

# Modals in Spanish

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Consultant demographics:	A female speaker of Peninsula/European Spanish
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This document has been reviewed by two other native speaker specialists. Their comments have been added in red.

## BODY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

### A. EPISTEMIC

#### A1 Epistemic Necessity

**Target: epistemic vs. deontic necessity.**

**(3) and (4) target only epistemic necessity.**

(1) Ben goes swimming every day. Ben is not obliged or required to go swimming; it is just a habit of his. It is now time for Ben to be swimming... so **Ben must be swimming (right now).**

Ben *debe-Ø* (de) *estar* *nad-ando*.  
Ben **MOD-3sg** of be.inf swim-PROG

Note from reviewers:

Deber + Inf = deontic; epistemic (colloquial but probably for young people just normal)

Deber + de + Inf = only epistemic

[Prescriptively at school: Deber + Inf = deontic; Deber + de + Inf = epistemic]

(2) You know that John goes to school at 9am every day. You look at the clock and see it is 9:30am, therefore **John must be at school**.

*John debe-Ø (de) estar en la escuela.*  
John MOD-3sg of be.inf in DET school

(3) (Adapted from von Fintel & Gillies 2007). The math teacher says: There are 3 boxes. The ball is in box A or in box B or in box C. It is not in A. It is not in B. So, **it must be in C**.

*... debe-Ø (de) estar en la caja C.*  
... MOD-3sg of be in DET box C

(4) Tim is calling for his dog. The dog is not coming. Tim looks for the dog in the kitchen, bedroom, living room, (in every room in the house) but the dog is not in any of those rooms. Therefore, Tim concludes that **the dog must not be in the house**.

*El perro no debe-Ø estar en casa.*  
DET dog NEG MOD-3sg be.inf in house

## A2 Epistemic Weak Necessity

**Target: epistemic weak necessity vs. deontic weak necessity**

**(6) is also compatible with testing for epistemic possibility.**

(5) You know that Ann goes hiking from 7am to 8am every day. Most of the time Ann goes to the lake, but sometimes she goes to the mountains. It is now 7:30am and your friend asks where Ann is. You say to your friend: **Ann should be at the lake right now**.

*Anna debe-ría (de) estar en el lago.*  
Anna MOD-3sg.cond of be.inf in DET lake

(6) (Imagine that) you used to live in Goa. You are not living in Goa anymore. You notice how different the weather is in the UK, where you live right now. You know that it often rains in Goa, especially in the afternoon, but not necessarily every day. Now it's the afternoon [in Goa], so you think **it should be raining** now in Goa.

*Esta-rá llov - iendo en Goa.*  
be-3sg.FUT rain - PROG in Goa

**Comment: Presumptive future**

*Debe - ría (de) estar llov - iendo en Goa.*  
MOD-3sg.COND of be rain - PROG in Goa

(7) When the light is on at Mary's house, it usually means that she is home. You want to visit Mary. You walk past Mary's house and notice that the light is on. You think to yourself: **Mary should be at home.**

Mary *debe-(ría)* (de) *estar en casa.*  
 Mary MOD-3sg.(COND) of be.inf in house

Comment:

- Both are possible, but with *debe* it's stronger than with *deberia*

### A3 Epistemic Possibility

**Target: epistemic possibility vs. epistemic necessity**

**(11) targets epistemic possibility vs. deontic possibility**

(8) The teacher is not consistent. The students never know if he's going to come or not to teach class. Today, it's time to start class and the students are waiting again. **He might be coming to school today.**

*Puede - Ø que ven - ga a clase (hoy).*  
 MOD - 3sg COMP come - subj.3sg to class today

(9) Grace is looking for her necklace. She looks in her wardrobe and on top of the wardrobe. It's not there. She looks on top of the TV. It's not there. She looks in her backpack. It's not there. She hasn't checked her sister's wardrobe, yet, but **Grace's necklace might be lost.**

*Puede- Ø que el collar de Grace se haya perd-ido*  
 MOD-3sg COMPL DET necklace of Grace ref have.subj lose-PART

(10) Charles is looking for his pet cat, but cannot find it. He knows that his cat is very elusive and mysterious. Charles tells his sister:

**The cat may be inside. The cat may also be outside.<sup>1</sup>**

*El gato puede-Ø esta-r fuera o dentro.*  
 DET cat MOD-3sg be-inf outside or inside

*El gato puede-Ø esta-r fuera pero también puede-Ø esta-r dentro.*  
 DET cat MOD-3sg be-inf outside but also MOD-3sg be-inf inside

*\*El gato debe estar fuera (o dentro).*

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<sup>1</sup> (The task is not only to translate these two sentences individually, but to keep in mind the sequencing i.e., these sentences are not to be used in isolation).

Note from a reviewer: *poder* + Inf = epistemic or deontic (or circumstantial, etc)  
*poder.3sg* + *que* + finite clause = only epistemic

(11) Daniel lives in London and his friend has recently moved to New York. Daniel's parents told him that he is not allowed to go and see his friend in New York because it is too far away. You heard that Daniel is leaving London next week but you don't know where he will go. Daniel usually does things that he is not permitted to do. You think **Daniel may go to New York**.

*Puede - Ø se - r que Daniel va - ya a NY.*  
MOD - 3sg be - inf COMP Daniel go - subjv.3sg to NY

## A4 Epistemic Non-necessity

(7') When the light is on at Mary's house, it usually means that she is home. You want to visit Mary. You walk past Mary's house and notice that the light is on. However, there is no car in the driveway. You think to yourself: **Mary may not be at home**.

*Puede-Ø que (Mary) no est - é en casa.*  
MOD-3sg COMP (Mary) NEG be - subjv.3sg in house

## A5 Epistemic impossibility

(1') Ben goes swimming every day. Ben is not obliged or required to go swimming; it is just a habit of his. It is now time for Ben to be swimming... so **Ben can't be at home**.

*Ben no puede-Ø esta-r en casa.*  
Ben NEG MOD-3sg be-inf in house

(3') The math teacher says: There are 3 boxes. The ball is in box A or in box B or in box C. We opened box A, and the ball is there. There is only one ball. So, **it can't be in C**.

*No puede-Ø esta-r en la caja C.*  
NEG MOD-3sg be-inf in DET box C

## B. DEONTIC

### B1 Deontic Necessity

**Target: deontic necessity**

(12) In Indonesia, the law states that when you ride a motor bike... **You must wear a helmet**.

*Debe-s lleva-r casco.*  
MOD-2sg wear-inf helmet

(13) You are going to visit your friend in the hospital. When you enter the hospital, you stop at the information desk to inquire what room your friend is in. But the woman at the information desk tells you that you can't visit your friend now because it's already 8pm. She says, "I'm sorry, the hospital regulations say that... **Visitors must leave by 6pm.**"

*Los visitantes debe-n irse antes de las 18:00.*  
 DET visitors MOD-3pl go.away//go.refl before of DET 6pm

## B2 Deontic Weak Necessity

**Target: deontic weak necessity**

(16) Your friend is having a birthday party. She tells you that she would like it if everyone invited wore formal clothes, but that it is not necessary to wear formal clothes to attend. You think to yourself... **I ought to wear formal clothes** to the party.

*Debe -ría llevar ropa formal.*  
 MOD - COND.3sg wear clothes formal

(17) Your friend tells you that the rules of the restaurant state that employees must wash their hands after going to the bathroom. You reply to your friend:... **Customers ought to wash their hands** too!

*Los clientes debe-rían lava-r-se las manos también.*  
 DET customers MOD-COND.3pl wash-inf-refl DET hands also

(18) In England, it is recommended that face coverings be worn in stores, but it is not a legal requirement. You plan on going shopping, and you think to yourself... **I ought to wear a face covering.**

*Debe-ría pone -r - me una mascarilla.*  
 MOD-COND.1sg put.on - inf - refl DET mask

## B3 Deontic Possibility

**Target: deontic possibility vs. deontic necessity**

**(22) and (23) target deontic possibility vs. circumstantial possibility**

(19) The ferris wheel ride is only for children under 12 years of age. Martin is 10 years of age. It is not obligatory for Martin to go on the ride if he doesn't want to, but **Martin may ride the ferris wheel.**

*Martin puede - Ø subi-r-se a la noria.*  
 Martin MOD - 3sg get.on-inf-refl to DET wheel.ride

(20) According to the rules of the hospital, only family members are allowed to enter the patient's room during visiting hours. You came to visit your sister after visiting hours. But the really nice nurse says...  
**You may enter.**

*Puede-s entra-r.*  
MOD-2sg enter-inf

(21) You are making plans for tomorrow night to meet up with your friend. Your friend says:  
**You can stay overnight or you can go home.**  
**You can stay overnight. You can also go home.**

*Puede-s pasa-r la noche aquí o (puede -s) irte a casa.*  
MOD-2sg pass-inf DET night here or (MOD- 2sg) go.away to home

= *Puedes pasar la noche aquí pero también (puedes) irte a casa.*

(22) Alice fell down the stairs and broke her arm a while ago. She hasn't been lifting her baby while her arm was hurt because the baby is heavy. Finally, she recovered, and she went to the doctor for a final check-up. The doctor gave her permission to lift her baby. But when she got home after her visit to the doctor, Alice found that she is still too weak to lift her baby, although according to the doctor's orders  
**Alice can lift her baby.**

*Alice puede-Ø coge-r al bebé.*  
Alice MOD-3sg take-inf to.DET baby

(23) Beth's teacher told her class that it was okay to go swimming, but Beth doesn't want to because she has never learnt to swim! However, as far as the teacher's directions are concerned...  
**Beth can go swimming.**

*Beth puede-Ø ir a nada-r.*  
Beth MOD-3sg go.inf to swim-inf

## B4 Deontic non-necessity

(16') Your friend is having a birthday party. She tells you that she would like it if everyone invited wore formal clothes, but that it is not necessary to wear formal clothes to attend. You think to yourself... I ought to wear formal clothes to the party, but **I don't have to / needn't wear formal clothes.**

*No teng-o que llevar ropa formal.*  
NEG have-1sg COMP wear.inf clothes formal

Comments from a reviewer: Honestly, the standard weak-strong univ modal text from English is not awesome in Spanish: "...ought p ...but not have to / need not p". I suspect that in Egnl people accommodate "...I don't (really) have to". I need a paraphrase to add the feeling of "really".

... pero no es absolutamente necesario.

but not is absolutely necessary

'..., but it is not absolutely necessary'

(18') In England, it is recommended that face coverings be worn in stores, but it is not a legal requirement. You plan on going shopping, and you think to yourself... I ought to wear a face covering, but **I don't have to / needn't wear a face covering.**

No     *teng-o    que    lleva-r        mascarilla.*  
NEG   **have**-1sg **COMP** wear-inf        mask

No     *teng-o    por qué            lleva-r        mascarilla.*  
NEG   **have**-1sg **why**                wear-inf        mask

- Comment: *No debo* not possible in this context

## B5 Deontic impossibility

(12') In Indonesia, the law states that when you ride a motorbike... **You must not ride a motorbike without a helmet.**

No     *debe - s    ir            en moto        sin            casco.*  
NEG   **MOD** - 2sg go.inf on motorbike without        helmet

(13') You are going to visit your friend in the hospital. When you enter the hospital, you stop at the information desk to inquire what room your friend is in. But the woman at the information desk tells you that you can't visit your friend now because it's already 8pm. She says, "I'm sorry, the hospital regulations say that... **Visitors must not stay after 6pm.**"

*Visitantes        no        deben        quedarse después de las 6pm.*  
Visitors        NEG   **MOD**-3pl stay.inf after        6pm

*Los visitantes    no        deben        permanece-r (en el hospital) pasadas las 18:00.*  
DET visitors    NEG   **MOD**-3pl stay-inf (in the hospital) after        6pm

Comment:

- *deber* is more felicitous in legal/prescriptive contexts

## C. TELEOLOGICAL

### C1 Teleological Necessity

**Target: teleological necessity**

(24) There is only one main road from Location A to Location B... If you go from Location A to Location B, **you have to take this road.**

*Tiene-s que ir por esta calle.*  
Have-2sg COMP go.inf by this road

*Debe-s ir por esta calle.*  
MOD-2sg go.inf by this road

(25) Team A are playing in a tournament. In order to advance... **Team A has to beat Team B.**

*El equipo A debe-Ø gana-r al equipo B.*  
DET team A MOD-3sg win-inf to.DET team B

*El equipo A tiene-Ø que gana-r al equipo B.*  
DET team A HAVE-3sg COMP win-inf to.DET team B

*El equipo A necesita(-ría) gana-r al equipo B.*  
DET team A MOD(-COND.3sg) win-inf to.DET team B

(26) The best pizza in town is sold at Gino's. You have invited your sister for dinner, and you decide to order pizza. You tell your sister: **We have to go to Gino** to eat the best pizza.

*Tene-mos que ir a la pizzería Gino.*  
HAVE-1pl COMP go.inf to DET pizzeria Gino

Comment:

- Infelicitous with *necesitar*

### C2 Teleological Weak Necessity

**Target: teleological weak necessity**

(27) There are different ways to get to the shopping centre. You can go by foot, by bus, or drive yourself. You are not sure how to go. Your friend advises you to get the bus because it is cheaper... To get to the shopping centre, **you should take the bus.**



*Debe-rías          coge-r    el          autobús.*  
MOD-COND.2sg take-inf DET bus

(28) There are 3 ways to get to the seaside: a direct road, taking smaller roads, or a combination. Your friend says that taking the smaller roads is very beautiful. According to him, **you should go via the smaller roads.**

*Debe-rías          ir          por las    carreteras secundarias.*  
MOD-COND.2sg go.inf by DET backroads

(29) Your friend wants to buy a new shirt for her job at a reasonable price. There are many nice shops for professional clothes in the area, and you work at one of them and think it offers good prices. You say: **You should come to my shop** to buy a new shirt.

*Debe-rías          veni-r          a mi tienda.*  
MOD-COND.2sg come-inf to my shop

Comment:

- This is a better translation than the example below.

*Tiene-s          que          venir          a mi tienda.*  
Have-2sg COMP come.inf to my shop

### C3 Teleological Possibility

**Target: teleological possibility**

(30) There are two different ways to get to the mountains from the city centre. Way 1 is inland and way 2 goes around via the coast. Both take around 7 hours by bus and they are equally beautiful... **You can take way 1.**

*Puede-s    coge-r    la    primera ruta.*  
MOD-2sg take-inf DET first route

(31) There is a swimming pool and a shopping centre in the town and both are an equal distance from your house. You have no specific desire for which to go to. You tell your sister... **We can go to the swimming pool.**

*Pode-mos ir          a la piscina.*  
MOD-1pl go.inf to the pool

(32) Your friend wants to buy a new shirt for her job. Since there are many nice shops for professional clothes in the area, you say... **You can go to this boutique.**

*Puede-s ir a esta tienda.*

MOD-2sg go.inf to this shop

#### C4 Teleological non-necessity

(27') There are different ways to get to the shopping centre. You can go by foot, by bus, or drive yourself. You are not sure how to go. Your friend advises you to get the bus because it is cheaper... To get to the shopping centre, you should take the bus, but **you don't need to / needn't take the bus.**

*No necesita-s coger el autobús.*

NEG mod-2sg take.inf DET bus

*No tiene-s que coger el autobús.*

NEG MOD-2sg COMP take.inf DET bus

#### C5 Teleological impossibility

(24') There is only one main road from Location A to Location B... If you are going from Location A to Location B, **you can't take another road.**

*No puede-s ir por otra calle.*

NEG MOD-2sg go.inf by other road

(25') Team A are playing in a tournament. In order to advance... **Team A can't lose to Team B.**

*El equipo A no puede-Ø perde-r ante el equipo B.*

DET team A NEG MOD-3sg lose-inf before DET team B

*El equipo A no debe-Ø perde-r ante el equipo B.*

DET team A NEG MOD-3sg lose-inf before DET team B

Comment:

- Based on previous data, this example with *puede* elicits the teleological orientation more than with *debe*

## D. CIRCUMSTANTIAL

### D1 Circumstantial Necessity

**Target: circumstantial necessity; (35) with inanimate subject**

(33) You are on a bus. You have not had a chance to go to the toilet for 4 hours, and your bladder is full. You text your friend... **I have to pee** so badly!

*Teng-o que mea-r.*  
**Have-1sg COMP pee-inf**

(34) In the middle of a conversation, you feel a sneeze coming on... Excuse me! **I have to sneeze**.

*Teng-o que estornuda-r.*  
**Have-1sg COMP sneeze-inf**

(35') Water is entering a pipe, which has two outputs: the left output and the right output. You block the left output. Therefore, **the water must come out from the right output/pipe**.

... *que el agua ten-ga que salir por la tubería de la derecha.*  
... **COMP DET water have-sbjv.3sg COMP leave.inf by DET pipe of the right**

Edited to avoid subjunctive subordination:

*El agua tiene-Ø que sali-r por la tubería de la derecha.*  
**DET water have-3sg COMP leave-inf by DET pipe of DET right**

*El agua debe-Ø salir por la tubería de la derecha.*  
**DET water MOD-3sg leave.inf by the pipe of the right**

Comment from a reviewer: for pure circumstantial: “tener que” is much better than “deber”  
If epi ingredients is added: ok “deber” / “tener que”

### D3 Circumstantial Possibility

**Target: (36) & (37) circumstantial possibility vs. epistemic possibility**

**(38) circumstantial possibility**

**(39) & (40) circumstantial possibility vs. deontic possibility**

(36) Ani came to visit a small island in the Philippines. She noticed that the climate and many of the plants are similar to some places she visited in Indonesia, where *duku* trees grow. The temperature is the same, the rainfall is the same, the types of rocks and the soil are the same. But when she looked around, she didn't find any *duku* trees anywhere. But because the temperature, rainfall, and soil are the same, she thinks that... ***duku* trees can grow here**.

*Los árboles duku puede-n crece-r aquí.*  
**DET trees duku MOD-3pl grow-inf here**

(37) Amy was in Italy and learned how to make traditional Italian pasta. Now Amy is back in the country she lives in, and she wants to make traditional pasta, but the right kind of ingredients are not sold where

she lives. So, she is unhappy because she wanted to show her parents how to make traditional pasta...  
**Amy can make traditional pasta** (but she does not have the ingredients).

Amy *puede-Ø* hacer pasta tradicional.  
Amy **MOD-3sg** make.inf pasta traditional

Amy *es capaz de* hacer pasta tradicional.  
Amy **is capable** of make.inf pasta traditional

A reviewer's intuition about "podría" (can in conditional form: would can/be able to): signals a silent conditional sentence roughly meaning "if she had the right ingredients".

(38) Ben was in a motorbike accident 3 weeks ago, and he sprained his ankle. Ben is able to walk now. However, the doctor told Ben that he is not allowed to walk until 5 weeks after the accident...  
**Ben can walk now.**

Ben *puede-Ø* anda-r.  
Ben **MOD-3sg** walk-inf

Ben *es capaz de* anda-r.  
Ben **is capable** of walk-inf

(39) Paul is quite old now, but he is still strong. His children are scared he will hurt his back if he does any intense labour, so they told him that he is forbidden to lift heavy things. But one day, his friend Rob asked to help him in the field, because Rob knows Paul is still strong. So when Rob saw a large rock that had to be moved, he asked Paul straightaway for help (but he didn't tell Paul's children!). Rob knew that... **Paul can lift that rock.**

Paul *puede-Ø* levantar la roca.  
Paul **MOD-3sg** lift DET rock  
Paul *es capaz de* levantar la roca.  
Paul **is capable** of lift DET rock

(40) The travel vans have a limit of 13 people by law. But the drivers don't care, and stop for more than 13 people. Also, the vans are bigger than you think... **Travel vans can fit 20 people.**

Los minibuses *puede-n* acomodar a 20 personas.  
DET minibuses **MOD-3pl** accommodate prep 20 people

Los minibuses son capaces de acomodar a 20 personas

#### D4. Circumstantial non-necessity

(44) Given the way this volcano has been active in the past 100 years, it is likely but not certain that it will erupt in the next 5 years. **The volcano doesn't have to erupt.**

*El volcán no tiene-Ø por.qué erupciona-r.*  
DET volcano NEG have-3sg why erupt-inf

#### D5. Circumstantial impossibility

(34') Ben was in a motorbike accident 3 weeks ago. He sprained his ankle and is in a lot of pain. **Ben can't walk.**

*Ben no puede-Ø andar.*  
Ben NEG MOD-3sg walk

*Ben no es capaz de andar.*

(35') Water is entering a pipe, which has two outputs: the left output and the right output. But, you know that the left output is blocked. And the water is coming out from the right output. You say: **the water can't come out from the left output.**

*El agua no puede-Ø salir por la tubería izquierda.*  
DET water NEG MOD-3sg exist by DET pipe left

(36') Ani came to visit a small Caribbean island. She noticed that the climate and many of the plants are very different to the places she visited in Indonesia, where *duku* trees grow. The types of rocks and the soil are different as well. She doesn't know whether or not there are *duku* trees on the island. But because the temperature, rainfall, and soil are so different, she thinks that... ***duku* trees can't grow here.**

*Los árboles duku no puede-n crecer aquí.*  
DET trees duku NEG MOD-3pl grow here

### E. BOULETIC

#### E1 Bouletic Necessity

**Target: bouletic necessity**

**(42) targets bouletic necessity vs. deontic necessity**

(41) You love handbags. You see a really nice handbag in a window and you say... **I must buy it.**

*Teng-o que compra-r-lo.*  
Have-1sg COMP buy-inf-it

*Deb-o*            *comprar-lo.*  
MOD-1sg        buy.inf-it

(42) Your friend asks you what you want to do today since it is a holiday and you both are not required to do any tasks today. However, you absolutely want to see this new movie that everyone is talking about- You say... **I must go to the cinema.**

*Teng-o*            *que*    *ir*        *al*        *cine*    *a*        *ve-r-la.*  
Have-1sg        COMP go.inf to.DET cinema to        see-inf-it

(43) A daughter tells her parent... **My friend wants to come visit me.**

*Mi*        *amiga*    *quiere-Ø*        *veni-r*    *a*        *ver-me.*  
My        friend    want-3sg        come-inf to        see.inf-me

## Table of Spanish modals:

MODALS	EPISTEMIC	ROOT/NON-EPISTEMIC			
		PARTICIPANT-EXTERNAL		PARTICIPANT-INTERNAL	
		<u>Deontic</u>	<u>Teleological</u>	<u>Circumstantial</u>	<u>Bouletic</u>
<b>Necessity</b>	deber <sup>V</sup> (de)	deber <sup>V</sup>	tener que <sup>CP</sup> // necesitar <sup>V</sup> // deber <sup>V</sup>	Tener que <sup>CP</sup> // deber <sup>V</sup>	Tener que <sup>CP</sup> // ?deber <sup>V</sup> // querer (want)
<b>Weak Necessity</b>	debería <sup>CV</sup> (de)	debería <sup>CV</sup>	debería <sup>CV</sup>	...	n/a
<b>Possibility</b>	poder <sup>V</sup>	poder <sup>V</sup>	poder <sup>V</sup>	poder <sup>V</sup> // ser capaz de <sup>PRP</sup>	n/a
<b>Non-necessit y</b>	[Puede que no + [...]] <sup>PRP</sup>	No tener	No tener // no necesitar <sup>V</sup>	No tener por qué <sup>CP</sup>	
<b>Impossibility</b>	No poder <sup>V</sup>	No poder <sup>V</sup> // No deber <sup>V</sup>	No poder <sup>V</sup>	No poder <sup>V</sup> // no ser capaz de <sup>PRP</sup>	

### Legend:

V: Inflected verb

CV: Conditional verb, inflected for person and number

CP: *tener* complement; cannot be finite

PRP: Paraphrase, either “it may be that...” or “SUBJ is [not] capable of...”