

Verbs

MODAL VERBS

Modal Verbs - Introduction

Modal auxiliary verbs are usually simplified to modal verbs.

They are used to modify the main verb by expressing modality.

Modality is ability, advice, desires, intent, likelihood, obligation, offers, permission, possibility, requests, suggestion or willingness.

Modal verbs are 'can', 'could', 'may', 'might', 'must', 'shall', 'should', 'will' and 'would'.

Modal verbs are not used as an infinitive.

Negative sentences are formed by adding 'not'.

Questions are formed by simple inversion.

Modal Verbs - Negatives

Negative sentences are formed by adding 'not'.

➤ Mary can swim.

➤ Peter can't swim.

(can't = cannot)

➤ John will help with the housework.

➤ Paul won't help with the housework.

(won't = will not)

➤ I might be late home this evening.

➤ I might not be on time this evening.

Modal Verbs - Questions

Questions are formed by simple inversion.

- *Bob can* swim.
- *Can Bob* swim?

- *You should* brush your teeth at least twice a day.
- How often *should I* brush my teeth?

- *I will* help you with your homework.
- *Will you* help me with my homework?

Modal Verbs – Ability Examples

We use 'can' to express, or question an ability.

- Most modern smart phones *can* connect to the internet.
- *Can* you swim a length of the pool yet?
- I *can't* run very fast. (can't = cannot)

We use 'could' to indicate, or question a past ability.

- When I was younger, I *could* eat whatever I wanted and stay slim.
- Jim *couldn't* read until he was 10 years old? (couldn't = could not)
- *Could* you still keep in touch without social media?

Modal Verbs – Advice Examples

We use 'should' to give (or ask for) advice.

- You *should* brush your teeth at least twice a day.
- *Should* I tell my boss about the missing money?

We use 'would' to politely offer advice about something.

- I *would* apologise to her if I were you.
- I think it *would* be wise to think about your pension now.

We use 'shall' to politely ask for advice about a future decision.

- Where *shall* we begin?
- Who *shall* I invite to the party?

Modal Verbs – Desires Examples

We use 'would' to express, or ask about desires.

- What *would* you like to do on our anniversary?
- I *would* love to go to that new restaurant.
- I *would* like my steak medium rare, please.

We use 'may' to express future wishes in a formal way.

- *May* our success continue in the year ahead.
- *May* you both have a happy and healthy life together.
- *May* the force be with you.

Modal Verbs – Intent Examples

We use 'must' to make intent stronger.

- I *must* get my car repaired this week.
- I *must* remember my wife's birthday.
- I *must* make an appointment with the accountant.

Modal Verbs – Likelihood Examples #1

We use 'will' to express the likelihood of something in the immediate present.

- *doorbell rings* That *will* be Jim – he said he would pop around today.
- Who is that in the car? That will be Peter's new girlfriend picking him up from work.

We use 'would' to express the likelihood of something in the immediate past.

- Your shoes have been chewed up again? That *would* be our dog – sorry about that.
- You answered the door and there was no one there? That would be the neighbour's kids.

We use 'should' to express a likely, or expected outcome.

- The results *should* be back in a week.
- This book *should* be interesting.

Modal Verbs – Likelihood Examples #2

We use 'can' to describe likely situations and occurrences.

- You *can* be sure that this is probably a bad idea.
- You *can* safely place a bet on that horse.

We use 'could' to indicate a possibility or likelihood.

- This *could* cause you a lot of problems.
- It looks like it *could* start raining at any time.

Modal Verbs – Likelihood Examples #3

We use 'might' to indicate a weak possibility.

- Take an umbrella – it *might* rain.
- If we don't leave now, we *might not* arrive on time.

We use 'must' to indicate a strong likelihood.

- I *must* have left my keys at home.
- You *must* be exhausted after running that race.

Modal Verbs – Obligation Examples

We use 'must' to indicate obligation.

- The fire door *must* be closed at all times.
- You *must not* tell anyone about this!

We use 'should' to express polite obligation.

- I think you *should* pay for half the damages.
- Why *should* she have to pay for her brother?

We use 'shall' to indicate obligation formally or in legal documents.

- The supplier *shall* not be held liable for damages if the product has been used incorrectly.
- The customer *shall* supply all necessary hardware.

Modal Verbs – Offers Examples #1

We use 'can' and 'could' to offer to do something for someone.

- *Can/could* I help you with the gardening?
- *Can/could* I give you a lift back to your flat?

We use 'will' to make polite offers.

- *Will* you have a cup of coffee?
- *Will* your friend be joining us for dinner?

Modal Verbs – Offers Examples #2

We use 'may' to make polite offers.

- *May* I be of assistance?
- *May* I help you with your bags?

We also use 'shall' to make polite offers.

- *Shall* I mow the lawn?
- *Shall* I get you anything while I'm in town?

Modal Verbs – Permission Examples #1

We use 'can' for permission, especially in questions.

- You *can't* have any ice-cream until you've finished your meal.
- *Can* I leave early today?

We use 'could' to ask for permission to do something.

'Could' is more polite than 'can'.

- *Could* I take next week off, please?
- Do you think you *could* approve the project budget?

Modal Verbs – Permission Examples #2

We use 'may' to ask politely and to formally deny permission.

- *May* I borrow your black tie, please?
- Students *may* not leave the hall during the exam.

We use 'might' to add extra politeness.

- I wonder if I *might* bring a friend to the party.
- *Might* I be excused from the table, please?

Modal Verbs – Possibility Examples

We use 'can' to describe possible actions.

- You *can* ask the librarian for a book recommendation.
- People *can* easily lose track of time when accessing social media on their phone.

We use 'may' and 'might' to express an uncertain possibility.

- We *may/might* run into problems if we don't think ahead.
- I'm worried that it *may/might* start snowing soon.

We use 'might' to suggest a possibility to another person.

- I thought you *might* like this band, so I bought you their latest CD.
- I was wondering if you *might* like to see a film with me.

Modal Verbs – Request Examples

We use 'can' to make direct requests.

- *Can* you turn the music down?
- I can't reach that – *can* you get it for me?

We use 'could', 'would' and 'will' to make polite requests.

- *Could/would/will* you help me with my homework?
- *Could/would/will* you put your dog on its lead, please?

Modal Verbs – Suggestion Examples #1

We use 'shall' to politely ask for suggestions.

- *Shall* we invite your parents over for dinner?
- What *shall* we do with a drunken sailor?

We use 'would' to ask for someone's opinion or suggestion.

- What *would* you suggest we do tomorrow?
- Where *would* be a good place for a camping holiday?

Modal Verbs – Suggestion Examples #2

We use 'should' to give (or ask for) recommendations.

- What *should* I see when I visit London next month?
- We *should* go and see the new film – I'm sure you will like it.

We use 'could' to suggest an option.

- We *could* all go for a drink after work.
- I'm not sure if your boss will agree to this, but you *could* try.

Modal Verbs – Suggestion Examples #3

We use 'might' to make polite suggestions.

- You *might* want to have that checked by your doctor.
- You *might* try rebooting the computer and see if that helps.

We use 'must' to emphasise suggestions.

- You *must* come and spend the weekend with us.
- You *must* try that new restaurant in town.

Modal Verbs – Willingness Examples

We use 'will' to indicate an immediate willingness (or unwillingness)

- If you cook the meal, *I'll* wash the dishes. (I'll = I will)
- Emma *won't* come out of the bathroom. (won't = will not)

We use 'would' to express a willingness (or unwillingness) in the past.

- Paul *wouldn't* come out of his room all day.
- The car *wouldn't* start this morning – so annoying.