

What Are Modal Verbs?

- Modal verbs are special verbs in English that show attitude toward actions.
For example:
 - **Can, could** = ability, possibility
 - **May, might** = possibility, permission
 - **Will** = certainty, promise
 - **Must** = necessity, obligation
 - **Should, ought to** = recommendation

Grammatical Features of Modals

- Modal verbs do not follow the rules of subject-verb agreement:
 - I can / he can / they can.
- Modals are followed by the base form of the verb, without “to”:
 - I can swim. They may not know it. We should go.

Phrasal Modals

Modal verbs have matching phrasal expressions, which are followed by Infinitives (to + verb) and follow the rules of subject-verb agreement.

Modal Verb	Phrasal Modal
Can, could	Be able to
Will, shall	Be going to, be about to
Must	Have to, have got to
Should, ought to	Be to, be supposed to
Would (= past habit)	Used to
May, might	Be allowed to, be permitted to

Other Modal Forms

- Some other expressions in English have modal-like properties:
 - (had) better or (had) best = advisability
 - You'd better go to bed early. You have an exam tomorrow.
 - would rather, would prefer = preference
 - I would rather have pizza than a hamburger.
 - would like = desirability (in statements); offer (in questions)
 - I would like a glass of water. Would you like a cup of coffee?

Meanings of Modal Verbs

- Although modal verbs are generally associated with certain meanings, each modal verb can express a variety of meanings, depending on the situations they are used in.
- The following slides will review the most common meanings of modal expressions.

Degree of Certainty: Present Events

	Absolutely certain (100%)	Very certain (99%) (only negative sentences)	A very strong possibility (95% certainty)	A possibility (50% certainty, a guess)
Verb used:	No modal	Cannot / Could not	Must / Must not	May / Might / Could May not / might not
Why isn't Carlos in class today?	He is sick. He is working .	---	He must be sick. He must be working .	He may / might / could be sick. He may / might / could be working .
Why isn't Sam eating anything?	He isn't hungry. He has just told me that he isn't hungry.	He can't / couldn't be hungry. He has just had lunch.	He must not be hungry. He never refuses a good meal!	He may / might not be hungry right now. Or maybe he doesn't feel well.

Degree of Certainty: Past Events

	Absolutely certain (100%)	Very certain (99%) (only negative sentences)	A very strong possibility (95% certainty)	A possibility (50% certainty, a guess)
	No modal	Cannot / Can't / Could not / Couldn't + have + Past Participle	Must / Must not / Mustn't + have + Past Participle	May / Might / May not / Might not / Could + have + Past Participle
Why wasn't Mary in class yesterday?	She was sick. She was working .	-----	She must have been sick. She must have been working .	She may / might / could have been sick. She may / might / could have been working .
Why didn't Sam eat anything for lunch yesterday?	He wasn't hungry. He told me he wasn't hungry.	He couldn't / can't have been hungry. He had a late breakfast.	He must not have been hungry.	He may / might not have been hungry.

Prediction of Future Events

	Absolutely certain (100%)	A very strong possibility (95% certainty)	A possibility (50% certainty, a guess)
	Will	Should / ought to	May / Might / Could
Do you think I will be able to get a job quickly?	You will get a job quickly. You are a hard worker, and you have good experience. My boss is looking for someone like you right now!	You should / ought to do get a job quickly. You are a hard worker, and you have good experience. Just be sure to apply right away.	You may / might / could do be able to get a job quickly. It depends on how much experience you have and on whether there are a lot of open positions in the area.

Polite Requests

Modal Verb	"I" as the subject	Level of Formality
Might	Might I borrow your cell phone?	Very formal and polite (used less often)
May	May I borrow your cell phone (please)?	Formal; polite
Could	Could I (please) borrow your cell phone?	A little less formal; polite
Can	Can I borrow your cell phone?	Informal; a little less polite

Modal Verb	"You" as the subject	Level of Formality
Will	Will you please pass the salt?	Very formal and polite (used less often)
Would	Would you pass the salt (please)?	Less formal; polite
Could	Could you pass the salt (please)?	A little less formal; polite
Can	Can you (please) pass the salt?	Informal; a little less polite

Obligation and Necessity

- Must:

- All job applicants **must** apply on the company's website.
- Where is John? I **must** talk to him right away. It is an emergency.

Meaning: It is necessary. This is a requirement. There is no other choice.

- **Must** is typically used in academic and legal writing. In speech, it shows urgency.

Obligation and Necessity

- Have to:

- All applicants **have to** apply on the company's website. (Present)
- I **had to** talk to John yesterday about your presentation, but I couldn't find him. (Past)

Meaning: It is necessary.

Have to is more typical in speech but can be used in formal English.

Prohibition

- Must not:
 - You **must not** tell anyone about this. Do you understand?*
 - Little children **mustn't** play outside by themselves.

Meaning: prohibition. Do not do this!

Lack of Necessity

- Do not / does not / did not / will not + have to:
 - Tomorrow is my day off. I **don't have to** go to work, but I want to finish a project.
 - Yesterday I **didn't have to** get up early. It was my day off.
 - He **doesn't have to** drive to work. He lives a block away!
 - When I graduate, I **won't have to** do any homework.

Meaning: It is not necessary. There is no need to do this.

Ability and Potential

- **Can, be able to:**

- I **can speak** three languages.
- He **is able to complete** the task on his own.
- I **could not finish** the book by Friday.
- The company **was not able to function** without the president.
- I **won't be able to finish** the project today. It is impossible!

Passive Voice with Modal Verbs

Modal Verb	Present	Past
can	+ be + Past Participle	+ have been + Past Participle
could		
must		
should	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lina <u>should be invited</u> to the party.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The textbook <u>should have been mailed</u> last week.
may	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The door <u>cannot be opened</u>.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">My friend <u>could not have been fired</u>. I don't believe it!
might		
have to/has to		

Editing Rules

1. Don't use "to" after a modal (exceptions: <i>ought to, be supposed to, have to</i>):	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You should to take a break. You look tired.• We must to finish the project today.
2. Use <u>the base form of the verb</u> after a modal:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• She can't goes to the movies. She is preparing for a test.• You should reading every day. It is a good habit.
3. Remember to use "-d/ed" in <i>supposed to, permitted to, allowed to</i> :	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We aren't <u>permitted</u> to smoke inside.• He was <u>supposed</u> to meet me at 7:00 pm.
4. Remember to use a form of "be" and "to" in <i>be able to, be supposed to, be permitted to, be allowed to</i> :	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They <u>are</u> <u>supposed to</u> leave at 6:00 pm.• I <u>am able to</u> work tomorrow.
5. Don't use two modals together:	<p style="text-align: center;">be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You <u>must</u> can <u>pass a test</u> before you can get your license.• He <u>may</u> be able to <u>get this job</u>.