

5 Chapter Five

Modal Verbs (Auxiliaries)



First of all, what does MODAL mean?

Modal means expressing mood. **Mood** means a way to express the attitude of the speaker to what is being said.

Examples:

- "I can paint" means the speaker believes he has the ability to paint.
- "I might paint" means the speaker believes there is a possibility for that to happen.
- "I will paint" means the speaker has the intention to paint.

English Modal verbs (auxiliaries) **show us the attitude of the speaker to what is being said.** We use ten modal verbs (auxiliaries) to "modify" the meaning of the main verb in some way. These special verbs are used to show necessity, possibility, ability, permission, and so forth.

These 10 modal verbs (auxiliaries) are-

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

Modal verbs

Examples:

- "It **might** rain"– shows possibility.
- "I **can** juggle"– shows ability.
- "You **may** sit down"– shows permission.

Notes that English modal verbs have only one form.

You don't add "-ing", "-ed" or "-s" to them.

Semi-modal verbs

The following verbs are often called "semi-modals" because they are partly like modal helping verbs and partly like main verbs

- **Need**
- **dare**
- **used to**

When & How modal verbs are used?

Uses of- can

1. To talk about what you are able to do

He is so strong! He **can** lift that car!

She **can not** come before four o'clock. / **Can** he teach?

2. To talk about a general possibility

The weather here **can** get really bad.

These chairs **can** be folded. / Such things **can** happen.

3. To say that something is allowed.

He **can** borrow my book if he needs it.

You **can not** smoke here. / You **can** pay with a credit card.

4. To make a request (this is an informal use, "may" is the formal version)

Can you help me with my homework?

Can you make some tea ? / **Can** you come here, please?

Uses of- could

1. As the past form of "**can**"
 - He said he **could not** come so early.
 - I **could not** remember who he was.
 - They **could not** pass the border.
2. To make a polite request
 - **Could** you open the window, please?
 - **Could** you remind him to call?"
3. To show possibility ("**may**" and "**might**" are stronger)
 - She **could** be with her parents.
 - He **could** still win, but it's not very likely.

Uses of- ought to (negative: ought not to)

To say what is the right thing to do ("should" is the more common word)

- In her condition, she **ought to** quit smoking.
- I believe you **ought to** apologize.
- He was watching TV when he **ought to** have been studying.

Uses of- must

1. To show that you have to do something, for example because it is very important or because it is a rule
 - You **must** stop the car when the traffic light turns red.
 - You **must** pay your taxes.
 - I **must** go now, otherwise I will miss my train.
2. "Must not" is used to show you are not allowed to do something
 - You **must not** steal.
 - The fruit of this bush **must not** be eaten because it is toxic.
3. To show that something is very logical or very likely to be true
 - He left at noon, so he **must** be there already.
 - She is not stupid, so she **must** have known what she was doing!
 - They **must** be really rich to live in such a house.

Uses of- shall (short form: 'll, negative: shall not)

Used with "I" and "we" to talk about the future (in formal British English)

- I **shall** leave tomorrow morning. / I **shall** never forget you.
- We **shall** overcome. / I **shall not** be late again.

Used with "I" and "we" to ask questions or make suggestions

- **Shall I** close the door?
- What **shall** we do tonight?
- Let's start, **shall** we?

Uses of- will (short form: 'll, negative: will not (or) won't)

1. To talk about future actions or future states (not plans)

- I hope he **will** pass his exams.
- She **will** be very happy to hear this.
- They **will** not be here on time.

2. For promises or intentions

- Leave it, I **will** do the dishes.
- It must be Joe at the door, so I **will** get it.
- I **will not** do that again, I promise.

(uses of “would” has been shown as independent chapter ahead)

Uses of- should

To say what is the right thing to do

- You **should** help your mother.
- If he doesn't like the job, he **should** tell it to his boss.
- If you knew you were going to be so late, you **should** have called.

To give advice or ask for advice

- You **should** try the new restaurant down the street.
- What **should** I do? **Should** I tell him the truth?
- **Should** I try to take the exam again?

To show that something is likely to be true or that it is expected

- Let's return home, dinner **should** be ready by now.
 - We **should** arrive there by twelve o'clock.
 - I **should** get an e-mail from him soon.
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Use of- may

1. To show possibility (it is slightly stronger than "might")

- What he said **may** be true." / It **may** rain." / "You **may** win the race.

2. To request or give permission (this is a formal use, "can" is the informal version)

- You **may** sit down." / "**May** I speak?" / "He **may** not use the car.
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Use of -might

1. As a past form of "may"

- She mentioned that she **might** come.
- We agreed that it **might** be dangerous."

2. To show possibility (it is slightly weaker than "may")

- He **might** pass the exam, but I wouldn't count on it.
- I **might** visit on Saturday.

When to use May & when Might?

These two words cause confusion. Many people aren't sure when to use which one and use them interchangeably. Clear up any confusion between these two words so you won't ever mix them up again.

- **Might** carries with it less probability and applies to hypothetical and counterfactual situations. Might is also the past tense of may.
- **May** applies to situations that are possible or could be possible.
- When talking about something that is not happening, it can be better to use *might* to avoid confusion with the permissive *may*.

Modal verb-Would

Would is an interesting modal verb with various functions.

1. As the past form of "will" in reported speech

Direct speech: "I will handle it myself."

Reported speech: "He said he **would** handle it himself."

Direct speech: I will be there at 6 pm.

Reported speech: She said that she **would be** there at 6 pm.

2. To talk about an imagined situation

- What **would** you do if you were a millionaire?
- I wish **he would** take a break.
- I **would** have cleaned the house, but I was too tired.

3. The second conditional & third conditional clauses

(look the lesson **conditionals** in this book)

4. To make a polite request

We use both 'will' and 'would' to make requests. The meaning is the same for both, but a request with 'would' is more polite than a request with 'will'.

- **Will** you please help me? / **Would** you please help me?
- **Would** you close the window, please?
- **Would** you give me the paper, please?

5. To invite someone, or offer something, politely

- **Would** you like a drink? / **Would** you like to meet her?
- We are going for a walk, **would** you like to join us?

6. With set phrases to talk about what we want, We use 'would' with some set phrases. These have some 'willingness' meaning in them

- I would like some coffee.
- She would rather go to the cinema.
- We would prefer to leave immediately

7. To say about something you want or want to do.

- I **would** like = a polite way of saying, "I want"
- I **would** rather = a polite way of saying, "I prefer"
- I **would** like a cup of coffee, please.
- I **would** hate to miss this opportunity.
- We **would** rather study with you.
- **Would** you like to come with us? / I **would** love to, but I can't.

8. Willingness in the past

In the present we use 'will' to talk about willingness (willingness means that you are happy to do something). For example, if we say 'I will help you' We use 'would' for the same meaning in the past. Usually, we use this in the negative (when we are not happy to do something).

- His mother **will not let** him go to the party.
- His mother **would not let** him go to the party.

9. Habits in the past

- When we were children, we would go to the beach every summer.
- When I lived in Japan, I would take Japanese lessons three times a week.

This is similar in meaning to 'used to + infinitive'.

'Would + infinitive'

We can also use 'would + infinitive' to talk about a habit or repeated action in the past. We usually use 'would + infinitive' in this way when we're telling a story about the past. So, we can say:

- When I was a student, we would often have a drink after class on a Friday.
- When I lived in Italy, we would go to a little restaurant near our house.

However, we don't use 'would + infinitive' to talk about states in the past. So, if we're talking about the past, we CAN'T say:

- ~~I would have long hair~~ / ~~I would live in Scotland~~

would for the past

We often use *would* as a kind of past tense of **will** or **going to** :

- Even as a boy, he knew that he would succeed in life.
- I thought it would rain so I brought my umbrella.
- She said that she would buy some eggs. ("I will buy some eggs.")
- The candidate said that he wouldn't increase taxes.
("I won't increase taxes.")
- Why didn't you bring your umbrella? I told you it would rain!

We often use “**would not**” to talk about past refusals:

- He wanted a divorce but his wife would not agree.
- Yesterday morning, the car wouldn't start.

We sometimes use **would** (rather like *used to*) when talking about habitual past behavior:

- Every weekday my father would come home from work at 6 pm and watch TV.
- Every summer we would go to the seaside.
- Sometimes she would phone me in the middle of the night.
- We would always argue. We could never agree.

would for the future in past-

When talking about the past we can use **would** to express something that has not happened at the time we are talking about:

- In London she met the man that she would one day marry.
- He left 5 minutes late, unaware that the delay would save his life.

We use **would** when giving advice:

- I wouldn't eat that if I were you. / If I were in your place I'd refuse.
- If you asked me I would say you should go.

Would for “You would never know it.”

(for example: If you met him you would never know that he was rich)

- Why don't you invite Mary? I'm sure she would come.

Although there is always the main verb, sometimes it is understood (not stated) as in:

- Do you think he would come? I'm sure he would. (would come)
- Who would help us? John would. (would help us)

Would for **desire or inclination**

- I would love to live here. / Would you like some coffee?
- What I would really like is some tea.

Would for **polite requests and questions**

- Would you open the door, please? (more polite than: Will)
- Would you know the answer? (more polite than: Do you know the answer?)
- What would the capital of Nigeria be?

Would for **opinion or hope**

- I would imagine that they will buy a new one.
- I would have to agree. / I would expect him to come.
- Since you ask me I'd say the blue one is best.

Would for **presumption or expectation**

- That would be Erik, calling. I shall answer it.
- We saw a police helicopter yesterday. They would have been looking for that bank robbers.

Would for **uncertainty**

- He would seem to be getting better.
- It would appear that I was wrong.

should & would

Should is mainly used to talk about obligation. **Would** is used to talk about past habits. **Should** is also used as the past form of **shall** and **would** is used as the past form of **will**.

Complete the following sentences using should or would.

1. Everyone wear shoes.
2. When we were young, wespend hours playing cricket.
3. He told him that he probably be late.
4. We be grateful for the quick supply of material.
5.I open the window?
6. If we all sang in tune, it be so bad. (wouldn't/shouldn't)
7. I turn the heating on?
8. we invite Judy?
9. you mind moving a bit?
10. She be informed?

Answers

1. Everyone **should** wear a helmet. (obligation)
2. When we were kids we **would** spend hours playing caroms. (past habits)
3. I told him that I **would/should** probably be late.
4. We **should/would** be grateful for an early reply.
(Note that in the USA, should is not normally used in this situation.)
5. **Should** I open the door?
6. If we all sang in tune, it **wouldn't** be so bad.
7. **Should** I turn the heating on?
8. **Should** we invite Judy?
9. **Would** you mind moving a bit?
10. She **should** be informed.

Subjunctive mood

In addition to tenses (past, present, future) and number (singular vs. plural), verbs also have “moods”.

What Is Mood? - mood is a way to express the attitude of the speaker to what is being said. (e.g., as a fact, a command, a wish, an uncertainty).

There are three major moods in English:

The Indicative (real) Mood. Indicative=stating facts. This states facts or asks questions.

- They are playing the guitar. / Are they playing the guitar?

The Imperative (order)Mood. Imperative=expressing order.

This expresses a command, instruction or a request.

- “Play the guitar!” (instruction)
- “Please play the guitar” (request)
- “Get out” (order)

What is the Subjunctive (unreal) Mood?

Subjunctive = dependent (needing something).

The *subjunctive mood* is a category of verb forms that we use to express things that are not facts. It is to express situations which are hypothetical and is typically used for what is imagined, hoped, demanded, or expected.

Once used extensively in English, this mood has disappeared today because most of the functions of the subjunctive are covered by modal verbs such as **might**, **could**, and **should**.

- It is distinctive only in the third person singular, where the normal indicative -s ending is absent (*he **face*** instead of *he **faces***) and in the verb ‘to be’ (***were*** instead of ***was*** and *they **be*** instead of *they **are***).

subjunctive mood

Non-subjunctive Form	Non-subjunctive Example	Subjunctive Form	Subjunctive Example
is	He is allowed.	be	It is essential he be allowed.
was	I was ordered.	were	If I were ordered, I'd go.
third-person singular	He cooks .	remove s	I wish that he cook.

The subjunctive mood is used in these instances:

- In “if” clauses to express condition contrary to fact.
 - "If I **were** you, I would accept the proposal."
(I am not you. This is an unreal condition in my mind.)
(Incorrect If you write “was” here)
- In “that” clauses expressing a wish, request, recommendation.
 - The attorney general demanded that Congress **come** to a decision immediately.
 - The committee recommended that the rules **be changed**.

Beware!-

Just because a sentence starts with “if” doesn't mean it's improbable or contrary to fact. “If” sometimes introduces clauses of logical possibility in the indicative mood.

(“If Rahul Gandhi was president” Not likely, but certainly a possibility.)

Examples of the Subjunctive Mood

- I wish I **were** home now. / I wish it were the weekend.
- I suggest that Lee **play** the guitar.
- I propose that Lee be asked to play the guitar.
- If I **were** Lee, I would play the guitar.
- I wish I **had** something to eat. (Implied: ...but I don't.)
- I **would do** it if I **had** the time. (It is not a fact. It depends on having time)
- You **should listen** to your parents. (It is not a fact. It is a suggestion.)
- If I were you, I would accept the proposal

Wishes, Desires, and Lest

We use the present subjunctive to express any wish/desire/etc. that is stated in a clause beginning with “that.” We also use the present subjunctive in clauses that follow the word “lest.”

- My parents desire that I **be** rich.
- She hopes that she not **be** chosen for modelling.
- He wants to cancel his ATM card, lest he **lose** some of his civil rights.

These may sound awkward, because fewer than 1% of the population uses these grammatical forms correctly. Notice that the present subjunctive is merely the infinite form of the verb without the “to”; for many verbs, this is identical to the indicative present, but we don’t add an “s” for the third-person singular (he/she/it).