

# Modal Verbs

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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?*