

Modals

Used to indicate modality, i.e., likelihood, permission, request etc.
Give more information about the function of the main verbs which follow them

1. May
2. Might
3. Can
4. Could
5. Will
6. Shall
7. Would
8. Should
9. Must

1. May

- Permission/ polite request/ formal

May I borrow your lecture notes? “Yes you may.”

- Weak possibility

I may go for an internship next summer.

2. Might

- Polite request

Might I borrow your lecture notes?

- Weak Possibility
- Might past of May

He might have called earlier but I was not at home.

3. Can

- Ability

Ali can fly a kite.

I can drive a car.

- Strong possibility/ negative

If you continue to smoke, you can get cancer.

- Suggestion

We can make popcorns and watch a movie tonight.

- Informal request/permission

Can I use your phone to take pictures tonight?

4. Could

- Past ability

Ali could fly a kite when he was five.

I could drive car when I was seventeen.

- Possibility

He could be at home since he is not at the party.

- Suggestion

You could move to a new apartment if your landlord is giving you trouble.

- Polite request

Could you please stop talking?

- 'Past' of can in indirect speech

He said he could take us to the beach.

He said he could drive a car.

5. Will

- 100% certainty about the future/ promise

I will cook dinner tonight.

- Willingness/determination

I will exercise in the evening even if I am tired.

- Polite request

Will you pick Ali up after school?

6. Shall

- Polite request to make a suggestion

Shall I turn on the fan?

Shall we leave now?

- Determination/ Willingness

I shall finish my assignment before I watch a movie tonight.

7. Would

- Polite request

Would you take me to the market with you?

- Asking for willingness

Would you like to go for a swim today?

Would you like to have breakfast at 10?

- Past habitual action

When I was a kid, I would cry every time my parents came to pick me up from my grandparents' house.

When I was a kid, I would cry when it was time for school.

- Preference

I would rather eat pizza than biryani.

- Past of will in indirect speech

He said he would pick Ali up from school.

8. Should

- Advice

You should study hard for your test tomorrow.

- Obligation/ more like a recommendation

You should respect your elders.

- Expectation

You should have taken better care of your belongings.

9. Must

- Necessity/ rules

You must not drink while driving.

- Assumption

She must be a good writer to have such a wide readership.

- Prohibition

You must not smoke, especially in front of young children.

Practice Questions

1. If you drive a car, you _____ (should, must, can) have a driving license.
2. You _____ (shouldn't, mustn't, don't have to) attend a call and drive.
3. When you are in a car, you _____ (should, must, may) wear a seatbelt.
4. When driving a car, you _____ (should, must, can) listen to the radio.
5. You _____ (should, must, have) stop at a red traffic light.
6. If you own a car, you _____ (should, must, can) have insurance.
7. You _____ (shouldn't, mustn't, don't have to) exceed the speed limit.
8. I have a doctor's appointment. _____ (can, shall, may) I leave in the middle of the class?
9. Even though there are no clouds, the forecast predicts that it _____ (could, can, might) rain tonight.
10. As a kid, I _____ (could, will, would) try climbing trees to see how high I could go.