

## DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF MODAL VERBS

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**Abstract:** *This article explores modal verbs which are also known as modals, modal auxiliaries, or modal auxiliary verbs. It is crucial to learn them as they can be tricky and they have many rules and uses.*

**Keys words:** *modal verbs, can, may, must, shall, will, ought to, need, have to*

Modal verbs show possibility, intent, ability, or necessity. Common examples of modal verbs include can, should, and must. Because they are a type of auxiliary verb, they are used alongside the infinitive form of the main verb of sentence.

Modal verbs:

**Can** – ability, doubt, astonishment, permission, polite request

**May** – permission, if not prohibition, supposition with doubt

**Must** – obligation firm necessity, logical conclusion, probability

**Shall** – intention, supposition

**Will** – wish, desire, will, confidence in the future

**Ought to** – modal duty, insistent advice, strict recommendation

**Need** – (un) necessity

**Have to** – unwillingness, forced

**Would** – wish (with “to like”), polite request, a habit of the past

**Should** – necessity, advice, blame, recommendation, reproach, regret.

A modal (also called a modal auxiliary) is used along with a main verb to express possibility, ability, permission or necessity.

For example, in the statement “ you must leave “ , “must “ is a modal verb indicating that it is necessary for the subject (“you”) to perform the action of the verb (“leave”)

In grammar, a modal verb or a modal auxiliary is a word such as “can” or “would” which is used with a main verb to express ideas such as possibility, intention, or necessity.

Modals are helper verbs meaning that they help other verbs by expressing modality. That is a fancy way of saying that modals express conditions. They help the main verb to convey ideas like certainly, possibility, willingness, obligation, prohibition, necessity, advice, or ability

Modal verbs are also known as modals, modal auxiliaries, or modal auxiliary verbs. Even though those sound more complicated, do not worry – they are just the same as modal verbs. Modal verbs can be tricky because they have many rules and uses.

I will cover the nine modal verbs and how to use them. This article will explain their special rules and provide some examples. This article talk about semi – modals ( or modal phrases ), which function similarly but have different grammar rules. Modal verbs are very common. It is likely that you known them well already, even if you did not know they were called “modal verbs”.

According to Merriam – Webster, the definition of a modal verb is: “A verb (such as can, could, shall, ought to, will, or would ) that is usually used with another verb to express ideas such as possibility, necessity, and permission”.

There are nine main modal verbs: may, might, must, can, could, shall, should, will, would. To this list we can add the semi – modals or modal phrases like ought to, have to, need to, and be able to

Any subject ( person / thing completing an action) in any sentence takes the modal verb in the same way (“I can “, “ she can “, “we can “, and so on ), with no need to add “ s “ for he, she, or it ( he / she/ it/ can )

Modal verbs have no infinitive form. This just means you cannot say “ to may “or “ to could “, these forms simply do not exist in English. Modal verbs do not have participle forms. This sounds more complicated than it is. Never add ending like “ – ed,” “ -ing,” or similar to a modal verb – “ coulded “ or “shoulding” just sound weird. Modal keep it simple; they will always appear exactly as written in the above list.

Modal verbs are followed directly by the bare infinitive ( an infinitive without “ to”). Examples:

- I **could hear** the dog barking. ( NOT I “ could to hear” the dog barking ), or
  - You **should tell** the truth ( NOT You “should to tell” the truth)
- Hear and tell are the infinitives in these sentences.

Modal verbs form questions by inversion. Modal verbs are auxiliary verbs and form questions by inversion. This means you do not need to add an additional modal verb when forming negatives or questions. For example, to change sentence “ I must go ” into a question, you can just move the modal must to the beginning of the sentence: Must I go ? (Not “ should I must go ?). similarly, to change “He should smoke ” into a negative , we simply add “ not ”. He should not smoke (Not “ He must not should smoke ”).

Modal verbs allow speakers to express a wide range of conditions like certainty, possibility, willingness, obligation, necessity, ability, permission, prohibition, advice, or probability. Let’s take a look at some examples and see each of the modal verbs in action.

**Can, could, and be able to** are used to express a variety of ideas. These include:

- The ability to do something (or lack thereof)
- The possibility or impossibility of doing something
- Asking or giving permission
- Making a suggestion

### **Ability**

Modal verbs explain whether or not someone can do something. For example, Nancy **can recite** poetry by heart.

In this sentences, the modal verb phrase can recite tell us that Nancy has the ability to memorize and recite poems.

I **can help** you move today.

I **will be able to help** you move today.

In the first sentence, the word can is accompanied by the verb help because the word can does not require the assistance of to.

In the second sentence, the phrases be able to is necessary to help the sentence make sense

### **Possibility**

You can use **can** or **could** to say whether something is possible

You **can watch** this film any time before 10 pm

In this sentence, the phrase can watch means that it is possible to watch the film so long as it is before 10 pm

Here are some more examples of using can and could to say if something is possible in a sentence:

I **can not believe** what I am hearing!

You **could take** a trip to Sacramento this weekend as you have vacation time left

He could not understand it if he tried.

### **Permission**

You can also use modal verbs to ask for something , or to give or deny someone permission to do something.

**Can** you help me with this?. This question asking for a response that will also use a modal verb. Could also works in the same way here:

**Could** you **help** with this?

**Could** I **borrow** a pencil please?

### **Suggestions**

You can use the modal verb **could** to suggest things someone is able to do out of a range of options. You **could take** the express bus.

In this sentences, the phrase **could take** not only means that it is possible to take the express bus, but that it might be a useful or good thing for someone to do.

## May and might

May and might are used to express a variety of ideas, from prohibitions, expressions of possibility or impossibility and making polite suggestions. In many cases, you can use **may** in the same way as **can**. **May** is often considered more polite.

### Permission

If you are speaking to someone in a formal context, you will often use **may** instead of **can** to ask for or give permission.

You **may begin** the exam now.

**May I address** you as Doctor N?

No, you **may not!**

You can also use **may** to make a polite request: **May I take** your order?

### Possibility

Like **may**, **might** can be used to indicate possibility. Both words work in the same way in the examples below:

We **may go** to the movies after dinner. You **might want** to write this part down.

In these sentences, the events are possible but not certain.

### Suggestions

**May / might** is also used to make a suggestion when there is no better alternative: You **may as well try** it. What have you got to lose? We **might as well stay home**.

### Shall and should

**Shall** and **should** have a range of subtle uses, from making polite suggestions to giving or asking for advice. Be careful when choosing between the modal verb **should** and the word **ought**, because they have the same meaning but different grammar.

**Ought to** is always followed by a **to** – infinitive: You **ought to** know that by now

**Shall** is only used with **I** and **we**. If you want to talk about a third person, you will need to use **should** or **ought to**. You can use **should** to ask what the right thing to do in a situation. **Should I** stay home with him if he is sick?

### Predictions

If you are pretty certain about something but you still have some doubts, you can say that it **should** happen: If we follow the instructions carefully, we **should** be able to build this bookcase properly.

### Advice

We are suggesting what the right thing is to do. Whether the person we are talking to follow our advice or not is another matter: You **should** do your research before making a big investment

We use the modal verb **must** to say if something is necessary or not, or persuade or forbid actions. **Have to** and **need to** work in the same way

### **Necessity**

Unlike **should**, with **must**, **have to**, and **need to** we are saying that the recommendation we are giving is not optional.

You **must be** this tall to ride the rollercoaster

Jane **has to leave** at 4

**Have to** , **need to**, and **must** does not work in the past tense

### **Certainly**

We have all been completely tired out after travel before. If you met someone who had just got home from a road trip, you might say: you have been the road all day. You must be exhausted

### **Persuasion**

In these cases, the thing you are trying to persuade someone to does not necessary – just something you really want to do happen: You **have to** visit us again before you leave town

### **Will and would**

**Will** and **would** have various uses. Will can form the basic future tense, similar to shall. They are used in conditional **if** , **this happens**, **then**, **that will happen** statements. **Will** and **would** can also make polite requests or statements, or talk about habits or things we usually do, or usually did in the past

### **Prediction**

If you want to say if something is or is not going to happen in the future, use **will**, **will not**, **won't**

I will visit Moscow in summer

### **Requests**

In question and statements with **will** and **would** , the asker is making sure that something is true or is not true. In most cases , this is just a polite way of telling someone to do something, or saying that you are going to do something:

**Would** you lock the lock door if you are the last to leave?

### **In the past**

If you want to describe something that happened routinely or a habit in the past , use **would**

When I was younger I would always go to bed early

To sum up, at least should be clear : these verbs are powerful and you should learn how to use them from this article.

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