

Modal Verbs

Introduction to modal verbs

- The modal verbs are:
can, could, may, might, must, will, should, ought to.
- They are known as modal auxiliary verbs because they “**help**” another verb.
- They are special verbs which behave **irregularly** in English.
- They are **different** from normal verbs like “play, work, visit...”
- They **give additional information** about the function of the main verb that follows it.

Examples:

- I **can** swim
- Do you think he **should** go?

Properties of modal verbs

Here are some characteristics of modal verbs:

1. There is no “s” in the third person singular.

Examples

She can ski.	She eans ski. (incorrect)	She can skis . (incorrect)
He must go.	It might rain.	They could travel.

2. There is no “do/does” in the question.

Examples

What should I write?	What do I should write? (incorrect)
Can she help you?	Does she can help you? (incorrect)

3. There is no “**don’t/doesn’t**” in the negative.

Examples

You mustn’t steal.	You don’t must steal. (incorrect)
He can’t drive.	He doesn’t can drive. (incorrect)

4. Modal verbs are followed by infinitive verbs without to (except ought to)

Examples

You may leave.	I should study.	They ought to see the trainer.
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5. Modal verbs do not have “**infinitives**” or “**ing**” forms.

Examples

can	to can (incorrect)	caning (incorrect)
must	to must (incorrect)	musting (incorrect)

Use

The use of modal verbs can be summarized by the following points:

1. Modal verbs express our attitudes, opinions, and judgements of events.
Compare the following cases:

Compare

I	Who is knocking on the door? It is John. (This is a fact.)
II	Who is knocking on the door? It could/may/might/must/should/can’t/will be John. (These all express our opinion.)

2. Each modal verb has at least two meanings. One use of all of them is to express possibility.

Sentence	Meaning
I must post this letter.	(=obligation)
You must be tired.	(=possibility)
Could you help me?	(=request)
We could go to Spain for our holiday.	(=possibility)
You may go home now.	(=permission)

Forms

In general, the following rules are used to build statements and questions with modal verbs:

Positive

All modal verbs must be followed by a main verb in the base form.

Positive				
Rule	S + modal verb + V. (inf.) + comp.			
Example	I They He (etc.)	should must can (etc.)	go	now.

Negative

We only need to add “**not**” to the last form to make negative statements.

Negative					
Rule	S + modal verb + not + V. (inf.) + comp.				
Example	I They He (etc.)	should must can (etc.)	not	drive	at night.

Yes/no questions

To make yes/no questions with modal verbs, we can use the following rule:

Yes/no questions

Rule	Modal verb + S + V. (inf.) + comp?			
Example	Should Must Can (etc.)	I they he (etc.)	come	next week?

WH questions

In the case of WH questions, we just add a Wh-word to the previous rule.

WH questions

Rule	Wh-word + Modal verb + S + V. (inf.) + comp?				
Example	When Where How (etc.)	should must can (etc.)	I they he (etc.)	do	the exam?

Forms in details

In this section, we are going to explore the form of specific groups of modal verbs individually as they differ in some cases.

1- have (has) to**Positive & Negative**

I / You / They / We	have to don't have to	work hard.
He / She	has to doesn't have to	

Questions

Do	I / you / (etc.)	have to work hard?
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2- can & be allowed to

Positive & Negative

I / You / They / We	can / can't are (aren't) allowed to	park here.
He / She	can / can't is (isn't) allowed to	

Questions

Can	I / you / we / (etc.)		park here?
Am	I	allowed to	
Are	you / we / they		
Is	he / she		