



# MODALS IN ENGLISH

# MODALITY

- Epistemic modality indicates the possibility or necessity of some piece of knowledge- degrees of certainty. Modal auxiliary verbs can be used to say for instance that a situation is certain, probable, (im)possible.
- Deontic modality indicates the possibility or necessity in terms of freedom to act. Modal auxiliary verbs can be used to say that somebody is obliged to do something, that he/she is able to do sth....

# Epistemic modality- *degrees of certainty*

## ▣ *Complete certainty (positive or negative)*

I shall be away tomorrow.

There's the phone. That'll be Tony. It won't rain this evening. That can't be John. You must be tired.

## ▣ *Probability/ Possibility*

She should/ ought to be here soon.

We may be buying a new house. The water may not be warm enough to swim.

# Epistemic modality- *degrees of certainty (FACTS, EVENTS)*

## ▣ *Weak probability*

I might see you again-who knows? We could all be millionaires one day.

## ▣ *Theoretical or habitual possibility*

How many people can get into a telephone box?  
Small children may have difficulty in understanding abstract ideas.

# Epistemic modality- *degrees of certainty*

## ▣ *Conditional certainty or possibility*

If we had enough time, things would be easy.

If John came we could all go home.

It mightn't be a bad thing if we took a short holiday.

# Deontic modality- *obligation and freedom to act (POLITENESS)*

## ▣ *Strong obligation*

Students must register at the tutorial office in the first week of term.

All sales staff will arrive for work by 8:40 a.m.

## ▣ *Prohibition*

Books may not be taken out of the library.

Students must not use the staff car park.

You can't come in here.

# Deontic modality- *obligation and freedom to act (POLITENESS)*

## ▣ *Weak obligation, recommendation*

She really ought to wash her hair.

What shall we do? That child had better start saying thank-you for things.

## ▣ *Willingness, volunteering, resolving, insisting and offering*

I'll pay for the drinks. If you will come this way... Shall I give you a hand? I should be grateful if you would let me know your decision as soon as possible.

# Deontic modality- *obligation and freedom to act (POLITENESS)*

## ▣ *Permission*

Can I borrow your keys? May we use the phone?

Do you think I might take a break now?

## ▣ *Absence of obligation*

You needn't work this Saturday.

## ▣ *Ability*

She can speak six languages.



## MAY and MIGHT

- used mainly to talk about possibility (the chances of something happening), and to ask for and give permission (in a more formal style)
- *I may see you tomorrow. Do you think I might borrow your pen?*
- MIGHT- less definite, more hesitant, suggesting a smaller chance
- Both MAY and MIGHT are used to talk about the present or future.

# MAY and MIGHT- possibility

- **MIGHT** meaning *would perhaps*
- If you went to bed for an hour you might feel better.  
Don't play knife. *You might get hurt.*
- **MAY** not normally used in direct questions about probability *Are you likely to go camping this summer? Do you think Emma has gone shopping?*
- **MAY/MIGHT+ perfect infinitive (HAVE+past participle)**
- What was that noise? *It might have been a cat.*

## MAY and MIGHT- permission

- more formal than CAN/COULD (*May I put the TV on?*) *May I borrow your car? No, I'm afraid you may not* (rather formal- refusing permission)
- When talking about freedom which people already have, or about rules/laws we use CAN, COULD or BE ALLOWED TO *These day children are allowed to/can do what they like.*
- Indirect speech Peter said that I might look round.

## MAY and MIGHT- wishes and hopes

- I hope that the young couple **may** enjoy many years of happiness together.
- **MAY** often comes at the beginning of the sentences
- *May the New Year bring you all your heart desires. May she rest in peace. May you both be very happy.*

# MAY and MIGHT- requests, suggestions, criticism

- You might try asking your uncle for a job.
- **Might have+ past participle**
- *She might have told me she was going to stay out all night ( talking about the past- criticism)*
- *You might ask before you borrow my car.*

## CAN and COULD- ability

- Present/general ability- *Look! I can do it.*
- Future –will be able to *One day people will be able to go to the moon on holiday.*
- COULD- She could read when she was four.
- COULD used for particular occasions in the past *I could smell burning. I could only get six eggs.*
- Conditional *You could get a better job if you spoke a foreign language.*
- Passive structure *This game can be played by two or more players.*

# CAN and COULD- possibility and probability

- Theoretical/general possibility *Can gases freeze?*
- Choices/opportunities *There are three possibilities: we can go to the police, we can talk to a lawyer, or we can forget all about it.*
- Future probability – CAN NOT USED *There might/may be a strike next week.*
- Present/logical possibility *Who can it be? It can't be your mum. It can only be the postman.*

# CAN and COULD- possibility and probability

- **Reported speech** *Anybody can join the club. I said anybody could join the club.*
- **CAN/COULD + have+ past participle** to guess or speculate about what has happened, whether things (have) happened. *CAN* is only used in questions and negatives with *only*, *hardly* or *never*- *Where can she have gone? She can't have gone to school.*
- **COULD+ have+ past participle** use to say that something was possible but did not happen *Somebody could have been hurt.*



## CAN and COULD- interpersonal uses (permission, requests..)

- A. Giving permission *CAN I have some more cake?*
- B. Reporting permission *She said she **COULD** come as often as I liked.*
- C. Conditional uses of COULD *He **COULD** borrow my car if he asked.*
- D. Offers *CAN I carry your bag?*
- E. Requests, orders, suggestions ***COULD** you put the children to bed?*
- F. Criticisms *You **COULD** ask before you borrow...*
- G. Reported speech *I asked if you **COULD** give me a hand.*

# CAN and COULD-COULD- interpersonal uses (permission, requests..)

- **See, hear, feel, smell, taste**
- *Can you hear somebody coming up the stairs? I can taste something funny.*
- **Guess, tell**
- *I could guess what she wanted.*
- *You can tell he is Irish from his accent.*
- **Understand, follow, remember**
- *Can you follow what she is talking about?*
- *I (can) remember your grandfather.*

# MUST

- no –s in the third person singular, after MUST we use bare infinitive, or progressive, perfect or passive infinitive
- *You must be joking. Dogs must be kept on a lead.*
- MUST has no infinitive or participles. When necessary, we use other words- forms of have to. *It's annoying to have to get up early on Sundays.*
- ideas about the past – **MUST+ perfect infinitive** (have+ past participle)
- *I can't find my keys. I must have left them at home*

## **MUST- concluding that something is certain**

- **Statements** *Mary must have a problem- she keeps crying.*
- **Need not** – *Look at those tracks. That must be a dog. It needn't be/ doesn't have to be- it could be a fox.*
- **Conclusions about the past** *A woman called while you were out. It must have been Kate.*
- **Indirect speech** *I felt there must be something wrong.*
- **Must and should** *Ann should be at home by now (I think she is very probably at home.-weaker form of must)*

## MUST- necessity and obligation

- **Statements** ( the speaker's point of view)- *Plants must get enough light and water. You really must come and see us soon...*
- **Questions** (the hearer's point of view)Must I clean all the rooms? (in AmE: DO I HAVE to..?)
- **Negatives (*prohibitions*)***The government mustn't /can't expect people to work hard for no money. You don't need to get a visa to go to Scotland. (it is unnecessary)*
- **Past necessity and obligation** *I HAD TO* cycle three miles to school when I was a child. (HAD TO- outside obligation in the past)/ MUST-giving orders/advice/making recommendations

# MUST- necessity and obligation

## ■ Indirect speech

The doctor said that I must stop smoking. The doctor said that I had to/ would have to stop smoking.

## MUST and HAVE (GOT) TO?

Both **must** and **have (got)** can be used to express the conclusion that something is certain. **MUST** is unusual in this sense in AmE, especially in speech. *This must be the worst job in the world.* (BrE) or *This has (got) to be worst job...*

**Negative conclusions-** *That can't be his mother- she's not old enough ( NOT mustn't ! )*

**Necessity/ obligation-** In AmE **have to** is more common, especially in speech. British English often makes a distinction. **MUST** is used mostly to talk about the feelings and wishes of the speaker and hearer. **HAVE (GOT)** is used mostly to talk about obligations that come from outside (laws, regulations...)

## MUST and HAVE (GOT) TO?

- Catholics have to go to church on Sundays. (Their religion tells them to.) Do you have to wear a tie at work? You really must go to church next Sunday- you haven't been for ages. (I am telling you to.)
- **Future obligations** *When you leave school you' ll have to find a job. I've got to go for a job interview tomorrow. (already arranged)*
- **Talking about the past** *Edna wasn't there. She HAD TO GO home.*
- **Negative forms** *You mustn't tell George/ You don't have to tell George.*



# MODAL AUXILIARIES- PAST

**Formation – modal+ past infinitive**  
(have+ past participle)

can/ could/must/ may + **past infinitive**

# MODAL AUXILIARIES- PAST

## Past obligation

- *Sorry, I am late, I had to post some letters. ( negative – didn't have to)*

## Past certainty

- *Really? It must have been terrible.*

## Expectations

*The parcel I sent should have arrived by now.*

## Criticism of an action

- *You shouldn't have eaten so much last night.*

## MODAL AUXILIARIES- PAST

- **Polite expression of thanks** *I've done the washing up for you. H, you really shouldn't have!*
- **With *be* and *adjectives* describing chance**
- *It was strange that you should have been staying in the same hotel last year.*
- **Past possibility/uncertainty**
- *David could have won the race if he had tried.*
- **Couldn't have+ comparative adjectives**
- *We couldn't have been happier in those days.*

# MODAL AUXILIARIES- PAST

- **Unwillingness** *We couldn't have left the dog on its own.*
- **Past permission/past ability** *When I was 16, I could stay out till 11:00.*
- **Unwillingness in the past** *Everyone was angry because Sam couldn't turn off the television.*
- **Events in the past which did not actually happen**
- *I would have accepted the job, but I didn't want to move house.*
- **Annoyance at someone's failure**
- *You might have told me my trousers were dirty.*

# MODAL AUXILIARIES- PAST

**Negative uncertainty** *They might not have received our letter yet.*

**The speaker's certainty about a past event**

*Someone must have taken it. Surely you must have noticed it.*

**Unnecessary action which was actually done**

*You needn't have paid all at once.*

## PRACTICE

- Nemusí nám vařit.
- Kdy musíte odejít?
- Smí chodit ven jen jednou za týden.
- Byl jsem tak sytý, že jsem ani nemohl dopít kávu.
- Nesmíš nechat otevřené okno.
- Ten pes nesmí sedět na nábytku.
- Nemusela mu s tím dopisem pomoct.
- Konečně si budu moct koupit nové kolo.
- Možná, že za to nebudeme muset zaplatit.
- Raději bys ho neměl provokovat. Má dnes strašnou náladu.

## PRACTICE

- Opravdu? To muselo být strašné.
- Můj pas tady není. Někdo ho musel ukrást.
- Život tady za války nemohl být jednoduchý.
- Mohl jsi alespoň zavolat.
- Raději bychom měli odejít te'd, nebo přijdeme pozdě.
- Možná, že měl pravdu.
- Nemusel si ti knihu kupovat. Mají ji v knihovně.