

MODALS: Ability, Permission & Prohibition

ABILITY -- I KNOW HOW TO DO STH

- * *Can*
- * *Be able to*
- * *Could*
- * *Managed to*

⇒ **CAN** – ability in the present

She can write really fast.

He can't sing flamenco

I can swim very well.

Can we play instruments?

⇒ **COULD** – ability in the past

Simon could speak English when he was 5

I could talk at the age of 3

⇒ **BE ABLE TO / MANAGE TO** - in any tense, mainly future and perfect tenses

When you graduate, you'll be able to get a good job

I wasn't able to sing

I will be able to go

I am able to swim

I was able to open the door

PERMISSION

- * *Can*
- * *Might*
- * *Could*
- * *Be Allowed To*
- * *May*

Be allowed to is used when it is a norm

*Students are not allowed to leave
the class during the breaks.*

*Could you give me a hand with
this essay, please?*

*May/ Might I use your pen,
please? (formal)*

*I couldn't go out until midnight
when I was a teenager.*

Can I go to the toilet?

I can't stay late at night.

I can go out tonight.

I was allowed to go

I will be allowed to go

*I couldn't go to the party last
night.*

I wasn't allowed to go...

May I come in, please?

PROHIBITION

*** Cannot**

*** Must not (Mustn't)**

The modal verbs used are Can and Must. They are used as negatives

Can't and mustn't (must not) are used to show that something is prohibited (not allowed)

You can't go into that restaurant without a tie

You can't drive in this country unless you are over eighteen

You mustn't use your phone in class

⇒ **Can't** usually gives the idea of something that is against the rules.
Mustn't usually means that it is the speaker who is setting the rule

Can't is the most common way to prohibit something in English. It is not as formal as must not, but it is the most common

You can't drive here

You can't wear a hat in class

You can't smoke in the office

Can't is normally used to show inability, but in these examples it shows prohibition. It is like you are saying you do not have the ability because of the rules

⇒ Finally, the strongest way to prohibit something: **Must Not**. This is the other way you can prohibit an action or make a rule against something

You must not use a mobile phone in this classroom

You must not write with pencil in an exam

You must not play music while the teacher is here

MODALS: Advice

ADVICE AND SUGGESTIONS -- STRONG CRITICISM

- * **Should**
- * **Shouldn't**

- * **Ought to**
- * **Oughtn't to**

⇒ To give advice and to recommend something

Students should take notes in class

You should see a doctor

⇒ To express criticism

People shouldn't judge a book by its cover

You ought to respect road signs

* **Should / had better**

Should is used to say what we think should be done, to give advice or an opinion. Well, **had better** (or the contraction, 'd better) is another very colloquial way of expressing the same

Affirmative: subject + had better + verb

You'd better turn at the junction. (Es mejor que gires en el cruce).

Negative: subject + had better + not + verb

You'd better not be late. (Es mejor que no llegues tarde)

Interrogative: not usually used in questions

On the other hand, it has a different use of should, since it is also used to express a warning, such as warning the listener that something bad or unpleasant can happen to him / her if he / she does not do what we say. It means “Será mejor que...” o “Más vale que...”.

You’d better slow down when it’s raining. (Será mejor que reduzcas la velocidad cuando está lloviendo)

You’d better not drink while driving! (¡Más vale que no bebas mientras conduces!)

MODAL		STRUCTURE	EXAMPLES
SHOULD opiniones subjetivas	+	Sujeto + should + infinitivo	He should study more. <i>Debería estudiar más.</i>
	-	Sujeto + shouldn't + infinitivo	You shouldn't be angry today. <i>Hoy no debería estar enfadado.</i>
	?	Should + sujeto + infinitivo	Should I go to the cinema with my friends? <i>(yo) ¿Debería ir al cine con mis amigos?</i>
OUGHT TO opiniones objetivas	+	Sujeto + ought to + infinitivo	We ought to go out tonight. <i>Esta noche deberíamos salir.</i>
	-	Sujeto + ought not to + infinitivo	You ought not to call him. <i>No deberías llamarlo.</i>
HAD BETTER consejos cuando se cree que habrán consecuencias negativas	+	Sujeto + had / 'd better + infinitivo	We' d better find a flat soon. <i>Deberíamos encontrar un piso pronto.</i>
	-	Sujeto + had / 'd better not + infinitivo	You' d better not touch that. <i>No deberías tocar eso.</i>

MODALS: Obligation & No obligation

OBLIGATION

- * **Must**
- * **Have to**
- * **Need to**

Need to, have to and must are used to express obligation. There is a slight difference in the way that they are used.

⇒ **Have to** shows that the obligation comes from someone else, not the speaker. This is usually referring to a rule or law, something is necessary, it expresses obligation which comes from outside, i.e. the government, your parents, teachers...

I have to write a composition by Friday

We have to be at the airport at least two hours before the flight

Have to (obligation) -- (ALL THE TENSES)

I have to study

I had to study

I didn't have to clean

I'll have to study

Something is necessary because the situation makes it necessary

I've run out of flour. I have to go to the shop

⇒ **Must** shows us that the obligation comes from the speaker

I must hand in my thesis by tomorrow

You must go to school

He must make his bed

You must tell her the problem

I must write a composition. I need to practise to improve

⇒ **Need to** shows us that we need to do something that isn't an obligation which is imposed

You need to go home before the evening

I need to slow down on this road

“**Have got to**” means the same as “have to” and is used a lot in spoken English and informal writing and expresses a very strong feeling.

I have got to go home because my father has suffered an accident.

She's got to get a job she's currently unemployed

NO OBLIGATION

★ *Don't / Doesn't have to*

★ *Needn't*

⇒ **Don't have to** means you don't need to do something, but it's fine if you want to do it:

I had to wear a school uniform when I was a child

⇒ The semi-modal **need** is most common **in the negative**. We use it to show that there is no obligation

We needn't spend much time on this topic. It's not going to be in the exam

She doesn't have / need to hand in her composition

She needn't bring her laptop to school today

You needn't come so early

I didn't have to come (Absence of obligation)

MODALS: Possibility & Deduction

POSSIBILITY

* *May*

* *Might*

* *Can*

* *Could*

“Puede que, quizás ...”

They convey the idea that something is likely or probable to happen but we are not sure about it.

⇒ Use **CAN** when the possibility of something happens is very high

Don't worry, we can do it later

We can go to the shopping center to buy everything you need

I can go in two directions

You will be able to find a place to park near the station

⇒ Use **COULD, MAY** or **MIGHT** to express that something is possible

It could / may / might be quicker to travel by train

It could / may / might be better travel to Marrakech in spring, it's boiling in summer

Tom could be on the train now

It may rain

It may not rain

Cars might fly in the future

⇒ **Might** expresses a more remote possibility than **may**

Susan may be a famous artista one day (we are not sure)

They might find a new house soon (perhaps...)

May is formal and is often found in writing

Side effects of this medication may include upset stomach and fever

LOGICAL DEDUCTION

* **Must**

* **Could**

* **Can't**

* **Might**

* **May**

⇒ Use “**must**” when you’re almost sure that something is true

It must be cold outside because has been snowing the whole day

He must be happy. He’s got a 10 in maths

⇒ Use “**can’t**” when you’re pretty sure that something is impossible or false

He can’t be the thief; he’s a really nice person

He can’t be happy. He’s failed his driving test

She can’t be at home, because her car isn’t in the garage

We use **must** when we feel sure that something is true because there’s very strong evidence

He must live near here because he comes to work on foot. We don’t know where he lives but we’re sure it’s not far away

We use **can’t** when we feel sure something is not true

It can’t be far away now. We’ve been driving for hours. Where’s the map?

⇒ Use “**might**”, **could** or “**may**” when you think that something is possible or true but you are not absolutely sure

She might / could be stuck in a traffic jam
He may be still sleeping, he's very sleepy head

REMEMBER! MODALS TO EXPRESS LOGICAL DEDUCTION IN THE PRESENT:

MUST	CERTAINTY	She must be at home, the lights are on.
MAY, MIGHT, COULD	PROBABILITY	His shirt might be blue, but I'm not sure because it's very dark in the room.
CAN'T	IMPOSSIBILITY	This coat can't be hers, it's too big.

MODALS: Request & Suggestion & Offer

POLITE REQUEST

* **Could**

* **Can**

* **May**

* **Might**

Could you tell me when the train leaves?

Do you know when the library opens?

Can you take me to the bus station, please? (Very informal)

Would you please help me with my luggage?

Would you mind telling me when start the show?

May I leave earlier; I have to visit my grandmother (Formal)

Might I come in? (Very formal)

Requests And Offers

* **REQUESTS: Will you...?**

Will you give me a hand with my English homework, please?

Polite Requests

Could you pass the salt, please?

Polite request

May I give you my phone number?

Formal request

Would you please turn right?

SUGGESTION & OFFER

- * *Can*
- * *Could*

- * *Shall*

*You **can** take either a taxi or the bus*
*You **could** sleep in my house I've got a free room*
*We **shall** go to the cinema*

“**shall**” is only used in the first person singular and plural

Offers And Suggestions: Shall I / We...?

***Shall** I give you a hand with your English homework?*

Polite Suggestions

*You **could** take me to the shop*

Offers

***Would** you like to come to my party?*