

MODALS

- Modals are a separate category of verb.
- They do not have different forms for different tenses.
- They do not change forms to agree with the subject.
- If another verb follows a modal, that verb is in the **simple** form: no “s,” no “ed,” no past tense form.
- They are used in various ways including:
 - to **give advice**,
 - to **make requests**,
 - to **predict** how likely an event is
 - to **make inferences**.
- They can be very confusing. :>

The most common modals are: **can, could, will, would, may, might, should, have to, had to, must, ought to,**

GIVING ADVICE

- How strongly does the speaker feel?
- How formal or informal is the relationship between the two people?

Think of a thermometer. The words at the top are stronger. The words on the left are more informal. (Notice that they often sound reduced in speech.)

going to (gonna) -----will [this is a command]

have to (hafta)-----must

ought to (oughta)-----should

could-----might [weak suggestion]

MAKING REQUESTS

- How formal and polite do you wish to be?

Formal and polite

would
could
may

Informal and casual

will
can

PREDICTIONS, PROBABILITIES

- How sure are you?

Someone is knocking on the door.

That _____ be Mary.

will-----certainty

should-----likely, strong chance

may, could, might-----possibility, perhaps

INFERENCES

- How sure are you?

Why was Zana absent yesterday?

She _____ be sick.

must-----strong certainty

could, might, may---weak certainty

OTHER USES OF MODALS

CAN/COULD

CAN

1. Ability to do something in the present or future
I can speak English. I can leave tomorrow.
2. Strong possibility of cause-effect relationship
Smoking can cause cancer.
3. Suggestion in present
You can ask me for help.
4. Giving or asking permission in present or future
Can I borrow your pencil? Yes, you can.
Can I borrow your car next week? Yes, you can.

COULD

1. Ability to do something in the past
Many years ago, I could run fast.
2. Possibility based on conditions in present or future
I could pick you up if you need a ride.
3. Strong possibility in present
Put down the knife! You could hurt yourself!
4. Polite request in the present or future (more polite than “can.”)
Could you please shut the window?
5. Suggestion for present or future.
You could improve your English by listening to the radio.

Practice: Write some sentences describing what you could do in the past, but that you can no longer do and things you could not do in the past, but that you can do now.

Example: When I was young, I could do cartwheels, but I can't do cartwheels anymore. Last year I could not bake bread, but now I can.

WILL/WOULD

WILL

1. Simple future
I will do my taxes this weekend.
2. Request
Will you help me bake some cookies?
3. Promise
I will visit you next summer.

WOULD often contracted in speech to I'd

4. Preference or desire
I would rather see that movie. (I'd rather see that movie.)
I would like to see that movie.
I would prefer to see that movie.
5. Habitual or repeated action in the past= used to.
When I lived in Africa, I would ride my bike to school every day.
When I lived in Africa, I used to ride my bike to school every day.
6. Polite request or offer (instead of "want")
I would like the tuna sandwich please.
Would you like to see a menu?
7. Replaces "will" in reported speech.
Maria said, "I'll see you later."
Maria said that she would see us later.
8. Used in the result clause in conditional sentences.
If I were rich, I would travel the world.

MAY/MIGHT

MAY

1. Asking permission in present or future—more formal than can/could
May I use this chair?
2. Weak possibility in present or future
It may rain today.
He may be absent because of illness.

MIGHT

3. Weak possibility in present or future
It might snow tomorrow.
He might be sick.
4. Replaces “may” in reported speech.
The boy said, “I may go to the zoo!”
The boy said that he might go to the zoo.

Could/May/Might all express **possibility**, but **COULD** is the strongest degree of certainty.

We could be there at seven.

We might be there at seven.

We may be there at seven.

SHOULD/MUST/HAVE TO

SHOULD

1. Obligation

Students should take cell phone calls outside of class.

2. Duty, responsibility

I should mow the lawn this weekend. (I may not, but it is a good idea. If you are going to do it, use, “have to.”)

I have to mow the lawn this weekend.

3. Expectation of something we are fairly sure of. Refers to future or present.

He should win the gold medal for his performance.

He should be there because he said he was coming.

4. Advice

You should study harder for that test.

SHOULD + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE expresses something that **DID NOT HAPPEN IN THE PAST**, though the speaker wanted it to.

You should have voted in the last election.

MUST

1. Necessity—no choice—Refers to present or future. You can also use **HAVE TO**.

The time is up. You must turn in your CASAS test.

You have to turn in your CASAS test.

(Expressing necessity in the past uses “HAD TO.”)

The time was up. I had to turn in my CASAS test.

2. Assumption—a strong belief something is true, though it may be incorrect.

She must be sick because she has missed a whole week of class.

3. Prohibition—a law prohibiting something, usually used in the negative.

You must not smoke on the plane.

MUST expresses a greater degree of certainty in assumption than SHOULD.

My keys should be in my purse. (I usually put them there.)

My keys must be in my purse. (I always put them there.)