

MODAL VERBS

Modal Basics

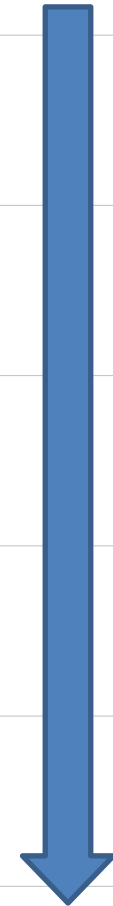
- Acting as **auxiliaries**
- Modals + bare-Infinitive
- **Never changing forms (no -s, -ed, or -ing)**
- Used with **progressive** (be + V-ing) and **perfect** (have + p.p.) aspects

Primary Functions

- **CAN / COULD** => ability
- **MAY / MIGHT** => permission
- **WILL / WOULD** => prediction
- **SHALL** => prediction
- **SHOULD / OUGHT** => escapable obligation or duty
- **MUST** => inescapable obligation
- **NEEDN'T** => absence of obligation

Secondary Functions

You	might	be right.	very uncertain
	may		
	could		
	can		
	should	have been right.	
	ought to		
	would		
	will		
	must	right.	almost certain
	are		certain



Modalities

ABILITY	PERMISSION / PROHIBITION	POSSIBILITY
DEDUCTION	OFFERS/ REQUESTS/ SUGGESTIONS	ADVISABILITY/ DUTY/ OBLIGATION/ NECESSITY
INADVISABILITY /LACK OF NECESSITY, PROHIBITION	HABIT	

Ability

- **CAN / COULD** => natural or learned ability
 - *Can you run 1500 meters in 5 mins.?*
 - *Can you drive a car?*
 - *Jim could run very fast when he was a boy.*
 - *Barbara couldn't sing very well when she was younger.*
- **be (un)able to**
- **be (in)capable of**
- **manage to**
- **succeed in**

Ability

- **COULD/WAS/WERE ABLE TO** => achievement after effort
 - *I tried again and found I could/was able to swim.*
- **WAS/WERE ABLE TO, MANAGED TO, SUCCEEDED IN** => specific achievement in the past
 - *In the end they managed to rescue the cat on the roof.*
- **CAN/COULD** + verbs of perception (NOT **be able to**)
 - *I can smell something burning.*
 - *I couldn't understand why he had decided to retire at 50.*

Ability


- COULD/WOULD BE ABLE TO => unreal past
 - *I'm sure you could get into university (if you applied).*

Ability

- **COULD HAVE/WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO =>**
ability not used due to personal failure or lack of opportunity
- *I could have done better in my school years if I had tried harder.*

Permission / Prohibition

Can I stay out late?	can/can't/ mustn't	Informal
Could I stay out late?		
May I stay out late?	may/mayn't/ mustn't	
Might I stay out late?		Formal



Permission / Prohibition

- **(not) be allowed to**
- **(not) be permitted to**
- **be forbidden to**
- **be prohibited**
- **be not to**
- **negative imperative**

Permission / Prohibition

- Very polite...
 - *Can/ Could I (possibly)...*
 - *Do you think I could/might use your phone?*
 - *I wonder if I could/might...*
 - *Might I (possibly) be allowed to...?*

Possibility

- A certain fact
 - *She is at home.*
- A possibility
 - *She may/might/could be at home.*
- Less common for possibility
 - *She should/ought to be at home.*

Possibility

- Questions about possibility
 - *Might/Could/Can* this be true?*
 - *Might/Could he know the answer?*
 - *Might/Could/Can* he still be working?*
 - *Might/Could/Can* he have been waiting long?*
 - *Might/Could he have left by tomorrow?*

Scale of certainty

*He **is** at home* (= it's a certain fact, non-modal be)

*He **could be** at home* (= doubtful possibility)

*He **should be** at home* (= doubtful possibility)

*He **ought to be** at home* (= doubtful possibility)

*He **may** be at home* (= it's possible, but uncertain)

*He **might be** at home* (= less certain than *may*)

Scale of certainty

He ***isn't*** at home (= it's a certain fact)

He ***can't be*** at home (= it's nearly certain)

He ***couldn't be*** at home (= more 'tentative' than *can't*)

He ***may not*** be at home (= possible, but uncertain)

He ***mightn't be*** at home (= less certain than *may not*)

Deduction

- Certainty / Facts

- *He lives here. / He is leaving.*

- *He lived here. / He has left. / He was working late.*

- Deduction

- *He must live here. / He must be leaving.*

- *He can't live here. / He can't be leaving.*

- *He must have lived here. / He must have been leaving.*

- *He can't/couldn't have lived here. / He can't/couldn't have been leaving.*

Requests with things/substances

- Offers

- *Can I have a sandwich (please)?*
- *Could I have some coffee (please)?*
- *May I have a sandwich (please)?*
- *Might I have a coffee (please)?*

- Responses

- *Of course, you can/may. (NOT COULD/MIGHT)*
- *Certainly.*
- *No, you can't/may not (, I'm afraid).*
- *I'm afraid there isn't any.*

Requests with action

- Requests

- *Will / Would you (kindly) open the door for me (please)? (willingness)*
- *Can / Could you (possibly) open the door (please)?*
- *Would you mind opening the window for me (please)?*

- Responses

- *Yes, of course (, I will).*
- *No, I'm afraid I can't.*

Suggestion/Invitations with actions

- Suggestions/Invitations

- *Will/Won't you come for a walk?*

- *Would/Wouldn't you like to watch some movie?*

- Responses

- *(Yes,) I'd love/like to.*

- *(No,) I'd prefer not to, thank you.*

Suggestions with actions

- Suggestions

- *Shall we go for a swim?*
- *We can/could/might go for a swim.*
- *What shall/can/could we do this evening?*

- Responses

- *Yes, let's. / Yes, shall we?*
- *No, I'd rather we didn't. / No, I'd rather not.*

Offers with actions

- Offers

- *Can/Could/Shall I open the window (for you)?*
- *Would you like me to open the window?*
- *What shall/can I do for you?*
- *May I take your coat?* (very polite)

- Responses

- *Yes, please. / Can/Could/Would you? That's very kind.*
- *No, thank you.*

Advisability

SHOULD	“in my opinion, it’s advisable to” / “it’s (my) duty to”
OUGHT TO	slightly stronger than SHOULD, regulations or duties imposed from the outside
HAD BETTER	stronger than SHOULD and OUGHT TO (some specific future action) + threat/warning/urgency
NEED TO	“it is necessary to”

Necessity

HAVE TO	inescapable obligation - objective
HAVE GOT TO	inescapable obligation - objective - more informal
MUST	inescapable obligation - subjective

Advisability/ Necessity in the past

- * *I should have been at the office before 9.*
- * *I ought to have left/have been leaving London before 9.*
- *I had to be at the office before 9.*
- *I had to be leaving London before 9.*

Lack of necessity

Present	Past
<i>You needn't go there.</i>	<i>You needn't have gone there.</i>
<i>You don't need to go there.</i>	(You went there unnecessarily.)
<i>You don't have to go there.</i>	<i>You didn't need/have to go there.</i>
<i>You haven't got to go there.</i>	(There was no necessity to go there, whether you did go or not.)

Inadvisability

Present	Past
<i>You shouldn't start smoking.</i>	<i>You shouldn't have started smoking.</i> (but you ignored this advice)
<i>You ought not to start smoking.</i>	<i>You ought not to have started smoking.</i> (but you ignored this advice)
<i>You'd better not start smoking.</i>	

Failure to observe a prohibition

Present	Past
<i>You can't park here.</i>	<i>You shouldn't have parked here.</i> (but you did)
<i>You mustn't park here.</i>	<i>You oughtn't have parked here.</i> (but you did)

Habit

- *He **will** always **complain** if he gets the opportunity.*
- *When we were students we **would** often **stay** up all night*
- *Jackie **used to make** all her own dresses.*

Past habit

- *I **used to smoke**, but I don't any more/any longer.*
- *I **never used to eat** a large breakfast, but I do now.*
- *I **collected** stamps when I was a child.*
- *I **used to collect** stamps (when I was a child).*
- *When I was a boy we always spent (or used to spend) our holidays on a farm. We'd get up at 5 and we'd help milk the cows. Then we'd return to the farm kitchen, where we would eat a huge breakfast.*

Past habit

USED TO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• no time reference necessary• can be used to refer to states
WOULD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a time reference necessary• never used at the beginning of a story• not used to refer to states
past simple	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a time reference necessary