



# IIT Madras

## BSc Degree

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**English – II**  
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**Mood and Modal Verbs**

Welcome to the class. Today we are going to talk about moods and modals in English. These are two specific aspects of English language, or for that matter of any language that we need to look at separately to get a slightly advanced understanding of how sentence construction works.

As I say, trying to understand nuances of construction of sentences, that is trying to understand smaller details of how we make a sentence, that is, how our mind processes a sentence; how it acquires that kind of ability and the understanding nuances for understanding subconscious processing of the structure in human mind helps us deal with those structures, when we speak very easily and effectively.

For that purpose, one more time, I take you to a different description of two specific topics, they are called modals and mood. What is mood and what are modals in English language is what we are going to discuss today.

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Some examples -

- Can I tell you something?
- What can I do for you?
- I can play piano.
- I would love to hear from you.
- They may go to Canada next year.
- She might like these dresses.
- You can't (cannot) be serious.
- We must study.
- We should listen to others.

can't (cannot) [Tense: Aux]  
[Modal Aux]



Let us see some examples, some sentences, very simple sentences and very often we use these sentences, very often we use these sentences in our conversations. Some of those sentences are like; Can I tell you something? What can I do for you? I can play the piano. I love to hear from you. They may go to Canada next year. She might like these dresses. You cannot be serious or you cannot be serious. We must study. We should listen to others. We hear these sentences quite often when we listen to others or we also speak these sentences quite often.

In the context of these sentences, I want to draw your attention to the elements that are available in red. These elements are can, would, may, might, the negative of can, cannot, please pay attention to this; when this is a shorter form of writing cannot, and when we write cannot there is no space between can and not; elements like must, should. These are some of the things where I want to draw your attention.

These things are very unique and specific, unique in nature, and specific for us to understand that sentences. In a way, so, what is special about these things? So, first of all, let us look at the intention. Let us look at what do we want to convey through these sentences. When we use these sentences, these elements add specific dimension to what we want to say. So, first of all, there is a lot of semantics involved in that. Can I tell you something? It is a question sentence, but it is asking for permission.

So, the word “can” denotes permission. I can play piano; in this sentence, the declarative simple sentence, this “can” denotes capability or ability to do something. I would love to hear from you, here “would” talks about or refers to possibility or willingness to do something. They may go to Canada next year, again this is denoting probability. She might like these things; possibility. We must study; a sense of obligation. And we should listen to others sense of acceptance, sense of suggestion.

So, these elements add these dimensions to what we are saying, this is one part. So, this is purely semantic in nature. How do we look at these things from the perspective of grammatical construction? What is so unique about these things that we need to pay special attention? You look at few sentences with these elements on your own. And check what you find among them.

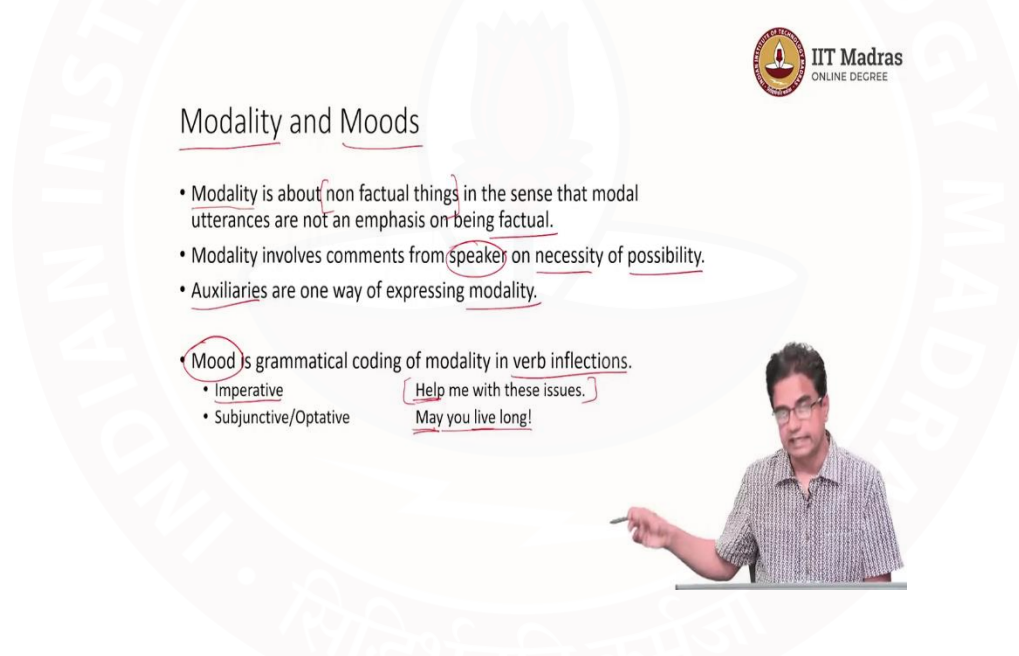
What is common about all of them? Is there something common? Is there something specific about all of them together? though they all have different intentionality, different purpose, different functions. But is there something common? The reason I am asking this question is this


something common, because it is, there is something common and only on the basis of that common factor we club them together in one and these things are called modal auxiliary.

So, today, I am going to talk about types of auxiliary as well. So, these are modal auxiliaries, for us to understand. You have heard this term, auxiliary verb, I am assuming you know about it. And I will discuss auxiliaries, like vis-à-vis modals, I will talk about tense auxiliaries. So, there are some auxiliaries which talk about tense and some of these are modal auxiliaries.

Right at this point, I want to take this opportunity to tell you that the reason right at the outset you can see we have modal auxiliaries separate from tense auxiliaries, clearly tells us modal auxiliaries are not tensed; modal auxiliaries have no tense embedded in that. We will look at the details of these as we move forward.


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### Modality and Moods

- Modality is about non factual things in the sense that modal utterances are not an emphasis on being factual.
- Modality involves comments from speaker on necessity of possibility.
- Auxiliaries are one way of expressing modality.
- Mood is grammatical coding of modality in verb inflections.
  - Imperative      Help me with these issues.
  - Subjunctive/Optative      May you live long!



So, we, I have mentioned this term several time modal, mood, what are they? Very briefly see modality is about nonfactual things, in the sense that modal utterances are not an emphasis on being factual. So, when we say, I can play piano; let us look at the implications of what we say. So, I say “can” is a modal auxiliary. What does it mean that it is not factual? Modality involves comments from speakers on necessity or possibility. So, it only adds certain dimensions, it does not emphasize on something being factual or factually correct. So, let us understand this with example.

So, when we say I can play piano; it is not about me playing piano as in statement or in reality, it is about the, my, it is about my ability to play piano. So, the moment we say can, it is not a factual thing. It is just denoting my ability to do something. That is what it means. That is what we mean all and this is common about all modals. Every time we use a modal auxiliary it does not stress on, it is a nonfactual element and it does not add on being anything factually correct. So, this we need to keep in mind.

Just take any example, "they may go to Canada next year". It talks about possibility, but it has no truth value added to that. It is not, it does not have to be factual, it is just talking about possibility; and therefore, we say it involves necessity or possibility type of elements and it comes in the form of comment from the speaker. So, this speaker of modal sentences are always involved in that; that it just modal auxiliaries, add speakers in this, speakers comment on what they are. This is another point that I wanted you to take a note of.

And these auxiliaries are one way, so they come in the form of auxiliaries. So, modalities, so modality is coming, is expressed through auxiliaries. So, what happens is, we are going to look at them in detail. So, but before that, we need to know, so that we understand this much about modality; now, we need to understand a little bit about mood. So, what is mood? Mood is grammatical coding of mortality in verb inflexions.

So, there are several ways of expressing modality in a sentence, one way is what we have seen examples of; I may go to Canada next year, I can play piano, may I tell you something or can I tell you something; these are examples of modalities through modal auxiliaries. The other way of expressing modality is when we put it in verb inflexions, that is, in actual verbs, these are separate from actual verbs. So, when we say I can play piano, "can" is the auxiliary and "play" is the verb.

But, when we put, embed some sort of modality within the verb itself, that is, that is indicative of a certain kind of mood and it is still not about tense. So, in totality, we can say, mood and modalities in English or for that matter in any language, is separate from how it works for tensed sentences. So, I am making this distinction. So, look at this one mood is imperative mood; help me with these issues, an imperative sentence.

When we, the reason why we take it as an example of mood and modality is it has no tense embedded in it, no tense involved in it, when we say help me with these issues, we are embedding imperative in the verb itself, there is no additional marker, we are just embedding it.

There is no apparent obvious marking of these things on the verb. But the fact that it is an imperative sentence, it involves modality in its structure itself.

May you live long; again we are using a modal verb here, but it is subjunctive or optative and we are using it through live and may together expressing a wish. So, imperative, subjunctives, optatives, these are examples of moods. So, we are leaving that aside for the time being and we will discuss modal, modality and modal auxiliary in particular.

Just to summarize the overall picture, we are talking about two things: moods and modality. Mood is all about modality embedded in verb. Modals, modal auxiliaries or modality is about something that we express that is capability, or necessity or possibility that we express through independent entity in a sentence that is called modals; however, they are connected. Let us look at examples to understand these details and so that you can use them confidently to make your own language impressive, effective and those things are going to help you do much better in expressing yourself in English.

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### Adverbs and Modality

- Non inflectional elements like adverbs.
- Perhaps
- In all possibility
- Hedges
  - I would think (that) ...
  - If I were you ...



So, let me add one more point here that there are so many, so we talked about modality in verb what we call mood, modality through auxiliaries, there are certain non-inflectional elements like adverbs also which add modal sense, modality in the sentence. So, we use certain adverbs like perhaps. So, when we say, perhaps nobody would come, nobody came. Perhaps nobody came.



By adding this adverb “perhaps”, we are converting the sentence into some possibility or some something additional, which relates to modality.

In all possibility, before we say a sentence, if you say, in all possibility, these guys do not know anything. Let us say two police officers are investigating somebody and they have a conversation among themselves. After they spoke with suspects, they are talking to each other in all possibilities these guys do not know much. An element like “in all possibility” just converts it into a modal.

We use hedges like I would think that everything is fine. So, everything is fine is a simple declarative sentence, but the moment we say I would like to think that everything is fine, we are adding cynicism, suspicion, possibility, ability, all kinds of things. So, the point here to conclude is, modality is expressed also within the verb; modality is expressed through certain additional nonfunctional, non-inflectional elements like adverbs and modality is also expressed through modal auxiliaries. So, let us look at them in little bit more details.

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### Modality

- Modality deals with semantic aspects of a sentence.
- Common among all modals is that they do not represent a situation as a fact.
- It deals with a range of semantic notions.
- It has following readings:
  - Possibility
  - Ability
  - Necessity
  - Certainty
  - Obligations
  - Willingness



So, it deals with semantic aspect of a sentence that is modality, common among all modals is that they do not represent a situation or a fact, they deal with a range of semantic notions like possibility, ability, necessity, certainty, obligation, willingness, etcetera., this is not an exhaustive list, this is just a few of them, you can add more to that.

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## Modals in English

1 Can	2 could
3 May	4 might
5 Must	
6 Shall	7 should
Will	would

Modal Aux - No TENSE  
 Tense Aux  
 Pres  
 Past  
 Fut - will/shall



So, when you check the list of modals or we can say, we can either say modals or we can say modal auxiliaries, we come up with these things; can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would and must. I want to spend a moment here for you to understand. You have seen several examples of sentences here on this one, where you see the use of can, would, may, must, should. When we say we should listen to others, I just want you to sit down with these sentences and think, what "should" actually indicates in this sentence, if you think about it, you will get answer. And where I need your attention here now, is some of, let us look at them one by one. Can and could they sound related, but I would like you to underline and understand that "could" is not the past form of "can", it is an independent auxiliary.

Now, something like "can" which denotes ability does not have to be converted into past tense. Therefore, the question of "could" being past form of "can" does not exist. I am oversimplifying this matter, but I want you to understand these things with clarity. Same way, "might" is not the past form of "may"; "should" is not the past form of "shall" and "would" is not the past form of "will".

In fact, one major distinction between modal auxiliaries and tensed auxiliary, is that tensed auxiliaries do indicate tense like present past or future, but modal auxiliaries do not indicate any tense. This is an important distinction between these, these sets and I will compare them with



you. So, I also want to underline the following with you, and I will come back to this part again “shall” and “will”.

There was a time we do not know when, when there was a distinction between “shall” and “will”. There were contexts in which we can use only “shall” and there were contexts in which you could use, we could use only “will”. Now, that context is merged, we can use the two interchangeably, point is we can use “shall” and “will” either way and “should” and “would” are not connected with them, they are modal verbs. So, “can” is an independent modal verb, “could” is an independent modal auxiliary.

So, 1 in on this slide, 2 3 4 5 6 and 7, there are 7 independent modal auxiliaries; and “shall” and “will” will be, they are future tense marker and therefore, they are tensed auxiliaries, they are not modal auxiliaries in actual sense. I add a footnote here, in lot of places you are going to see “shall” and “will” in the list of modals. There is a reason for that, and I am going to explain that reason to you. But let us underline the fact that these are tense auxiliaries and they are future tense markers.

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Tense in English

	SNG	PL
Prs	Is	are
Pst	Was	were
Fut	Shall/Will	

1st  
 am  
 X  
 X



Moving ahead, when we look at tense in English, we see we have; is, are, am, these are the tense marking auxiliaries. So, when we say tensing auxiliaries, we are actually saying tense that is auxiliaries that indicate tense, so “is”, this is present, this is past and this is future. So, let us see,

we have seen this thing, we are going to see this one more time, this is singular present, this is plural present and this is specific only for first person.

So, there is no question of singular or plural. Actually, this is first person singular because it does not come for first person plural. So, this is first person singular. Let us take it this way. In past tense, when we say we see no marking for first person, no additional marking for = first person, either we have singular “was” or plural “were”; all of them are coming in the same category, “shall” and “will”, we do not when we go to future tense.

So, look at this here we have singular, plural. But in first person, we have a special marker in present tense, for past tense, we have no special marker for present tense. But for “shall” and “will”, we do not even have a plural marking and no marking on first person. So, if we say, if I put first person here, like this, if I say first person here, then when we look at this category, we see that for past tense and future tense, there is no first person marking and for future, there is no plural marking either.

So, that is the, this is what the distribution of tense auxiliaries. But why “shall” and “will” is special? What is the difference between “shall” and “will”? And these two present and past, the distinction is the following; when we can use these are the forms that the reason why there is a that is, why some people count “will” and “shall” as modals is because they only count this much as different forms of verb “be”.

And they do not count them “these”, because you, we can say she is a doctor, they are doctors. We can say she was a doctor, they were doctors. But we cannot use “shall” or “will” in the same fashion with existential sentences in the sense of be. We cannot say she shall doctor, we have to say she will be a doctor, we have to say she will become a doctor. So, whenever we use “shall” and “will”, we need to use another verb; like I will read, I will play and therefore, “shall” and “will” are separate from is, are, am, was, were.

Because I can say I am, I can say I am, I can say, he is Rajesh Kumar, but we cannot say he shall Rajesh Kumar. For this distinction, we need, this distinction we need to make and therefore, some people put these two as modal auxiliaries; but actually the fact is, they are not modal auxiliaries either, because they indicate tense marker and modal auxiliaries do not indicate tense marking.

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More than two readings ...

• CAN

- Anyone can become a minister. [Possibility]
- Can I ask you a questions? [Permission]
- She can walk fast. [Ability]
- They can speak several languages.

\* to can  
\* to m.p



Now, I have talked enough about these things and we only need to look at examples to understand them, but let me add a couple of more things. So when we talk about examples, so look at that, all the time, modal auxiliaries will have more than one reading. Just for the sake of one example, let us say, let us look at this; anyone can become a minister.

Here, the modal auxiliary “can”, is indicating possibility. Can I ask you a question? Indicating permission. She can walk fast; it is talking about ability. They can speak several languages; this is also talking about ability. That is one thing that we see from these examples. The other thing that I want you to notice is, every time we use modal auxiliaries, we have to use another verb.

But keep in mind, the verb is never in any inflected form, verbs do not inflect for any tense along with modal auxiliary. There are certain situations where they do which I will introduce separately for you to see. But modal auxiliaries, modal auxiliaries, take verbs without inflection. Can I look at this here again “ask”, Can and walk; can and speak. It takes auxiliary, it takes the verb in its bare form.

And these are not even, these auxiliaries are not even verb by them; the reason why we call them modal auxiliaries because they are not verb by themselves, we cannot say “to can”, out of question, we cannot say “to may”, out of question or we cannot say, we cannot even add things like the following.

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## Tense Auxiliary and Modal Auxiliary

- No number and person distinction
- Does not mark tense
- Works separately for agreement, tense and negation
- Do not inflect or takes inflected verbs along
  - Do not have infinitive (like to go, to come) or -ing forms.

- \* To can
- \* Caning

Can coming  
Can come



So, I will discuss this with you. So, no number or person distinction can be made in modal auxiliaries. So, “can” will be used for singular, plural, both; masculine and feminine, all. They do not take tense, they take verbs in bare form and they do not involve with any kind of agreement, tense or negation. And they do not inflect or take inflected verbs along as you can see, we say, we like to go, the infinitive the verbs with the inflected forms we mean or infinitive we mean, to go is an infinitive to come as an infinitive.

So, we things like “coming” is not possible, “can coming” is not possible. The point we are making here is the moment we use the verb “can”, auxiliary “can”, we have to use the bare form of the verb, no “ing” and at the same time, these verbs cannot take “ing” form either or infinitive forms either.

So, these many things about the verbs, modal verbs like; can, could, may, might, would; we want to understand that these are modal auxiliaries, they are different from tense auxiliaries. They do not part in agreement; they are not tense markers. They may come with some other tense in some context, but they are not tense markers by themselves and they only add certain additional semantic intentionality of possibility, necessity and things like these.

And therefore, we need to understand, when we look at sentences like these in detail. So, at the end of this thing, I one more time asking you what I said in the beginning, please take a list of 20 to 40 sentences for yourself. Make sure that all those sentences have one of these modal

auxiliaries in them. Compare them with sentences which have tense auxiliaries. See, how tense auxiliaries work with tense and aspects and how modal auxiliaries work separately.

What the intentions underlying modal auxiliaries are and what the intentions underlying tense auxiliaries are, and that will give you clarity of looking into the structure of a sentence to understand them openly. These are, these nuances are again important for us to get a clearer sight through the sentences that we are learning.

By taking them head on, we are going to learn them with clarity; by brushing them aside, they are going to always hang on us. My recommendation is to take them up front, understand the distinctions, understand the nuances in a third wear fashion and get it done with it. With that, I thank you and look forward to an interaction with you on these topics. Thank you so much.

