

# Modal verbs and adverbs

## Teach

### Modal verbs and adverbs: PowerPoint slides 2-3

Modality is the expression of how definite we are about things - or the probability that they will occur. Modal vocabulary expresses the range of these probabilities.

- It can help us to express opinion.  
In the following sentences, we are clearly aware of the writer's judgement on the certainty of the weather because the writer has used modal verbs:  
*It will rain tomorrow. It might rain tomorrow. It will not rain tomorrow.*
- It can help us to indicate priorities.  
In the following sentences, we can see how likely the writer is to do something through the use of modal verbs:  
*We must go to the castle. We should go to the castle. We could go to the castle.*
- Modality can be strengthened by the use of modal adverbs, which either increase or decrease the level of certainty.  
*It will definitely rain tomorrow. It might possibly rain tomorrow. It will certainly not rain tomorrow.*
- Modal nouns and modal adjectives can also be used to articulate degrees of possibility.

Note that modal nouns and modal adjectives are not statutory terms for students to learn.

| Word class       | Examples  |
|------------------|---|
| Modal verbs      | will, shall, can, may, must, would, should, could, might<br>ought (all the above stems with the addition of 'not')          |
| Modal adverbs    | rarely, occasionally, possibly, probably, certainly, definitely, unquestionably,<br>absolutely, perhaps, maybe, undoubtedly |
| Modal nouns      | chance, likelihood, possibility, probability, necessity, certainty  |
| Modal adjectives | potential, possible, certain, definite, probable, likely, unlikely, sure  |

## How certain?: PowerPoint slides 4-5

As stated above, one of the purposes of modality in writing is to express degrees of confidence or certainty that events may happen, or that advice should be taken.

Students therefore need to be able to rank the modal verbs and adverbs according to their level of certainty.

| Degree of certainty | Modal verbs               | Modal adverbs                      | Construct prompts   |
|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Strong              | will, shall, must         | certainly, undoubtedly, definitely | You will do ...<br>You must do ...<br>... is definitely ...                 |
| Moderate            | should, would, can, ought | probably, generally, usually       | I probably will ...<br>Usually in these instances, ...<br>You should do ... |
| Hesitant            | might, may, could         | occasionally, possibly             | Occasionally I could ...<br>It might be the case that ...                   |

## Sentence construction: PowerPoint slides 6-8

Note that the term 'auxiliary' is used in the teaching notes, but is not shared with students, as it is not a statutory term for students.

Modal verbs are placed after the subject in a sentence. They are placed first in a verb phrase and are followed by the main verb, or an auxiliary verb with a main verb ('be', 'have').

For example:

*The budgie might want some seed.*

We can see the modal verb 'might' comes after the subject of the sentence, 'budgie', and is followed by the main verb 'want'.

And in the sentence:

*The thief should be taken to prison.*

We can see the modal verb *should* come after the subject 'the thief', and is followed by an auxiliary verb 'be' and a main verb 'taken'.

It is important to note that the modal verb does not change whether the subject is singular or plural - and whether the tense is past, present or future. The change of tense is marked by the change in the main verb - or the auxiliary form attached to it.

### Modal questions: PowerPoint slide 9

When modal verbs are used in questions, the subject and the verb change places. Usually, the modal verb is used to start the question. See the table below for some examples.

| Statement                                 | Question                                  |
|---|---|
| We <b>should</b> go to the zoo today.     | <b>Should</b> we go to the zoo today?     |
| It <b>might</b> snow today.               | <b>Might</b> it snow today?               |
| You <b>could</b> pass me the salt.        | <b>Could</b> you pass me the salt?        |
| The twins <b>would</b> like fish for tea. | <b>Would</b> the twins like fish for tea? |

### Negative modal verb forms: PowerPoint slide 10

Most of the forms of negation are regular when using modal verbs - but note the irregularities below (e.g. 'shan't').

| Positive | Formal     | Spoken contraction |
|----------|------------|--------------------|
| will     | will not   | won't              |
| must     | must not   | mustn't            |
| shall    | shall not  | shan't             |
| may      | may not    | mayn't (archaic)   |
| should   | should not | shouldn't          |
| might    | might not  | mightn't           |
| ought    | ought not  | oughtn't           |
| could    | could not  | couldn't           |
| can      | cannot     | can't              |

## Practise

### Identifying modal verbs and adverbs: PowerPoint slides 7-8

Regular practice in identifying modal verbs and adverbs can be supported by a range of different techniques, including:

- underlining modal verbs and modal adverbs
- underlining the part of the sentence that includes the modal and the main verb
- using a table to record examples that students find in a text
- giving the modal verbs which students find a score (1-5) for the strength of the modal verb (from uncertain to certain)
- analysing the frequency of the modal verbs and what it suggests about the writer's intentions
- copying out the modal verbs and adverbs in different colours.

Political speeches work well for this exercise; you could provide extracts from speeches such as Winston Churchill's 'We shall fight on the beaches' or Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream'. Students could also identify modality in their own choice of text(s).

### Adding modal verbs to a sentence: PowerPoint slide 6

Give students sentences to add in relevant modal verbs, depending on their view or probability. Here are some example sentences you could use.

1. I \_\_\_\_\_ go to the moon when I am older.
2. I \_\_\_\_\_ clean my teeth twice a day.
3. I \_\_\_\_\_ go to Antarctica someday.
4. I \_\_\_\_\_ live till I am 100 years old.
5. I \_\_\_\_\_ play in a rock band.
6. I \_\_\_\_\_ become an author of a famous novel.

As an extra challenge, ask students to create their own statements and add modal verbs to qualify their degrees of certainty.

### Strengthening or weakening – [Resource 1](#) / PowerPoint slides 7-8

Develop and practise the use of modal verbs and adverbs to illustrate likelihood in response to question prompts using the questions on the sheet. To support this exercise, there is a word bank at the bottom of the sheet. To challenge your students further, ask them to create their own questions and possible answers, using modal verbs and adverbs.

### School rules – [Resource 2](#)

Many moral codes use modal verbs and adverbs to communicate rules which need to be followed (e.g. the Ten Commandments). School rules in Victorian times give a good model for students to analyse the use of modal verbs (the examples of modal verbs in the text are highlighted in the resource answer sheet). Ask students to then create their own modern versions (serious or humorous!). The text on the worksheet is from the [Bedfordshire Archives](#), and is printed with kind permission.

### Be the detective – [Resource 3](#)

This resource encourages students to gauge the certainty of a series of statements, based on the evidence in a crime report. Ask students to analyse the crime report to help the detective investigate the crime.

Please note that answers are not given for this activity, as the certainty of modal verbs is, to an extent, subjective. As a plenary activity, ask students to explain their categorisation of the statements to assess their understanding.

As an extension, students can then write out an extra set of statements based on the evidence, and give their new table to a partner to complete.

To download this PowerPoint, go to one of the following pages:



Teachit **English** members:

[www.teachit.co.uk/challenging-grammar-powerpoints](http://www.teachit.co.uk/challenging-grammar-powerpoints)

Teachit **Primary** members:

[www.teachitprimary.co.uk/challenging-grammar-powerpoints](http://www.teachitprimary.co.uk/challenging-grammar-powerpoints)

## Modal verbs and adverbs

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## Modal verbs

Modal verbs help us to say how likely something is to happen.

*'I **might** go bowling on Saturday'* shows that the speaker is uncertain

whereas:

*'I **will** go bowling on Saturday'* shows that the speaker is more definite.

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## Using modal verbs

Modal adverbs can be used to emphasise how certain or uncertain we are.

- I might go bowling this Saturday.  
*I might **possibly** go bowling on Saturday.*
- I will go bowling this Saturday.  
*I will **definitely** go bowling on Saturday.*

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## How certain?

Where would you place the modal verbs and adverbs on a 'certainty' line?

Low certainty ————— High certainty

|                  |          |                |                 |
|------------------|----------|----------------|-----------------|
| definitely (adv) | will (v) | possibly (adv) | certainly (adv) |
| must (v)         | may (v)  | could (v)      | probably (adv)  |

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## How certain? Answers

You might find that your answers are in slightly different places on the scale, rather than being grouped together.

Low certainty ————— High certainty

|                |                |                  |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| possibly (adv) | probably (adv) | certainly (adv)  |
| could (v)      |                | definitely (adv) |
| may (v)        |                | will (v)         |
|                |                | must (v)         |

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## Sentence construction

Modal verbs are placed after the subject in a sentence. They are placed first in a verb phrase and then followed by the main verb.

For example:

- The budgie might want some seed.

subject      modal verb      main verb

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## Modal verbs and adverbs in sentences

Identify the modal verbs and adverbs in the following sentences.

- My brother will come to dinner tomorrow.
- The house could do with redecorating.
- John should get a job.
- It will be difficult for me to be there.
- It will rain occasionally tomorrow.
- I definitely know the answer.
- Tim will probably be late.
- The train will possibly be on time.



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## Modal verbs and adverbs in sentences. Answers

- My brother will come to dinner tomorrow.
- The house could do with redecorating.
- John should get a job.
- It will be difficult for me to be there.
- It will rain occasionally tomorrow.
- I definitely know the answer.
- Tim will probably be late.
- The train will possibly be on time.



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## Modal questions

When we use modal verbs in a question, the verb usually begins the sentence.

- Should we go to the zoo?
- Might it snow today?
- Could you pass me the salt?
- Would the twins like fish for tea?



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## Negative modal verb forms

| Positive | Formal     | Spoken contraction |
|----------|------------|--------------------|
| will     | will not   | won't              |
| must     | must not   | mustn't            |
| shall    | shall not  | shan't             |
| may      | may not    | mayn't (archaic)   |
| should   | should not | shouldn't          |
| might    | might not  | mightn't           |
| ought    | ought not  | oughtn't           |
| could    | could not  | couldn't           |
| can      | cannot     | can't              |

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## Strengthening and weakening

Complete the table with answers to the questions in the first column, adding modal verbs or adverbs to make the level of certainty clear. The first one has been done for you.

| Question                              | Answer using more certain modal verbs or adverbs | Answer using less certain modal verbs or adverbs |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Will you come to my party?            | I <i>will definitely</i> come to your party.     | I <i>could perhaps</i> come to your party.       |
| Will the sun shine tomorrow?          |  |  |
| Should we go to this restaurant?      |  |  |
| Will I get a pay rise this year?      |  |  |
| Can I have a pet dog?                 |  |  |
| Is he the criminal?                   |  |  |
| Was life hard for Victorian children? |  |  |
| Do we have to go to school today?     |  |  |

Here are some words you could choose from. Make sure you choose carefully!

Modal verbs:

will, shall, can, may, must, would, should, could, might, ought

Modal adverbs:

rarely, occasionally, possibly, probably, certainly, definitely, unquestionably, undoubtedly, absolutely, perhaps, maybe





## Strengthening and weakening

### Teacher answer sheet

Here are some suggested answers; there are additional possibilities to those given.

| Question                              | Answer using more certain modal verbs or adverbs     | Answer using less certain modal verbs or adverbs |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Will you come to my party?            | I will definitely come to your party.                | I can perhaps come to your party.                |
| Will the sun shine tomorrow?          | The sun will certainly shine tomorrow.               | The sun will probably shine tomorrow.            |
| Should we go to this restaurant?      | We should undoubtedly go to this restaurant.         | Maybe we should go to this restaurant.           |
| Will I get a pay rise this year?      | You will absolutely get a pay rise this year.        | Perhaps you will get a pay rise this year.       |
| Can I have a pet dog?                 | You can most certainly have a pet dog.               | You could probably have a pet dog.               |
| Is he the criminal?                   | He is definitely the criminal.                       | He might possibly be the criminal.               |
| Was life hard for Victorian children? | Life was unquestionably hard for Victorian children. | Life could be hard for Victorian children.       |
| Do we have to go to school today?     | You must go to school today.                         | You could perhaps go to school today.            |



## School rules

### Task one

Read the example of a set of Victorian school rules, and highlight or underline all the modal verbs in the text.

Northill National School in Bedfordshire was created in 1855. Logbooks from 1863 included the following school rules:



### Northill School Rules

I. The School is open to all Inhabitants of the Parish at the following rates of payment, -

1. Labourers 2d. per week for one child, 1d. for all after.
2. Farmers or tradesmen 6d. per week for one child, 4d. for all after.

**N.B.** Special agreement may be made with Parents when any peculiar circumstances seem to require it.

All payments to be made in advance, either on the Monday in each week for that week, or on the first Monday in each quarter for the quarter.

II. All scholars to be in attendance punctually at nine and two o'clock each day except Saturday. Notice must be sent to the Master of absence on account of illness, and leave must be asked in case of unavoidable absence from any other cause.

Prizes will be given at the end of the year for regular attendance and good conduct.

III. A Clothing Club will be provided for the scholars. Any scholar paying a weekly sum into the club will (before Christmas each year) receive a ticket for clothing to the amount of such deposit, together with such addition as the funds will allow.

IV. Scholars must purchase copy-books and other articles necessary for home lessons, which are supplied at the School at a low rate of charge.

### Task two

Have a go at writing your own set of real or fictional school or classroom rules, with optional humour!

## School rules

### Teacher answer sheet

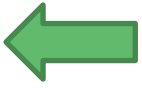
#### Task one

Read the example of a set of Victorian school rules, and highlight or underline all the modal verbs in the text.

Northill National School in Bedfordshire was created in 1855. Logbooks from 1863 included the following school rules:

#### Northill School Rules

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| I.   | <p>The School is open to all Inhabitants of the Parish at the following rates of payment, -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Labourers 2d. per week for one child, 1d. for all after.</li><li>2. Farmers or tradesmen 6d. per week for one child, 4d. for all after.</li></ol> <p>N.B. Special agreement <b>may</b> be made with Parents when any peculiar circumstances seem to require it.</p> <p>All payments to be made in advance, either on the Monday in each week for that week, or on the first Monday in each quarter for the quarter.</p> |
| II.  | <p>All scholars to be in attendance punctually at nine and two o'clock each day except Saturday. Notice <b>must</b> be sent to the Master of absence on account of illness, and leave <b>must</b> be asked in case of unavoidable absence from any other cause.</p> <p>Prizes <b>will</b> be given at the end of the year for regular attendance and good conduct.</p>   |
| III. | <p>A Clothing Club <b>will</b> be provided for the scholars. Any scholar paying a weekly sum into the club <b>will</b> (before Christmas each year) receive a ticket for clothing to the amount of such deposit, together with such addition as the funds <b>will</b> allow.</p>   |
| IV.  | <p>Scholars <b>must</b> purchase copy-books and other articles necessary for home lessons, which are supplied at the School at a low rate of charge.</p>   |



## Be the detective

### Task one

Read the crime report below. Put a tick in the table to show how true you think the statements are, based on the evidence in the report.

#### Crime Report: 18th January 2016.

*The victim was a doctor, born on 04.05.89. The body was discovered in a flat on the High Street, London SW7, at 15:00 on 17.01.16. The body was on the floor of the kitchen, face down. Bruising was found around the neck, and a knotted silk scarf was still hanging down the back. The victim was wearing a gold band on the third finger of the left hand.*

*One shoe was found in the doorway between the kitchen and the lounge. In the lounge, the cushions on the sofa were disturbed. There were two wine glasses on the kitchen table: one empty and one half-filled. On closer investigation, the empty glass had lipstick around the rim. The TV was still turned on.*

*In the hallway, a letter was found addressed to Dr Maddison. The contents read simply:*

*'I can't go on like this.' The letter was postmarked 'Battersea, SW11' and dated 11.01.16.*

*The detectives are looking for a white male, aged between 24 and 35, as their chief suspect.*



| Statement   | Can't be true | Might be true | Must be true |
|---|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| The crime took place at 37a, The High Street, SW7.                |               |               |              |
| The victim was a man.   |               |               |              |
| It is likely that the victim was married.                         |               |               |              |
| The victim was strangled.   |               |               |              |
| The murder weapon was a knotted scarf.                            |               |               |              |
| The struggle began in the lounge.                                 |               |               |              |
| The murderer knew the victim.                                     |               |               |              |
| The victim was watching television while the crime was committed. |               |               |              |
| The murderer was a woman.   |               |               |              |
| Either the murderer or the victim had been wearing lipstick.      |               |               |              |
| The murderer lived in Battersea.                                  |               |               |              |
| The victim's surname was Maddison.                                |               |               |              |

### Task two

Now have a go at writing your own table of five more statements based on the information in the crime report. Swap your table with a partner, and complete each other's tables.

## Apply: Text types

### Advice writing

Writing an agony aunt letter to a character in a class reader would be a perfect opportunity to use modal verbs and adverbs in writing. Alternatively, you could look at a dilemma in a narrative, or simply some moral dilemmas, and ask students to write their suggested advice.

### Report writing

You could look at weather maps with your students and create weather reports - for your local area or other appropriate geographical locations.

### Persuasive writing

When presenting information in an objective way, in persuasive writing for instance, it is useful to employ modal verbs and adverbs to add formality. You could set your students a persuasive writing task and set a minimum use of modal verbs or adverbs. Some suggested writing tasks: for or against longer school days/holidays, for or against school uniform, for or against a local issue.

To support your less able students, you could provide a list of suitable phrases using more hesitant modal verbs and adverbs such as:

*'It could be argued that ...'*

*'It would seem likely that ...'*

*'It could be concluded ...'*

The skill of presenting a balanced argument is the cornerstone for effective essay writing, and modal verb forms can be very useful for this purpose.

Please note that you will also find this activity later in the teaching pack when learning how to use and identify passive verb forms.

Poetry

Students could use modal verb constructs to create emotive poetry, since modal verbs are useful for expressing and exploring personal feelings. You could use W. B. Yeats' 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' or the following poem by Emily Dickinson as a starting point:

Part One: Life

VI IF I can stop one heart from breaking,  
I shall not live in vain;  
If I can ease one life the aching,  
Or cool one pain,  
Or help one fainting robin  
Unto his nest again,  
I shall not live in vain.

Your students might benefit from some suggested topics for their poems: their perfect friend, their dream house, their dream holiday, their perfect day, or how they would heal the world.

As an alternative, the topic of 'resolutions' would work well using 'If ...' statements to explore what they would do if they could be rich, taller, smarter, could win the lottery, or rule the world. You could give your students a writing frame such as the one below.

If I could be (a) .....  
I would .....  
I should .....  
I could .....  
I ought to .....  
I might .....  
If I only could be (a) .....

## Apply: Paper 1 style exam questions

1. Circle the sentence that shows the use of a **modal verb**.

The thief was found guilty.      The thief might be found guilty.

2. Underline the **modal verb** in the following sentences.

You should get a haircut.

The book might be a hundred years old.

3. Add a **modal verb** to complete the following sentences.

The referee ..... award a penalty.

Fox hunting ..... be banned.

4. Tick one box in each row to show how the **modal verb** affects the **meaning** of the sentence.

| Sentence   | Modal verb indicates <b>certainty</b> | Modal verb indicates <b>possibility</b> |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| It will not snow tomorrow.                                   |                                       |   |
| I might have finished all of my homework before the weekend. |                                       |   |
| Jack can play three musical instruments.                     |                                       |   |
| You could wash up after dinner.                              |                                       |   |

5. Rewrite these words to create a modal sentence.

would ice-cream to eat like the I

.....

6. Which two sentences use a **modal verb** or **adverb**?

I am definitely feeling unwell today.

My present arrives tomorrow.

Who could have hidden the treasure?

It is not up to you.

Tick **two**

☐
☐
☐
☐



## Apply: Paper 1 style exam answers

1. Circle the sentence that shows the use of a **modal verb**.

The thief was found guilty.      The thief might be found guilty.

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You should get a haircut.

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3. Add a **modal verb** to complete the following sentences.

The referee ..... award a penalty.

Fox hunting ..... be banned.

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| Sentence   | Modal verb indicates <b>certainty</b> | Modal verb indicates <b>possibility</b> |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| It will not snow tomorrow.                                   | ✓                                     |   |
| I might have finished all of my homework before the weekend. |                                       | ✓                                       |
| Jack can play three musical instruments.                     | ✓                                     |   |
| You could wash up after dinner.                              |                                       | ✓                                       |

5. Rewrite these words to create a **modal sentence**.

would   ice-cream   to eat   like   the   I

*I would like to eat the ice-cream.*

6. Which two sentences use a **modal verb** or **adverb**?

I am definitely feeling unwell today.

My present arrives tomorrow.

Who could have hidden the treasure?

It is not up to you.

Tick two

