

# Modal auxiliaries

## 33 Modal auxiliaries: introduction

Modal auxiliaries are also sometimes called modal verbs or modals.  
The following are modal auxiliaries:

<i>Present</i>	<i>Past form</i>
can	could
may	might
will	would
shall	should
must	—
ought to	—
need	—

### FORM

- Positive: subject + modal + bare infinitive:  
*I **must** see you tomorrow.*  
*We **must** go now.*
- Negative: subject + modal + **not/n't** + bare infinitive:  
*You **shouldn't** go to bed so late.*  
*They **needn't** come if they don't want to.*
- Question: modal + subject + bare infinitive:  
***Can** you help me?*  
***Will** she be here soon?*
- Short answers: subject + modal auxiliary:  
*Yes, we **can**. No, they **won't**.*
- Modal auxiliaries always stay the same.  
They cannot be:
  - put into different tenses.
  - used as infinitives.
  - used as gerunds or present participles.
- They can be followed by the infinitive in different forms:

	<i>Active</i>	<i>Passive</i>
modal +	<i>bare infinitive:</i> must <b>take</b>	<i><b>be</b> + past participle:</i> must <b>be taken</b>
	<i><b>be</b> + present participle:</i> must <b>be taking</b>	
	<i><b>have</b> + past participle:</i> must <b>have taken</b>	<i><b>have been</b> + past participle:</i> must <b>have been taken</b>
	<i><b>have been</b> + present participle:</i> must <b>have been taking</b>	

## Notes

- **need** can be a modal auxiliary only in the question or negative form.
- **ought** is the only modal auxiliary followed by **to**.
- **dare** can be used as a modal auxiliary in the question and negative forms. It can also be used as a main verb followed by the **to**-infinitive.  
It is not a common modal auxiliary and is not therefore included in the practice exercises.

## Practice

**33** Rewrite the following sentences using a modal. The underlined words can be written as subject + modal + verb (or modal + subject + verb in questions). In some sentences, more than one modal is possible.

- 1 I promise to phone you next week.  
*I will/I'll phone you next week.*
- 2 At the age of nine, he still didn't know how to read.  
*At the age of nine, he still couldn't read.*
- 3 It's essential that we leave on time tomorrow morning.  
.....  
.....
- 4 Are you able to come with me tonight?  
.....
- 5 It's not a good idea for you to work so hard.  
.....
- 6 It's possible that they'll be here soon.  
.....
- 7 Why don't we go and see a film tonight?  
.....
- 8 He said that he intended to write to me soon.  
.....



- 9 Is it possible for me to sit here?  
.....

10 He refuses to give me an answer.

.....

11 It's not necessary for you to apologize.

.....

12 Am I allowed to smoke in here?

.....

13 He knew how to speak four languages by the time he was twelve.

.....

.....

14 I want to help you but I'm not able to.

.....

15 I think it's a good idea for me to stay in tonight: I've got a lot of work to do.

.....

.....

16 I don't know who she is but it's possible that she's Rick's sister.

.....

.....

17 Do not tell him any of this: it's vital that it remains a secret

.....

.....

18 I intend to finish this essay before I go to bed.

.....

.....

19 It's 7 o'clock. I assume that Clare will be here soon.

.....

.....

20 He's in but he's not answering the phone. I'm sure that he's asleep.

.....

.....

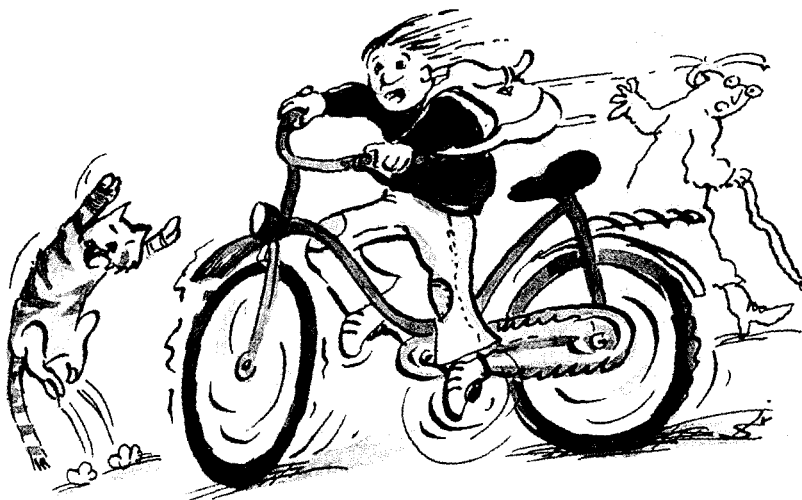
## 34 Ability: *can*, *could*, *be able*

- **Can** (present or future) and **could** (past) refer to a general ability to do something. **Can** is also used to refer to an ability to do something specific at a time in the future:  
*She **can** sing really well.*  
*I **can** come and see you next week.*  
*I **can't** swim so I won't come to the pool with you.*  
*He **could** read when he was four.*  
*I **couldn't** understand the language when I first came here.*
- **Can** and **could** refer to the ability to do something, but not to the doing of it. We use **can** or **be able** to talk about ability:  
*Will you **be able** to/**Can** you come on Saturday?*  
*My parents live quite a distance away so we're **not able** to/**can't** see them very often.*  
*He had a motorbike accident at the age of eighteen and after that he **wasn't able** to/**couldn't** walk.*  
  
We use **be able** to talk about ability + achievement of the action:  
*Jan gave me a lift home so I **was able** to stay at the party till late.*  
*We got lost but we **were able** to find our way home again with the map.*
- We use **will be able** and not **can** to talk about skills that will be acquired in the future:  
*I'll **be able** to drive by next summer so we can hire a car.*  
***Will** you **be able** to read textbooks in German when you've finished this course?*
- We use **can** + **be** + adjective or noun to talk about possibility:  
*The sea **can be** quite warm in September./The sea is sometimes quite warm in September.*  
*She **can be** very charming when she wants to be.*
- We use **be able** for different grammatical forms that are not possible with **can**:  
*I like **being able** to work at home.*  
*We'd like **to be able** to help you but we can't.*  
*I've **been able** to work much faster since I got that new computer.*
- We use **can**, **could** and **could have** in conditional sentences. We also use them in sentences with an implied condition:  
*I **can** help you if you want me to.*  
*I **could** do it if I had the time.*  
*You **could** do that job easily. (if you had that job)*  
*I **couldn't have** done it if I hadn't had your help.*  
*I **could have** got here earlier but I didn't know you were waiting. (I could have got here earlier if I had known you were waiting.)*

## Practice

- 34** Complete the sentences with the correct form of **can**, **could** or **be able**. If it is possible to use **can/could** or **be able**, use **can/could**.
- 1 He is very fit for his age. He *can run*. (run) really fast.
  - 2 I'd like *to be able to work*. (work) with you one day.
  - 3 He ..... (not climb) up to the top: he was too scared.
  - 4 If they hadn't phoned for an ambulance, he .....  
..... (die).
  - 5 I love ..... (spend) all morning in bed at the weekends.
  - 6 We ..... (go) to that concert tomorrow if the tickets haven't sold out.
  - 7 I think you should go in the spring: it .....  
(be) very crowded there in the summer.
  - 8 I ..... (not understand) what he says: he speaks too quickly.
  - 9 Do you know where Nick's glasses are? He .....  
..... (not see) very much without them.
  - 10 ..... (speak) another language fluently is a great advantage when you're looking for a job.
  - 11 Jonathan ..... (not say) anything until he was about three years old.
  - 12 We ..... (not phone her up) because her phone had broken, but fortunately we .....  
..... (get) a message to her.
  - 13 Amy's exam results weren't very good. She .....  
..... (do) better.
  - 14 I ..... (not sleep) very well for the last four nights. It's been too hot.
  - 15 She tried to think of other things but she .....  
..... (not put) that awful memory out of her mind.
  - 16 You should ..... (go out) when you want to.

- 17 ..... (you come) to the party on Saturday?



- 18 I ..... (ride) this bike soon: I just need more time to practise.
- 19 He doesn't do very much when he's here. He ..... (be) more helpful.
- 20 I ..... (play) tennis really well a few years ago, but not anymore.

### 35 Certainty, possibility, deduction: **can, could, may, might, must, will, should, ought to**

- To talk about something that it is possible to do at any time, use **can** or **may**. With this use, **can** and **may** are often followed by the passive infinitive:  
*Suitcases **can/may be left** in the left luggage office at the station.*  
*Stamps **can/may be bought** at most shops which sell cards.*
- To talk about a future possibility, use **may** or **might**. We can also use **could**; **could** refers to a theoretical possibility:  
*The parcel **may/might arrive** tomorrow.*  
*I **may/might see** you next week.*  
*You **could go** by train. (It is possible to take a train there if you wanted to do that.)*
- To talk about a present or future certainty, use **will** + simple or continuous infinitive:  
*You can phone Sally: she **'ll be** at home now.*  
*I **'ll be** there by 9 o'clock.*  
*The meeting **will start** at 7.30.*  
*We should go now: they **'ll be waiting** for us.*  
*I **'ll be standing** on the platform when you arrive.*

- To talk about the possibility in the present, use **may**, **might** or **could** + simple infinitive (usually the verb **to be**) or continuous infinitive:  
*'Where's Tony?' 'I don't know. He **may be** outside.'*  
*'Whose is this?' 'It **could be** Emma's.'*  
*Alison's not in the office today so she **may be working** at home.*  
*I won't phone Jennifer now because she **might be having** a rest.*
- To talk about possibility in the past, use **may**, **might** or **could** + perfect infinitive (simple or continuous):  
*It's 8.30 so she **may have left** by now.*  
*I don't know why they're so late. I suppose they **could have got** lost.*  
*Sue wasn't at the party last night. She **might have been feeling** too tired to come.*
- To make a deduction about something in the present, use **must** (positive deduction) or **can't** (negative deduction) + simple infinitive (usually the verb **to be**) or continuous infinitive:  
*Jane's not at home so she **must be** on her way here.*  
*The office is closed now so he **can't be** there.*  
*Barbara's back at work now so she **must be feeling** better.*  
*He **can't be driving** here: he hasn't got a car.*
- To make a deduction about something in the past, use **must** or **can't** (or **couldn't**) + perfect infinitive (simple or continuous):  
*It's very wet outside so it **must have rained** in the night.*  
*He **can't have forgotten** about the meeting: he talked to me about it only this morning.*  
*You **must have been talking** on the phone for a long time last night: I phoned four times and it was engaged.*  
*Eddie **couldn't have done** that robbery: he was with me the whole weekend.*
- We can use **should** or **ought to** + present infinitive to make assumptions about the present or the future and **should** or **ought to** + perfect infinitive to make assumptions about the past. We use **should** more frequently than **ought to**:  
*The train got in half an hour ago so they **should be** here soon.*  
*The sun's been shining all day so the sea **should be** quite warm now.*  
*The weather's lovely there at this time of year so they **should be having** a nice holiday.*  
*Let's go and see Cathy: she **ought to have finished** working by now.*

#### Notes

- We can use modals in short responses:  
*'Are they at home now?' 'They **might be**.'*  
*'I expect Debbie was very pleased with her results.' 'Yes, she **must have been**.'*
- In short responses, **do** often replaces other verbs:  
*'Has he gone home?' 'He **may have done**.'*

## Practice

- 35 Complete the sentences with *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *will*, *should*, *ought to* or *must* and an infinitive in the appropriate form.



- 1 Kerry's rather late. She must have missed (miss) the train.
- 2 Travellers' cheques can/may be exchanged (be exchanged) at most banks.
- 3 They're not answering the phone so they .....  
..... (be) out.
- 4 Don't phone her now. It ..... (be)  
the middle of the night in Australia.
- 5 They ..... (not move) house yet. I  
saw them in town this morning.
- 6 I haven't seen Molly this week. I think she .....  
..... (visit) her parents but I'm not sure.
- 7 Her exam results are coming out soon. She worked very hard so she  
..... (do) well.
- 8 That woman's just fallen over. Let's go and see her: she  
..... (be) hurt.
- 9 I don't know where she is. She .....  
(not still play) tennis: it's been dark for the last hour.
- 10 I sent the letter two days ago so he .....  
..... (get) it by now, but you can never be sure.
- 11 The encyclopaedias ..... (be  
found) on the second floor of the library.



- 12 Jim's been very quiet since his girlfriend went away. He ..... (miss) her.
- 13 I ..... (come) and visit you at the weekend. Anyway, I'll give you a ring to let you know.
- 14 She was with a man I didn't recognize. It ..... (be) her brother because he looked a bit like her.
- 15 The roads are fairly quiet today so we ..... (have) a good journey.
- 16 'Do you think Josephine ..... (be) at home now?'  
'No, she ..... She ..... (have) a swim. She always does at this time in the morning.'
- 17 'Why do you think Tricia was in such a hurry?'  
'I don't know. She ..... (run) to catch the bus.'
- 18 These glasses ..... (be) Tim's: they look a bit like his.
- 19 It ..... (not rain): the ground's completely dry.
- 20 I ..... (join) the sports club in the summer but I haven't decided yet.
- 21 What a terrible thing to have happened. You ..... (be) terrified.
- 22 I told her you were coming so she ..... (expect) you.
- 23 They've just rung the bell so the children ..... (be) out of the classrooms in a minute.
- 24 That looks like Jack but it ..... (not be) him. He went to live in Australia last year.
- 25 I've got a stomachache this morning. I ..... (eat) too much last night or I ..... (have) some sort of virus.

## 36 Advice, obligation, necessity: **should, ought to, must, have to, have got to, need**

- To give advice, use **should** or **ought to**. **Should** is used more frequently.  
**Should/Ought to** = that course of action would be a good idea; it would be the best thing to do. It can refer to present time or to future time:  
*You **should/ought to** try and lose some weight.*  
*We **should/ought to** be leaving soon.*  
*You **shouldn't/oughtn't to** take any notice of him. He always upsets you.*  
***Should** we/**Ought** we **to** tell Ann where we're going?*  
 We often use **should/ought to** with *I think .../Do you think .../?Don't you think...?*  
*Don't you think you **should/ought to** stop seeing him?*  
 We sometimes use **I should** ... (NOT ~~**I ought to**~~) to give advice to someone else when there is an implied condition *if I were you*:  
*Everything's going to be alright. I **should** stop worrying about it. (if I were you)*
- To give strong advice and recommendations, use **must**. It can refer to present time or to future time.  
*You **must** go and see that film; it's fantastic.*  
*You really **must** try to forget him.*  
*You **mustn't** let him talk to you like that.*  
*We **must** go and visit them more often.*  
*You **must** come and stay with us sometime. (Here it is used to give a casual invitation.)*
- To criticize actions in the past, use **should** or **ought to** + perfect infinitive.  
**Should/Ought to** in the past means that the subject did not do the right thing:  
*I **should** have stayed at home. (= I didn't stay at home and my behaviour was wrong.)*  
*You **shouldn't** have said that. (= You said that and it was the wrong thing to have said.)*  
*They **shouldn't** have been talking when the exam started.*  
***Should** I have phoned you back?*
- To talk about obligation, use **must, mustn't** or **have to**.  
**Have to** is not a modal verb. It is an ordinary verb and it can be used in any form.  
**Must** and **have to** are often interchangeable but there is sometimes a difference between them.  
**Have to** – the obligation is often external, it comes from the situation:  
*We **have to** get up early tomorrow to catch the plane.*  
 (The time of the plane is the reason for the obligation.)  
**Must** – the obligation comes from the speaker or writer of the sentence.  
 This may be an individual or some kind of authority:  
*We **must** get up early tomorrow. We've got a lot to do.*  
 (We are imposing the obligation on ourselves.)  
*Passengers **must** fasten their seat belts.*  
 (The obligation is imposed by the airline who wrote the notice.)  
*Children **must** wear school uniform at all times when they are in school.*  
*You **mustn't** smoke in here.*  
*We'll **have to** get there before 5 o'clock because the shops close then.*  
*Do you **have to** pay for the tickets in advance?*

- We can also use **have got to** to express obligation.  
**Have got to** is often interchangeable with **have to** but there is sometimes a difference.  
**Have to** can be used for habitual actions and single actions:  
*I **have to** get the bus into work today.*  
*I **have to** get the bus into work every day.*  
**Have got to** can only be used for single actions:  
*I **have got to** get the bus into work today.*  
 (NOT ~~*I **have got to** get the bus into work every day.*~~)
- To express a negative obligation, use **mustn't**.  
 Do not use **don't have to**. **Don't have to** means there is no obligation:  
*You **mustn't** wait here.* (You are not allowed to wait here.)  
*You **don't have to** wait here.* (It is not necessary for you to wait here but you can if you want to.)
- To express obligation in the past, use **had to**:  
*I **had to** report the incident to the police.*  
*Did you **have to** get a visa?*

**Note:** **Must** + perfect infinitive is not used to talk about past obligation. It is used to make deductions about the past: *She **must have left** early.*

- To express necessity, use **need**.  
 We can use **need** as a modal verb in questions and negative sentences. It is most often used in the negative:  
*You **needn't** come if you don't want to.*  
***Need** I bring anything with me?*  
 We can also use **need** as an ordinary verb, followed by the **to**-infinitive:  
*You **don't need to come** if you don't want to.*  
***Do** I **need to bring** anything with me?*  
*Everyone **needs to eat** fresh fruit and vegetables.*  
*I'll **need to buy** some new clothes if I get that job.*



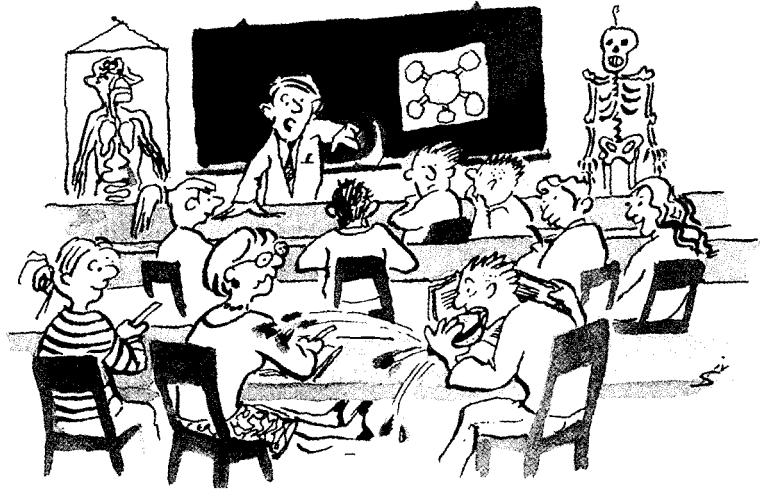
- To express lack of necessity in the past, use **needn't** + perfect infinitive or **didn't need to/didn't have to** + infinitive. There is some difference between them:  
*I **needn't have gone** to the station so early. The train was nearly an hour late.*  
 (It wasn't necessary to go to the station early but I didn't realise that and so I did get there early.)  
*We **didn't need to/didn't have to get up** early this morning because we had no lectures.* (It wasn't necessary and so we didn't do it.)

**Note:** We do not use **need** + perfect infinitive in the positive.

## Practice

- 36** Complete the sentences using the modals **should**, **ought to**, **must**, **need** or the verb **have to** in the correct tense and form. Put the infinitive into the appropriate form.
- 1 We had to leave. (leave) at 11 o'clock last night because the last bus went at 11.20.
  - 2 I don't think you should / ought to offer. (offer) to help him. You've got enough work to do yourself.
  - 3 They ..... (not pay) to stay in a hotel. They can stay with us.
  - 4 We've been staying in a hotel for the last two weeks so we ..... (not cook) our own meals.
  - 5 You ..... (come round) for dinner one evening. We haven't had a good talk for a long time.
  - 6 We ..... (run) all the way to the station because we were late for the train.
  - 7 It's your own fault that you're so tired. You ..... (not go) to bed so late.
  - 8 Why ..... the prisoners ..... (be locked) in their cells all day?
  - 9 Hurry up. You ..... (not have) a bath now. The taxi's coming in twenty minutes.
  - 10 You ..... (not tell) him what happened. He would never forgive us.
  - 11 You ..... (not allow) Max to walk home from school every day on his own. He's too young.
  - 12 I don't like ..... (do) everything my boss tells me to do.
  - 13 You ..... (go) to that new French restaurant in town. It's the best restaurant I've ever been to.
  - 14 Tom ..... (not get up) early in the morning but everyone else in the house does.
  - 15 If I fail any one of my exams, I ..... (take) all of them again in November.

- 16 You ..... (work) when I came into the room, not talking.
- 17 I ..... (tell) him what you really think of him next time you see him if I were you.
- 18 The wedding's been cancelled so I .....  
..... (not buy) that new suit: it was a waste of money.
- 19 I ..... (take) the children to school every morning before I go to work.



- 20 You ..... (not eat) in the lecture halls: it's against the college regulations.
- 21 I'd like you to come to the meeting but you .....  
..... (not come) if you don't want to.
- 22 This letter ..... (be hidden) where no-one will ever find it. Its contents  
..... (remain) a secret for ever.
- 23 ..... (you/wear) a uniform at work?
- 24 Please don't say any more. I already know the truth so you  
..... (not lie to me).
- 25 Employees ..... (follow) the safety regulations.

### 37 Offers, requests, permission, suggestions: *can, could, may, might, would, must, shall, would you mind*

- To ask permission or make a request, use:

ASKING PERMISSION	<b>Can</b>	} I ...?	informal
	<b>Could</b>		↓
	<b>May</b>		
	<b>Might</b>		formal

'**Can** I borrow your pen, please?' 'Yes, of course you **can**.'

'Do you think I **could** leave my bag here?' 'Yes, certainly.'

'**May** I use your phone, please?' 'Yes, of course you **may**.'

MAKING A REQUEST	<b>Can</b>	} you ... ?
	<b>Could</b>	
	<b>Would</b>	

'**Could** you open the door for me, please?' 'Yes, of course.'

**Would you mind** + 

gerund ...?
<b>if I</b> + verb in present or past ...?

'**Would you mind**

opening the window?
<b>if I</b> open/opened the window?

' 'No, of course not.'

- To give or refuse permission, use:

**You can/can't/may/may not/must/mustn't ...:**

You **can** stay here if you want to.

You **may** borrow these books whenever you like.

You **can** go out but you **must** be back by midnight.

I'm afraid you **can't** wait in here.

These modals can also be used to give permission or make prohibitions in the third person, e.g. in written rules:

Each player **may** look at the cards once.

Candidates **must not** start writing until the examiner tells them to.

- To make an offer, use:

**Can/Shall I, we ...? Would you like ...?**

**I'll ..., (shall I?), May I ...?** (more formal)

**Can I** help you?

**Shall I** carry that for you?

**Would you like** some tea?

**Would you like** me to help you?

**I'll** make you some breakfast, **shall I?**

**May I** take your coat?

- To make a suggestion or an invitation, use:

**Shall we ...?, We could ... , Would you like to ...?:**

'**Shall we** go out for a meal tonight?' 'Yes, that would be nice.'

'**We could** have a game of tennis this afternoon.' 'Yes, OK, why not?'

'**Would you like to** come round tomorrow?' 'Yes, I would.'

## Practice

- 37** Write what to say using *can, could, may, might, shall, must, would, would you like, would you mind*. There may be several possible answers.
- 1 Offer to open the door for a stranger.  
*Shall I open the door for you?*
  - 2 Ask someone to answer the phone for you.  
*Would you answer the phone for me, please?*
  - 3 Invite a friend to go for a swim this morning.  
.....
  - 4 Offer to make someone a sandwich.  
.....
  - 5 Request an appointment to see your bank manager, Ms Arnold.  
.....  
.....
  - 6 Give someone permission to use your phone.  
.....
  - 7 Suggest going for a picnic this afternoon.  
.....
  - 8 Ask someone to wait here for you.  
.....
  - 9 Give your son permission to go out but tell him to be back before dark.  
.....  
.....
  - 10 You are in a train. Ask another passenger if you can open the window.  
.....
  - 11 You are the teacher. Give your students permission to work outside today but tell them not to talk too much.  
.....  
.....
  - 12 Offer to answer the phone.  
.....
  - 13 Ask a friend for a pen.  
.....

## 38 Habit

### **would and used to**

- **used to** is not a modal. It is formed like this:  
*I **used to** work there.*  
*I **didn't use to** work there.*  
***Did** you **use to** work there?*
- Use **would** and **used to** to talk about past habits:  
*When we were children, my brother and I **used to** fight all the time.*  
*When we were children, my brother and I **would** fight all the time.*
- When we use **would** to talk about a past habit, it is necessary to use a past time reference. **Used to** can be used with or without a past time reference.  
*I **used to** go out a lot.*  
*(NOT ~~I **would** go out a lot.~~)*  
*Before I got this job, I **used to/would** go out a lot.*
- When we talk about past situations (not actions), we can use **used to** but we can't use **would**:  
*We **used to** live in a flat in the town centre.*  
*(NOT ~~We **would** live in a flat in the town centre.~~)*  
*She **used to** have long hair but now she wears it short.*

### **Practice**

- 38** Complete the sentences with **would** or **used to**. Where either form is possible, write them both. Where there is a word in brackets, put it in the correct position.
- 1 I ..... have lots of free time before I started working here.
  - 2 In the long summer holidays, we ..... go out somewhere with a picnic every day.
  - 3 When I was a newly-trained teacher, I ..... work till late every night preparing lessons.
  - 4 They ..... be happy together but they're not now.
  - 5 When they came to London, they ..... (never) travel anywhere on the tube.
  - 6 When I had a car, I ..... drive everywhere, but now I'm much fitter because I always walk or cycle.
  - 7 During my last year at university, I ..... go to the library to start work at 9 o'clock every morning.
  - 8 When we shared a flat together, we ..... (often) stay up talking late into the night.



- 9 When Amy was a baby, people ..... (often) come up to me and tell me how beautiful she was.
- 10 He ..... be very overweight but he's much slimmer now.
- 11 When I was at school, I ..... (never) do my weekend homework until Sunday evening.
- 12 I ..... work in the same department as your sister.
- 13 When I was a teenager, I ..... (often) spend the whole evening just listening to music.
- 14 She ..... have a lot of boyfriends when she was younger.
- 15 He ..... go for a run every day.

