

Modal Verbs

- **Obligation/Necessity**
- **Absence of necessity**
- **Permission/Prohibition**
- **Possibility**
- **Ability/Inability**
- **Logical Assumptions/Deductions**
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Obligation/Necessity

must - strong obligation to do sth., the speaker himself has decided that sth is necessary

I must contact the school for some information.

have to – strong necessity/obligation, when objective circumstances make us do sth

We have to wear uniform at school.

had to – past form of **must** and **have to**

should/ought to – duty or weak obligation

We should clear away the mess in the kitchen.

Absence of necessity

don't have to-don't need to-needn't - sth which isn't necessary to do in the present/future

You don't have to dress formally today.

needn't have V3 – sth which wasn't necessary to do in the past but it was done

You needn't have cooked so much food. We weren't hungry.

didn't have to – sth which wasn't necessary to do. We don't know if it was done or not.

He didn't have to invite everyone to the party. (We don't know if he invited everyone.)

Permission/Prohibition

can/may - used to ask for/give permission. **May** is more formal than **can**.

Can/May I use your phone, please? – Yes, you can/may.

mustn't /can't – forbidden to do sth, against the rules, not allowed to do sth.

You mustn't/can't park here.

Possibility

can + present infinitive - general/theoretical possibility

*Going to the gym **can be boring**.*

could/may/might + present infinitive - possibility in a specific situation.

*She should take a map with her. She **might get lost**.*

We can use **can/could/might** in questions, but NOT **may**.

*How difficult **can it be**?*

could/might/would + perfect infinitive sth in the past that was possible but didn't happen

*He **could have come with us**, if he hadn't missed the train.*

Ability/Inability

can - ability in the present/future.

I can speak Italian fluently.

could – general or repeated ability in the past

I could sing quite well when I was younger.

was(n't) able to – (in)ability on a specific occasion in the past

I was able to (wasn't able to) find all the answers.

couldn't – any kind of inability in the past

I couldn't read or write when I was four.

Logical Assumptions/Deductions

must = almost certain that it is/was true

*He isn't at work. So he **must be** on his way home.*

may/might/could = possible that it is/was true

*The computer is out of order. It **may be** broken.*

can't/couldn't = almost certain that it is/was impossible

*That **can't be** John! John has blue eyes and blond hair.*

Criticism

could

*You could at least **be** polite to her. (present)*

*You could at least **have called** to cancel it . (past)*

should

*You should **call** them back. (present)*

*She should **have told** us. (past)*

Offers/Suggestions

would

Would you like a cup of tea?

shall

Shall I give you a lift?

can/could

We can/could watch TV.

Can I give you a lift?

Probability

will

He will call me tonight. (100% certain)

should/ought to

The weather should/ought to get better tomorrow. (90% certain, future only)

Advice

should/ought to - general advice

You should stop smoking.

shall – asking for advice

Shall I enter the competition?