite permission/request Suggestion Possibility, low probability or one possibility of many	I <i>could</i> not see him. <i>Could</i> I use your phone please? We <i>could</i> go to the new restaurant. It <i>could</i> rain today. She <i>could</i> be at home.
May	Polite permission/request Possibility, more probable than 'could'	<i>May</i> I use your phone please? It <i>may</i> rain today. She <i>may</i> be at home.
Might	Same as 'may'	It <i>might</i> rain today. She <i>might</i> be at home.
Should	Advice Rational probability	He <i>should</i> go to the doctor. He <i>should</i> be fine.
Must	Obligation, necessity Very high probability	You <i>must</i> go to school. She <i>must</i> be at home.

Shall	Obligation in legal documents Suggestions Future tense, rare, British	The defendant <i>shall</i> pay a fine of \$200. <i>Shall</i> we begin? Thou <i>shall</i> not kill.
Will	A voluntary action A promise A prediction	I <i>will</i> make dinner. I <i>will</i> call you at 4 pm. The summer <i>will</i> be very hot.
Would	Conditional Past of 'will' Repetition in the past	If I had time, I <i>would</i> travel more. He said he <i>would</i> come. When I lived in Paris, I <i>would</i> always go to the Champs Elysees.

Some of these common modal verbs have synonyms we often use.

Examples:

must = have to, need to

she *must* leave = she *has to* live = she *needs to* leave

should = ought to

he *should* speak to his boss = he *ought to* speak to his boss

When we speak, we use contractions with some of the modal verbs in the negative form.

Examples:

can't = cannot = can not

couldn't = could not

shouldn't = should not

mustn't = must not

won't = will not

wouldn't = would not

How can we use modal verbs in the past?

We can:

Use a synonym in the past: to be able to, to be allowed to, to have to, to need to	You <i>can</i> go → You <i>were able to</i> go You <i>may</i> go → You <i>were allowed to</i> go You <i>must</i> go → You <i>had to</i> go / You <i>needed to</i> go
Use a modal verb that expresses the past: could (past of 'can'), would (past of 'will')	I <i>could not</i> go I thought I <i>would</i> go
Use 'modal verb + have + past participle'	He could have gone He may have gone He might have gone He should have gone He must have gone He would have gone

How can we use modal verbs in the future?

We can:

Use a synonym in the future: to be able to, to be allowed to, to have to, to need to	You <i>can</i> go → You <i>will be able to</i> go You <i>may</i> go → You <i>will be allowed to</i> go You <i>must</i> go → You <i>will have to</i> go / You <i>will need to</i> go
Use a modal verb with an indication of future	We <i>can/could/may/might/should/must</i> go tomorrow

Writing Exercise

5 min

Complete the sentences with one of the two choices.

1. You really _____ watch tv this much. (shall / shouldn't)
2. She _____ be at work, she always works at this time. (must / could)
3. Speak up, I _____ hear you! (can't / couldn't)
4. I _____ hear a word he said. (can't / couldn't)
5. Andrew _____ call his wife urgently. (must / shouldn't)
6. Thank you for calling Zee Company, how _____ I help you? (can't / may)
7. If I go to New York, I _____ see the Statue of Liberty. (will / would)
8. If I went to New York, I _____ see the Statue of Liberty. (will / would)
9. It _____ happen, but it is very unlikely. (shall / could)
10. Emma _____ go out tonight, her parents said no. (can't / may)

Writing Exercise

5 min

Match the two columns to identify the use of each modal verb.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1. Abe should call Lyla soon after their first date. | a. obligation |
| 2. Lyla should be happy to get his call. | b. possibility |
| 3. Abe calls but she doesn't pick up, she must be working. | c. low probability |
| 4. No problem, he can call her back later. | d. rational probability |
| 5. Later he tells her they could go out to dinner again. | e. certainty |
| 6. She says she may be available Friday. | f. polite request |
| 7. Abe asks if he can call her back Friday morning. | g. permission |
| 8. She says she could be in a meeting, the afternoon is better. | h. advice |
| 9. Friday afternoon, Abe asks: May I pick you up at 6 pm? | i. capacity |
| 10. He must be on time to make a good impression. | j. suggestion |

Writing Exercise

5 min

Complete the sentences with a modal verb from this list, without using the same one twice: can, could, may, might, should, must, shall, will, would

1. Children _____ go to school.
2. Before you make a decision, you _____ speak to a specialist.
3. I _____ ride a horse, I love horse riding.
4. Let's go, _____ we?
5. Jake _____ speak some English before the training.
6. _____ I please speak to Mrs. Sanders?
7. I promise I _____ buy you a new phone.
8. He _____ join us later, he is not sure.
9. If I were you, I _____ take this opportunity.

Writing Exercise

5 min

Match each sentence to a sentence with the same meaning.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Jack must write a report tomorrow. | a. She needs to help him, or the report will not be finished on time. |
| 2. Jack couldn't write it yesterday. | b. Jennifer's boss says she is allowed to help Jack. |
| 3. Jennifer says she can help him tomorrow. | c. Jack will have to write a report tomorrow. |
| 4. She has to help him, or the report will not be finished on time. | d. Jennifer says she will be able to help him tomorrow. |
| 5. Jennifer's boss says she may help Jack. | e. Jack wasn't able to write it yesterday. |

Speaking Exercise with the Instructor

5 min

Listen to your teacher's questions. Then, answer.

Example: What could we do to protect the environment? We could recycle more.

1. Should children spend a limited time in front of the computer?
2. What else could children do to have fun?
3. If your child spent too much time on the computer, what would you do?
4. Do you think a parent must be strict about this?
5. Do you think it may cause weight problems?

Watch the Video!

10 min

With these song extracts, you will practice modal verbs.

Watch the video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KcSEnVnQ98>

Watch again, and complete the sentences below with the right modal verb:

1. We _____ as well be strangers.
2. I _____ get you out of my head.
3. I know I _____ be what I want to be.
4. If I work hard at it, I _____ be where I want to be.
5. Even when the darkest clouds are in the sky, you _____ sigh and you _____ cry.
6. The show _____ go on!
7. My make up _____ be fading, but my smile still stays on.
8. _____ I stay or _____ I go?

Quiz

10 min

True or False?

- | | | |
|---|------|-------|
| 1. The most polite modal verb to ask for permission is 'may'. | true | false |
| 2. We use 'to' between a modal verb and another verb. | true | false |
| 3. We can use the future with modal verbs. | true | false |
| 4. 'could' is the past of 'can'. | true | false |

Match each situation on the left to a modal verb on the right.

Situation	Modal Verb
1. rational probability	a. must
2. very high probability	b. would
3. suggestion	c. should
4. past of 'will'	d. could

Put these sentences in the past.

1. I can get in, because I am invited.
2. We must finish our work before going out.
3. You should ask a professional to fix your roof.
4. You may understand his explanation.

Put these sentences in the future.

1. I can get in, because I am invited.
2. We must finish our work before going out.
3. He can fly a kite.
4. You would listen carefully.