

## Modals can, could, and should: meaning, form, and common errors

### Meaning

Use can to express ability or possibility.

Jerome can speak Korean.

I can be there before 8:00.

Use could to offer an alternative or to make a weak suggestion.

They could see an old movie like *Titanic*, or they could go to something new.

You could eat a healthier diet.

Use should to give advice, to make a strong suggestion, or to express criticism.

You should think before you speak.

### Form

Modals are followed by the base form of the main verb of the sentence, except in short answers to questions.

You can eat at a lot of good restaurants in this neighborhood.

Who should read this? They should.

Can you see the moon tonight? Yes, I can.

Use not between the modal and the base form.

You shouldn't stay at the Galaxy Hotel.

They can't take the express.

In yes / no questions, the modal precedes the subject of the sentence. In information questions, the question word precedes the modal.

#### Yes / no questions

Should I buy a round-trip ticket?

Can we make the 1:05 flight?

Could she take an express train?

#### Information questions

When should they leave?

Why should they go?

Which trains could I take?

Who could they call?

**BUT:** Note the word order when Who is the subject.

Who can give me the information?  
(The travel agent can.)

### Common errors

Never add -s to the third-person singular form of modals.

He should buy a ticket in advance. NOT ~~He shoulds buy~~ a ticket in advance.

Never use to between modals and the base form.

You could take the train or the bus. NOT ~~You could to take~~ the train or the bus.

Circle the correct phrases to complete the sentences.

- Who (should buy / should to buy) the tickets?
- Where (I can find / can I find) a hotel?
- You (could to walk / could walk) or (take / taking) the bus.
- (I should to call / Should I call) you when I arrive?
- We (can to not take / can't take) the bus; it left.
- When (should you giving / should you give) the agent your boarding pass?
- Which trains (can get / can getting) me there soon?

## UNIT 9 Lesson 2

### Expansion: future actions

There are four ways to express future actions, using present forms.

#### Be going to

**Be going to + base form** usually expresses a future plan or certain knowledge about the future.

I'm **going to spend** my summer in Africa. She's **going to get** a rental car when she arrives.  
It's **going to rain** tomorrow.

#### The present continuous

The present continuous can also express a future plan.

We're **traveling** tonight. They **aren't wearing** formal clothes to the wedding.  
I'm **not eating** at home tomorrow.

#### The simple present tense

The simple present tense sometimes expresses a future action with verbs of motion: **arrive, come, depart, fly, go, leave, sail, and start**—especially when on a schedule or a timetable. When the simple present tense expresses the future, there is almost always a word, phrase, or clause indicating the future time.

**This Monday**, the express **leaves** at noon. The flight **arrives at 9:00 tonight**.

#### The present of be

The present of **be** can describe a future event if it includes a word or phrase that indicates the future.

The wedding **is on Sunday**.

- A** Read the arrival and departure schedules. Then complete each sentence or question with the simple present tense.

TOMORROW'S BUS TO NEW YORK CITY	
DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL
8:00	11:00

THURSDAY'S FLIGHT TO GUATEMALA CITY	
DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL
23:30	01:30

THIS WEEKEND'S TRAIN TO BEIJING	
DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL
07:00	22:20

- The bus ..... at 11:00. It ..... at 8:00.
- A: When ..... the flight .....?  
B: It ..... at 23:30.
- A: What time ..... the train ..... in Beijing?  
B: At 10:20 P.M.
- A: ..... the train ..... at 7:00?  
B: Yes, it does.

- B** On a separate sheet of paper, answer each of the questions with a complete sentence. There may be more than one correct way to answer each question.

- What are your plans for your next vacation?
- What are you going to do this weekend?
- What are you doing this evening?