

MUST

The *speaker* thinks it is necessary.
Personal opinion.
Written rules/instructions.

HAVE TO

Another person thinks it is necessary.
External obligation.
Facts, not opinions.

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The teacher is giving the students an obligation / instructions.

TEACHER: You **must** complete the essay by Friday.

STUDENT: We **have to** complete the essay by Friday.

The teacher has given us the obligation / instructions.

We use *Had to* instead of *Must* in the past tense.

- I *had to* pay my speeding ticket yesterday.

Have to is more common than *Must* in questions.

- When do you *have to* finish the report?

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Uses of **Should**:

Advice or Suggestion

- Your hair is too long. You **should** get a haircut.

Situation likely in the present

- Mary **should** be at home now. Give her a call.

Likely in the future (prediction)

- They **should** win tonight, they're a better team.

Should + have + past participle

Meaning: The subject *did not* fulfill their obligation in the past or *did not* act responsibly.

- You **should have given** your boss the report yesterday when he asked for it.

Should + be + verb-ing

Meaning: The subject is *not* fulfilling their obligation now or is *not* acting sensibly.

- You **should be wearing** your seatbelt.
- We **should be studying** for the test right now.

SHOULD vs. OUGHT TO

Should can be replaced by **ought to** without a change in meaning.

- You **ought to** study more. =
- You **should** study more.

Note: **ought to** sounds more formal than **should** and is used less frequently.

We use **SHOULDN'T** to advise **not** to do something, usually because it is bad or wrong.

- You **shouldn't** throw your litter onto the street.
- He **shouldn't** play with those wires if he doesn't know what he is doing.
- You **shouldn't** work so much.

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May - Might

Uses of **May** and **Might**:

Possibility

- It **might** rain later so take an umbrella.
- I **may** watch a movie tonight.

Give permission (Only MAY)

- You **may** have another cookie if you like.
- You **may** open the window if you want.

Ask for permission

- **May** I borrow your pen please?
- **May** I have some water please?

Express wishes (Only MAY)

- **May** you both live a long and happy life.
- **May** the New Year bring you happiness.

Happens in certain situations

- These tablets **may** produce side effects.
- Kids **may** be scared by these images.

Speculate about past actions

- She is late. She **may** have missed her plane.
- Your comment **may** have offended people.

May or Might?

May and **Might** can normally be interchanged without a significant difference in meaning. However, **Might** often implies a smaller chance of something happening (when expressing possibility).

- It **may** rain. (70% chance)
- It **might** rain. (40% chance)

When expressing wishes or giving permission, only **May** is used.

May not can be used to NOT give permission or to PROHIBIT someone from doing something.

- You **may not** take photos inside the museum.

Can

Could

General ability (present)

- I **can** speak English.

Ask for permission (informal)

- Can I borrow your pen please?

To request something

- Can you help me please?

Possibility

- It **can** get very cold there at night.

Offer to help someone

- Can I carry your bags for you?

Cannot (can't) = not allowed

- You **cannot** smoke in this room.
- You **can't** go to the party.

General ability in the past

- I **could** play the piano when I was younger.

Ask for permission (more polite)

- **Could** I use your bathroom please?

To request something (more polite)

- **Could** you pass me the salt please?

Possibility in the past could + have + past participle

- What? You **could** have broken your leg.

Suggestion (when asked what to do)

- We **could** go to the movies if you like.

Conditional of Can (would be able to)

- If we had some oranges I **could** make you some fresh juice. (= would be able to)