

# English VI

## Modal Verbs

MENG321 - 2022

Zachary Chui – Room A323

[zchui@ipm.edu.mo](mailto:zchui@ipm.edu.mo)

Lesson 4

# Modal Verbs

## Modal and Modal Phrases (Semi-Modals)

A modal is a type of **auxiliary (helping) verb** that is used to express: ability, possibility, permission or obligation. Modal phrases (or semi-modals) are used to express the same things as modals, but are a combination of auxiliary verbs and the preposition “to”.

# Modal Verbs

The modals and semi-modals in English are:

- Must/have to
- Shall/should
- Can/could/be able to
- May/might
- Will/would

- **Must, Have to, Need to, Do not have to, Need not**

### ***Express Necessity or Requirement***

Present and Future:

*must/ have to/need to* + base form of the verb

- You *must have* a passport to cross the border.
- Elisabeth *has to apply* for her visa by March 10th.
- I *need to drop* by his room to pick up a book.

Past:

*had to/needed to* + base form of the verb

- I *had to work* late last night.
- I *needed to drink* a few cups of coffee in order to stay awake.

Note: *have to* and *need to* are often used in the same context, but *need to* is used to express something that is less urgent, or for something in which you have a choice.

- **Must, Have to, Need to, Don't have to, Need not**

***Almost 100% Certain***

*must* + base form of the verb

- Thomas has lived in Paris for years. His French *must be* very good.

***To Persuade***

*must/have to* + base form of the verb

- You *must try* this wine. It's excellent.
- You *have to visit* us while you're in town.

***Prohibited or Forbidden***

*must not/mustn't* + base form of the verb

- You *must not drive* over the speed limit.
- You *mustn't leave* medicines where children can get to them.

- **Must, Have to, Need to, Don't have to, Need not**

***Lack of Necessity***

*do not/don't/does not/doesn't/did not/didn't + have to + base form of the verb*

- You *do not have to park* the car. The hotel valet will do it for you.
- Tim *does not have to go* to school today. It's a holiday.
- You *did not have to shout*. Everyone could hear you.

*need not/needn't + base form of the verb*

- You *need not worry* about me. I'll be fine.

- **Shall, Should, Ought to**

***To Offer of Assistance or Polite Suggestion (When you are quite sure of a positive answer)***

*shall* + subject + base form of the verb

- *Shall we go for a walk?*

Note: *Shall* is only used with *I* or *we*. It is used instead of *will* only in formal English.

***To Offer of Assistance or Polite Suggestion (When you are not sure of a positive answer)***

*should* + subject + base form of the verb

- *Should I call a doctor?*

- **Shall, Should, Ought to**

***A Prediction or Expectation that Something Will Happen***

*should/should not/shouldn't* + base form of the verb

- The proposal *should be* finished on time.
- I *should not be* late. The train usually arrives on time.

***To Give Advice***

*should/ought to* + base form of the verb

- You *should check* that document before you send it out.
- You *ought to have* your car serviced before the winter.

***To Give Advice (about something you think wrong or unacceptable)***

*shouldn't* + base form of the verb

- James *shouldn't teach* him words like those.



- **Can, Could, Be Able to**

*Can, could* and *be able to* are used to express a variety of ideas in English:

***Ability/Lack of Ability***

Present and Future:

*can/cannot or can't* + base form of the verb

- Tom *can write* poetry very well.
- I *can help* you with that next week.
- Lisa *cannot/can't speak* French.

*am/is/are/will be* + *able to* + base form of the verb

*am not/isn't/aren't/won't be* + *able to* + base form of the verb

- Mike *is able to solve* complicated math equations
- The support team *will be able to help* you in about ten minutes.
- I *won't be able to* visit you next summer.

- **Can, Could, Be Able to**

Past:

*could/couldn't* + base form of the verb

- When I was a child, I *could climb* trees.

*was/were* + *able to* + base form of the verb

*wasn't/weren't* + *able to* + base form of the verb

*hasn't/haven't* + *been able to* + base form of the verb

- I *wasn't able to visit* her in the hospital.
- He *hasn't been able to get in touch* with the client yet.

Note: *Can* and *could* do not take the infinitive (to “verb”) and do not take the future auxiliary *will*.

Incorrect: I *can to help* you this afternoon.

Correct: I *can help* you this afternoon.

Correct: I *will (I'll) be able to help* you this afternoon.

- **Can, Could, Be Able to**

***Possibility/Impossibility***

*can/can't* + base form of the verb

- You *can catch* that train at 10:45 today.
- He *can't see* you right now. He's in surgery.

*could* + base form of the verb

- I *could fly* via Amsterdam if I leave tomorrow.

***Make a suggestion – To make a suggestion use***

*could* (emphasis placed) + base form of the verb (informal)

- You *could take* the tour of the castle.

- **Can, Could, Be Able to**

***Ask Permission/Give Permission***

*can* + subject + base form of the verb (informal)

- *Can* you lend me ten dollars?

*can* + base form of the verb (informal)

- You *can* borrow my car.

*could* + subject + base form of the verb (more polite)

- *Could* I have your number?
- *Could* I talk to your supervisor please?

- **May, Might**

***Formal Permission/Formal Prohibition***

*may/may not* + base form of the verb

- You *may start* your exam now.
- You *may not wear* sandals to work.

***Polite Request***

*may* + subject + base form of the verb

- *May* I help you?

- **May, Might**

***Possibility/Negative Possibility***

*may/might* + base form of the verb

- We *may go out* for dinner tonight. Do you want to join us?
- Our company *might get* the order if the client agrees to the price.

*may not/might not* + base form of the verb

- Adam and Sue *may not buy* that house. It's very expensive.
- They *might not buy* a house at all.

***To Make a Suggestion (when there is no better alternative)***

*may as well/might as well* + base form of the verb

- You *may as well come* inside. John will be home soon.
- We *might as well take* Friday off. There's no work to be done anyway.

- **May, Might**

***Polite Suggestion***

*might* + base form of the verb

- You *might like* to try the salmon fillet. It's our special today.

- **Will / Would**

*will/won't* + base form of the verb

- John *will pick you up* at 7:00am.
- Beth *won't be* happy with the results of the exam.

***Polite Request or Statement***

- *will/would* + base form of the verb
- *Will you please* take the trash out?
- *Would you mind* if I sat here?
- *I'd (I would) like* to sign up for your workshop.

***Habitual Past Action***

- *would/wouldn't* + base form of the verb
- When I was a child, I *would spend* hours playing with my trains.
- Peter *wouldn't eat* broccoli when he was a kid. He loves it now.