



# Modal Verbs: Part I

## DE HOGESCHOOL MET HET NETWERK

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# It's all about NUANCE

- I **might** drop by tonight...
- I **may** drop by tonight...
- You **can** sit down now.
- You **may** sit down now.

# Modal Verbs

Two kinds of meaning:

1. Degree of certainty: used to say that a situation is certain, probable, possible or impossible
2. Degree of obligation, freedom to act: obligation, prohibition, permission, ability

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# Modal verbs: Part I (1TIN)

- Ability:

I **can** write programmes.

I **am able to** write programmes.

- Permission:

**May** I use your pen?

You **can** park here.

- Possibility:

We **might** meet him at the conference.

It **could** rain this afternoon.

# Modal verbs: Part I

- CS1 p175: connect to the right example

Ability: a

Possibility: c

Permission: b

# Ability

CS1 p175:

What is the difference between these sentences?



# Ability

PRESENT	PAST	FUTURE
I CAN	I COULD	I CAN
=	≠ !!!	=
I AM ABLE TO	I WAS ABLE TO	I WILL BE ABLE TO
<b>USE:</b> Talk about the present or 'general ability'  E.g. We <b>can</b> see the lake from our hotel room. (=more common)  Some people <b>are able to</b> walk on their hands.	<b>USE:</b> [next slides]	<b>USE:</b> Talk about the future or 'general ability'  E.g. I'll <b>be able to</b> speak good English within a few weeks. (=more common)  I haven't got time today, but I <b>can</b> see you tomorrow. (=deciding now about future)



# Note!

- 'be able to' ≠ be used in the passive!

The game can be played with two or more players.

\*NOT [...] ~~is able to be played~~



# Ability

CS1 p176 Ex 2: fill in the correct modal

1. Can
2. Could
3. Cannot / am not able to /won't be able



# Could vs. was able to (= past)

## PAST

## I COULD

### USE:

Talk about 'general ability', express a talent → 'I could do this at any time, whenever I wanted'

E.g. Mozart **could** play the piano at the age of five.

Used with verbs of the senses + verbs of 'mental activity' (=particular occasion in the past)

E.g. As soon as I walked into the room, I **could** smell gas.  
We were sitting at the back, so we **couldn't** hear very well.  
I **could** read between the lines and **could** understand very well what she was implying.

# Could vs. was able to (= past)

## PAST

### I WAS ABLE TO

#### USE:

Talk about 'particular ability' → 'I managed to', 'I succeeded in doing' on one occasion

E.g.

We didn't know where David was, but we **were able to** find him in the end.  
(=managed to)

\*NOT [...] ~~we could find him~~

After six hours' climbing, the team **was able to** reach the top of the mountain.  
(= succeeded in)

\*NOT [...] ~~the team could reach~~

# Compare...

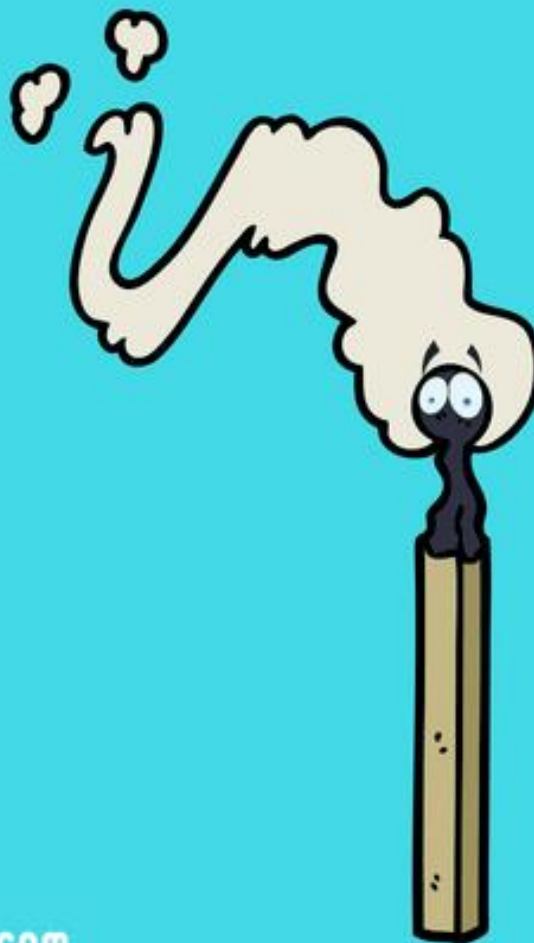
- Mike was an excellent tennis player when he was young. He could beat anybody.  
= general ability
- Mike and David played tennis yesterday. Pete played very well, but Mike was able to beat him.  
= he managed to in this particular game



# Couldn't = possible in all situations

'managed to'; one specific occasion

I was able to  
escape the fire,  
but I couldn't  
save the others



# Ability

CS1 p176 Ex 3: 'could' or 'was able to'

1. Could
2. Could
3. Was able to
4. Couldn't
5. Was able to
6. Were able to



# Ability

CS1 p176 Ex 4: 'could' or 'was able to'

1. Could
2. Was able to
3. Was able to
4. Could
5. Could





# Permission

CS1 p177:

What is the difference between these sentences?



# Permission

PRESENT	PAST	FUTURE
I CAN	I COULD	I CAN

**USE:** Ask and give permission (granted or refused by person asked); permission subject to external authority, e.g. the law

E.g. **Can** I have some more cake?

You **can't** smoke on the underground. (i.e. it's the law)

**Can** you park on the double yellow lines on Sundays?

I COULD	I COULD	I COULD
---------	---------	---------

**USE:** same as 'can', but more formal/more polite

E.g. **Could** I borrow your car?

I MAY	/	I MAY
-------	---	-------

**USE:** Ask and give permission (granted or refused by person asked); personal permission (more formal)

E.g. **May** I come in?

# Permission

PRESENT	PAST	FUTURE
AM ALLOWED	WAS ALLOWED TO	WILL BE ALLOWED TO

**USE:** Ask and give permission

E.g. You **aren't allowed to** park in front of this building

Self-driving cars **will** probably **be allowed to** drive in cities within the next decade.

# Was allowed to vs. Could

- General permission in the past → could

E.g. In the 1950s British children **could** leave school at the age of fourteen.

- Permission on a specific occasion in the past  
→ 'was allowed to'

E.g. I was allowed to leave early yesterday.

\*NOT ~~I could leave early...~~

# Exercise

- CS1 p177: Ex 5: Fill in the correct modal
  1. May/Can/Could
  2. Could
  3. Can/are allowed to/will be allowed



# Possibility



# Possibility

CS1 p178 Ex6: Fill in the correct modal

1. Can
2. Couldn't
3. Will be able to/can



# Possibility

CS1 p178:

What is the difference between these sentences?





# Possibility

CAN

COULD

BE ABLE TO

**USE:** general possibility; circumstances permit  
'Het is mogelijk omwille van de omstandigheden.'

E.g. Anybody who wants to **can** join the club.  
She **could** learn more quickly if she paid attention.  
What shall we do tomorrow? We **could** go to the cinema.  
(=sounds less definite)

COULD

MAY

MIGHT

**USE:** there is a chance that something is true  
'De kans bestaat. Het zou kunnen.'

E.g. Don't worry. The parcel **could** well be in the post.  
There **may** be life on Mars.  
You **might** be needed in the office on Saturday.



Level of certainty

# Mixed exercise

CS1 p179-180: Ex 8: translation: **mixed exercise!!**

1. She can drive well.
2. We won't be able to catch the bus.
3. It might snow tonight.
4. I may/could/might call you later. (speaker-dependent!)
5. Can I smoke/Am I allowed to smoke in the canteen?
6. They couldn't enter (general permission in past) /were not allowed to (one specific occasion in past) enter the disco.



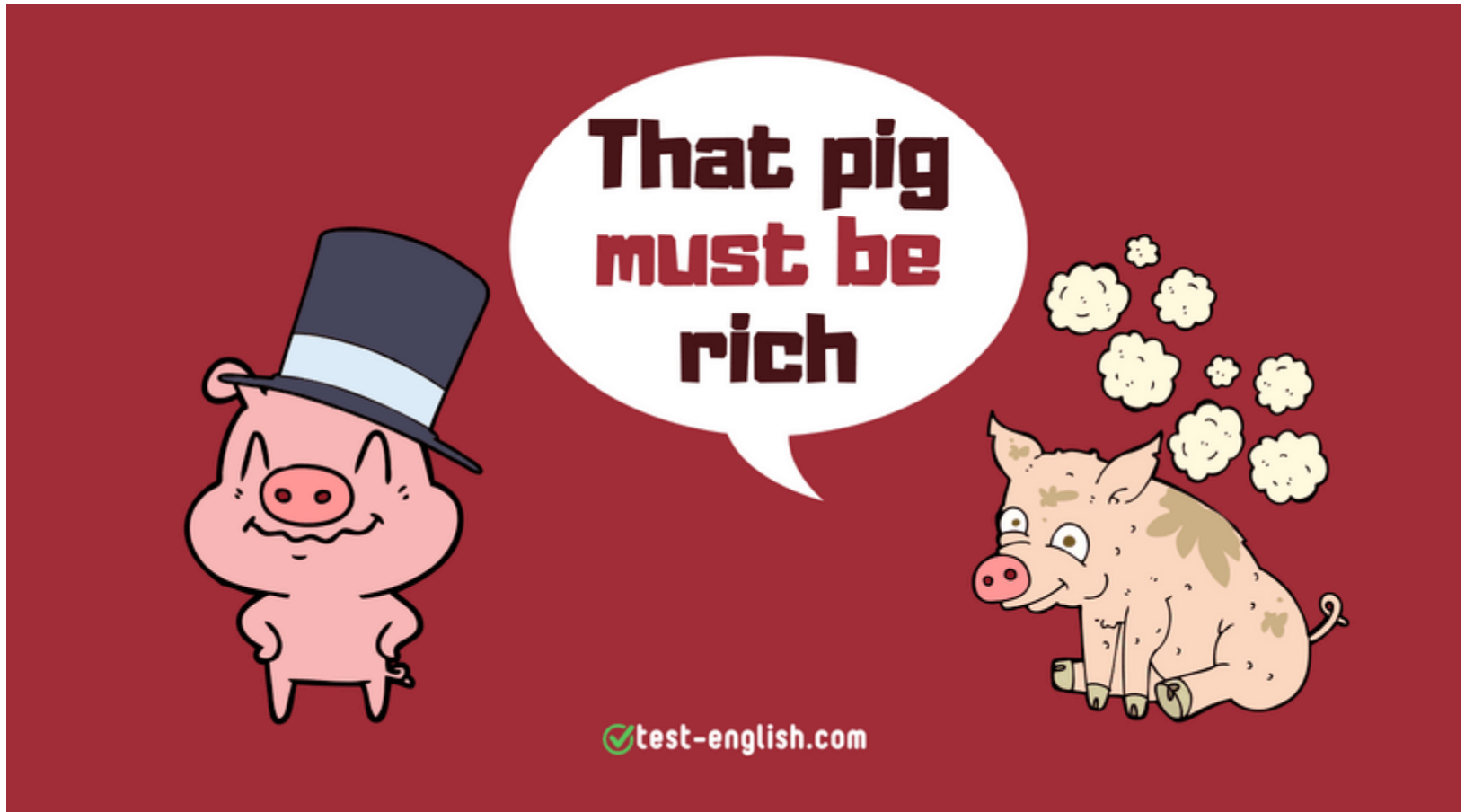
# Mixed exercise

CS1 p177-178: Ex 8: translation: **mixed exercise!!**

7. You cannot enter a mosque without taking your shoes off.
8. They were able to build a house in six months' time.
9. The driver may/might/could have been drunk.



# Deduction



# Deduction

= deduce based on evidence or on your experience

MUST (HAVE)

CAN'T (HAVE)

E.g. There's nobody home. They **must have** gone out.  
'I've lost one of my gloves.' 'You **must have** dropped it somewhere.'  
Tom walked into a wall. He **can't have** been paying attention.



# Deduction

- CS1 p180 ex 9: Fill in the correct modal
  1. Can't
  2. Must
  3. Can't
  4. Must have been
  5. Can't have escaped
  6. Must have started

