



Unlock Fluent English: Your Modal Verb Toolkit

A step-by-step guide to adding power, politeness,
and precision to your speech.



What are Modal Verbs?

They are special helper verbs that change the meaning of the main verb. Think of them as essential tools that express a specific mood, attitude, or function.

Here are the main jobs they do:



Ability / Inability

Expressing what you can or cannot do.



Permission / Request

Asking for or giving permission.



Possibility

Talking about things that might happen.



Obligation / Advice

Describing necessity, rules, or giving advice.

The Power Tool: CAN



To Express Ability / Inability

I **can** swim.



I **can't** swim.



To Make a Request or
Ask for Permission

Can you
help me?



Can I drink
some water?



The Diplomat's Tool: COULD



To Talk About Past Ability

She **could** walk before the accident.



Use *could* to describe an ability someone had in the past but may not have now.



To Make a Polite Request

Could you open the window?



Could is often more polite and formal than *Can* when making a request.

The Formal Tool: MAY



To Ask For or Give Formal Permission

May I come in?



This is a very polite way to ask for permission, often used with people you don't know well or in professional settings.



To Express Possibility

It **may** rain today.



The Cautious Tool: MIGHT



To Express a Weak Possibility

He **might** come to the meeting.



Use `might` when you think something is possible, but you are less certain than with `may`.

The Essential Tool: MUST



To Express Strong Necessity or Rules

You **must** wear a helmet.



To State a Prohibition (Something Not Allowed)

You **must not** smoke here.



'Must not' (or 'mustn't') means something is forbidden.

The Everyday Obligation: HAVE TO / HAS TO



To Express an External Requirement

Use **have to** when the obligation comes from an outside source, like a job, a school rule, or a law.



I **have to** wake up early. (for work)



She **has to** wear a uniform. (a school rule)

Use **have to** with
I / You / We / They.

Use **has to** with
He / She / It.

The Advisor's Tool: SHOULD



To Give Advice or Make a Recommendation

You **should** study more.



You **shouldn't** eat too much sugar.



'Should' is not a strict rule like 'must'; it's a suggestion about what is the right or best thing to do.

Your Complete Modal Verb Toolkit at a Glance

Modal Verb	Function(s)	Example Sentence
can	ability permission	She can swim.
could	past ability polite request	Could you help me?
may	permission possibility	You may go now.
might	weak possibility	It might rain.
must	strong obligation	You must wear a mask.
have to	external requirement	He has to finish homework.
should	advice	You should sleep early.

Now, Put Your Tools to Work

Choose the best modal verb to complete each sentence.

1. I _____ speak three languages fluently. ability
2. You _____ see a doctor about that cough. It looks serious. advice
3. _____ I borrow your pen, please? polite request
4. Look at those dark clouds. It _____ rain this afternoon. possibility
5. Students _____ be silent during the exam. It's the rule. strong obligation

The same way to arrange the conjugation table in Source Serif Pro.

The best way to master these tools is to use them. Try writing your own sentences today!