



**ITMO**

# **MODAL VERBS**

# WHAT IS MODALITY?



Modality is about **a speaker's or a writer's attitude towards the world**. A speaker or writer can express **certainty, possibility, willingness, obligation, necessity and ability** by using modal words and expressions.

# Obligation and necessity

## Should

*You should see a doctor.*

## Have to

*You have to see a doctor.*

## Must

*You must see a doctor.*

**Must:**

- A strong personal opinion
- An obligation on oneself
- Instructions (often with Passive)

+ OTHERWISE

*You must treat your neighbors with respect.*

**Have to**

Obligations outside our control

*You have to treat your neighbors with respect.*

**Should / ought to**

Subjective (often moral) obligation, but weaker than with must.

*You should treat your neighbors with more respect.*

**Be to**

Order from a person or authority + schedule.

*The train is to arrive at 8 am.*

*The members of the committee are to report to the chairperson.*

# Prohibition and criticism



**Strong prohibition:**

**Mustn't OR can't**

*You mustn't / can't remove patient files from the surgery*

# Criticism (secondary meaning)

**Should (shouldn't) + have + Past participle** – strong criticism (reproach)



*You're late! You should have been here an hour ago.*

**Might / could + have + Past Participle** – weaker criticism (reproach)

*You might have told me about the party.*

# Absence of necessity



Don't have to / don't need to

You *don't have to* pay to visit the museum. Entrance is free.



## Can

She **can** speak Spanish, but she **can't** speak Italian.

## Be able to

1) If the ability is surprising or supposes overcoming difficulties

*Despite his handicap he **can / is able to** drive a car.*

2) In the future instead of **can**

**Will I be able to** speak fluently by the end of the course?

# Ability in the past



COULD or WAS / WERE ABLE TO

Mozart **couldn't / wasn't able** to speak French.

Past ability: **could**

*Hannah loves water. She **could** swim before she could walk.*

Specific occasion:

*Mike's car broke down yesterday but fortunately he **was able to** repair it.*

# Could: secondary meaning

Past opportunity that wasn't taken:



*She **could have paid** by credit card but she preferred to use cash.*

*Secondary meaning in the present:*

*She can't be there right now.*

*Can she be so stupid?*

*She can't have done it. – **Не может быть...***

*Can you fail to know? – **Разве ты не знаешь?***

# Possibility

May / might / could



*This rash may/might/could be a symptom of something more serious.*

When something is POSSIBLY NOT the case:

*The shops may not/ might not be open today. It's a public holiday.*

When something is DEFINITELY NOT the case:

You really can't drive to Oxford in under an hour.

# Speculation and expectation (revision)



This **MUST** be the place.

This **CAN** be the place.

This **COULD** be the place.

This **MAY** be the place.

This **MIGHT** be the place.

This **must** have been the place.

This **can** have been the place.

This **could** have ben the place.

This **may** have been the place.

This **might** have (well) been the place.

THIS **CAN'T** BE THE PLACE.

**THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR TIME!**

**it's** **MO** *re than a*  
**UNIVERSITY**

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