

MODAL VERBS

Modal verbs are auxiliaries. They never change form. They show what we think or feel about the lexical verb in the sentence. The important modals are: can, could, may, might, will, would, shall, should and must.

With verb formation

Put the modal verb before any other verbs. The next verb is always base form.

BEFORE ONE-WORD VERB FORMATIONS

He can play the piano very well.

The journey might be uncomfortable.

BEFORE CONTINUOUS FORMATIONS

I will be arriving tomorrow.

She must be learning Arabic.

Notice: Always use **be** after a modal NOT am, is, are, was or were.

BEFORE PERFECT SIMPLE FORMATIONS

He may have got lost.

They should have arrived by now.

BEFORE PERFECT CONTINUOUS FORMATIONS

She could have been watching.

She might have been playing.

Notice: Always use **have** after a modal NOT has or had, after a modal.

As auxiliary verbs

Modals are the same as other auxiliaries for making:

QUESTIONS - the modal goes before the subject:

Can you help me please?

How many days will you be staying?

NEGATIVE SENTENCES - the modal goes before not:

He couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag.

You might not have succeeded without his help.

SHORT ANSWERS - use the modal:

Should we tell her about it? Yes, we should.

TAG QUESTIONS - use only the modal in the tag:

We won't get there on time, would we?

Meaning

Generally, modals say something about:

HOW TRUE (OR NOT TRUE) SOMETHING IS:

After that work, you must be tired. = I am sure you are tired.

He may have got lost. = Perhaps he has got lost.

HOW GOOD (OR BAD) SOMETHING IS:

You must work harder. I think it is good to work hard.

They should not do that. I think it is bad to do that. BE CAREFUL!

Notice: The meaning of a modal verb in an affirmative sentence is not always the same as its meaning in a question or a negative sentence.

Ex 1: Change the order of the words or groups of words to make a correct sentence.

Question 1

- a. should
- b. you
- c. have done
- d. better than that

Question 2

- a. how many days

Question 4

- a. it
- b. in the mail
- c. must
- d. have got lost

Question 5

- a. smoke here

- b. be staying there?
- c. you
- d. will

Question 3

- a. known
- b. never have
- c. would
- d. I

- b. should
- c. you
- d. not

Question 6

- a. would
- b. have
- c. she
- d. helped you

Ex 2: Complete each sentence/question on the column A to using the set of answers on the column B. Be careful with questions and negatives.

Column A

- 1) I could _____ that myself, but you didn't ask.
- 2) You shouldn't _____ without lights.
- 3) When should they _____?
- 4) You might _____ an accident!
- 5) While you're relaxing, I'll _____ hard.

Column B

- a) have been driving
- b) be arriving
- c) have done
- d) be working
- e) have had

Ex 3: Fill in the blank with the continuous formation of the verb in the brackets.

1. When will you _____ (leave) for England?
2. Don't just sit there! You should _____ (help) John with the work.
3. I want to meet him at the airport. When will he _____ (arrive)?
4. I may _____ (go) to England next year.
5. He really must _____ (leave) now, or he'll miss his bus.
6. How long will they _____ (work) at the hotel?

Ex4: Please decide if each sentence is correct or incorrect. Select True if it is correct and False if it is incorrect.

1. I could have told you that myself.
2. I could never have did this without you.
3. You should come to the lesson yesterday.
4. You might have helped me, instead of just standing there.
5. But they can't have got lost; it's easy to find the way.
6. If you had come, we might win.

LESSON TWO

CAN

Can is a modal verb. This lesson shows you when you can use it.

Ability

GENERAL

- She can speak good English.
- Kiwis are birds but they cannot fly.

Notice: **cannot** is one word

NOW

- Can you hear me?
- I can't see anything. It's dark.

FUTURE

- I'm afraid I can't see you this week but I can next week.

Notice: Do you know what's **be able to**?

Possibility

GENERAL

- Canada can be very cold in the winter.

NOT POSSIBLE

- He can't be working now. It's much too late.
- They can't have got lost. They know the way.

Notice: use **must** for strong probability.

Permission

STATEMENT

You cannot drive without a license.

Passengers can smoke outside of the terminal.

Notice: more friendly than **may**.

REQUEST

Can I borrow your pen?

Can I have the red one please?

Notice: **could** is more polite.

Asking for help

Can you give me a hand?

Can you tell me the time?

Notice: also **could** ; also **will**.

Polite offers

Can I help you?

Can I get you some food?

Notice: also **will** ; also **shall**.

COULD

Could is a modal verb. This lesson shows you when you can use it.

Possibility

NOW

I suppose he could be at home.

FUTURE

It could become a big problem.

PAST

Surely it could not have got lost in the mail.

IMAGINARY

If I had more money, I could buy a car.

IMAGINARY PAST

I did my best. I could not have tried any harder.

Notice: also **may** ; also **might**.

Asking for

HELP

Please could you send me some information about the course.

Could you lend me some money?

Notice: also **can** ; also **will**.

PERMISSION

Could I possibly come and see you next week?

Notice: also **can** ; also **may**.

Past tense of can

ABILITY

We could not find a seat on the train.

PERMISSION

In those days, you could drive without a license.

POSSIBILITY

At that time, you could live like a king on twenty dollars a day.

Notice:

Luckily, I **could** get in by the back door. It was possible.

Luckily, I **was able to** get in by the back door. And I did.

Notice:

We also use **could** (NOT can) in sentences with a past tense verb before the modal.

They wanted to know if I could help them.

He said that he could not come on Saturday.

Ex 5: Fill in the blank with can or could.

1. When I was at school I ____ never understand physics.
2. Bees ____ fly, even though it seems impossible.
3. I ____ n't get to the shops today. They closed early.
4. He asked me if I ____ help with the laundry, but I was too busy.
5. Take an umbrella. It ____ be raining when you get to Vancouver.
6. Take an umbrella. In Vancouver, it ____ rain at any time.
7. They say they ____ deliver it next week.
8. They said they ____ deliver it next week, but I told them not to.
9. You ____ leave the class when you've finished the exercise.

LESSON THREE

MAY AND MIGHT

May and **might** are modal verbs. This lesson shows you when to use them.

Possibility

NOW

- I don't know where John is but he might be helping Peter.

Notice: The Canadian winter **may be** very cold. = this winter

But: The Canadian winter **can be** very cold. = generally

FUTURE

- Gas prices might fall again soon.

Notice: also **may**

PAST

- I think you may have caught a cold.

Notice: also **might**; also **could**.

Permission

STATEMENT

- Visitors may enter the museum from 9:00 to 5:00 each day.

REQUEST

- May I come in?
- May we think about it for a few days?

Notice: **May** only; do NOT use **might**.

Notice: more polite than **can** or **could**.

Might with past tense

We use **might** (NOT may) in sentences with a past tense verb before the modal.

- I thought the road might be blocked so I went another way.
- He told me that the next winter in Canada might be very cold.

Ex6: Fill in the blank with may or might.

1. You ____ have told me. I came all this way for nothing.
2. I thought he ____ be able to help me, but he was useless.
3. You ____ leave the class when you've finished the exercise.
4. I asked him if I ____ leave the class early.
5. Passengers ____ smoke at the back of the plane.
6. Customers ____ use the staff washroom.

Ex 7: Fill in the blank with can, could, might or be able to.

1. Will you ____ come to my house today?
2. Some birds ____ fly a very long way.
3. There was a party last night but I ____ n't go.
4. She ____ n't have finished already!

5. I think you should arrive early or you _____ not get a seat.
6. I thought you _____ be able to help me.

LESSON FOUR

WILL AND SHALL

Will and **shall** are modal verbs. This lesson shows you when to use them.

Prediction

FOR THE FUTURE

- We shall all die one day.
- Do you think it will rain tomorrow?
- The manager will be writing to you soon.
- I'll be phoning him tonight.

Notice: ALSO **be going to**, present simple, present continuous:

FOR NOW

- Don't phone now! They'll probably be having lunch. They usually have lunch at this time.

PAST IN THE FUTURE

- By this time tomorrow, I'll have finished all my exams.

Intention

OFFERING

- He's next door. Just a minute and I'll get him for you.
- If you think it's a good idea, I'll phone him.
- Shall I help you with that?

Notice: ALSO **can would**. Use **shall** only in questions.

ASKING FOR HELP

- Will you mail this for me?
- What shall I say to her?

Notice: **could** is more polite

REFUSING

- The car won't start. (= will not)
- He won't tell me the answer.

PROMISES AND THREATS

- We'll never forget your kindness.
- I'll kill you if you do that again.

MAKING DECISIONS

- I think I'll visit my parents this weekend.
- I'll have coffee, please.

Notice: do NOT use be going to

Ex 8: Change the order of the words or groups of words to make a correct sentence.

Question 1

- a. tomorrow
- b. I will
- c. you
- d. call

Question 2

- a. do you think
- b. we
- c. will finish
- d. ?
- e. in time

Question 3

- a. have a go
- b. if you

Question 4

- a. have
- b. a green
- c. I will
- d. salad

Question 5

- a. he
- b. won't eat
- c. anything
- d. these days

Question 6

- a. call her
- b. I

- c. will
- d. I
- e. like

- c. shall
- d. for you
- e. ?

LESSON FIVE

WOULD

Would is a modal verb. This lesson shows you when to use it. Notice that **-'d** is the short form.

Imaginary situations

PRESENT AND FUTURE

- If we hadn't met that time, I wouldn't be here now. (But we met, so I am here now.)
- I think he would find the movie very interesting.

ADVICE

- What would you do in my place?
- If I were you, I'd take a long holiday.

Notice: ALSO **must** and **should**.

PAST TIME

- They wouldn't have lost if John had been playing for them. (But he wasn't playing.)
- If I'd known you were coming, I would have stayed longer. (But I didn't know, so I left.)

Would + like

ASKING

I'd like some information, please.

Notice: We can use **want**, but **like** it is more polite

OFFERS AND INVITATIONS

- Would you like some coffee?
- Would you like to join us?

Notice: ALSO **can will**.

Polite commands

- Would you open that suitcase, please, madam?

Past tense of **will**

REFUSAL

- My car wouldn't start this morning.

We use **would** (**NOT will**) in sentences with a past-tense verb before the modal.

- He asked me if I would mail a letter for him.
- I thought I would visit my parents this weekend.
- They said they would be writing to me soon.

Notice: We also use **would** with **mind** + **-ing** form , **mind** + **if** and with **rather**.

Ex 9: Fill in the blank with will, shall or would. Use shall with only one of these sentences.

1. ____ you like some more coffee?
2. Where ____ I put the ashtray?
3. I wondered if we ____ get it done on time.
4. I ____ certainly like to have a go.
5. I ____ have had a go, but they didn't let me.
6. If we go tonight, it ____ be the third time I've seen that film.
7. I ____ like a green salad, please.
8. I ____ have a green salad, please.
9. ____ I help you with that?

LESSON SIX

MUST AND SHOULD

Must and **should** are modal verbs. This lesson shows you when to use them. They have the same kinds of meaning, but **must** is always stronger than **should**.

Commands (must only)

- You must not leave the room until I say.
- Parking permits must be displayed in car windows.

Advice or necessity

GENERAL

- You shouldn't ever cross the road without looking.

PRESENT AND FUTURE TIME

- Do you think we should take our coats?
- Yes, you must; it might be very cold.
- I'm afraid we really must go now.

PAST TIME (SHOULD ONLY)

- You shouldn't have been rude. It was bad of you.
- They should have told him. Why didn't they?

Notice: We can also use **have to/ need to/ needn't** and sometimes **would** for advice and necessity. The meanings of all the verbs are a little different from each other .

Probability

GENERAL (MUST or have got to)

- It must be terrible to be in an earthquake.
- It has got to be terrible to be in an earthquake.
(I have not been in one but I feel sure.)

NOW

- This isn't my bill. There must be some mistake.
- This isn't my bill. There has got to be some mistake
(I am sure there is a mistake.)
- I must be dreaming.
(I can't believe it.)
- He should be in his office.
(He is probably there.)

FUTURE TIME

- Don't worry. You shouldn't have any problems.
(I don't think you will have problems.)

PAST TIME (MUST ONLY)

- I can't see them anywhere. They must have gone home.
- (I feel sure that they have gone home.)

BUT

- I saw them just now. They can't have gone home.
(I feel sure they have not gone home.)

For strong negative probability, use **can't**.

Notice: **Ought to** means the same as **should**.

Ex10: Fill in the blank with must or should.

1. I don't think he ____ go to school today.
2. Look at your teeth! You really ____ go to the dentist.
3. You think I'm going to buy that? You ____ be joking.
4. I was stupid to buy that ring. I ____ have realized it was a fake.
5. It was a mistake to let in that goal. He ____ be feeling terrible right now.
6. I know I ____n't have this cake, but I'm going to.

Ex 11: Fill in the blank with should, shouldn't, must, can't or might.

1. After all that work, you ____ be tired.
2. You ____ find this exam difficult. The other exam was much harder.
3. Call the operator. She ____ be able to help you. That's her job.
4. You'd better take an umbrella. It ____ rain.

5. There ____ be a mistake in this bill. The figures don't add up.
6. I ____ be going to Toronto, but I haven't decided yet.

LESSON SEVEN

HAVE TO/ NEED TO/ NEEDN'T

We use these verbs to talk about necessity.

Formation

HAVE TO/ NEED TO

- We can make all verb formations with these verbs. For example:

Present simple

- He has to work nine hours a day, but he doesn't have to work very hard.
- Let's stop. We don't need to finish today.

Past simple

- Did they have to go out?
- Yes, they had to go to the airport.
- I needed to buy a number of things, but I didn't have enough money.

Present perfect

- She has had to stay behind to look after the children.

With modal verbs

- I may have to go to Winnipeg soon.
- If she takes that job, they will need to move to another city.

Notice: We always use base form after **to**. We say he **had to go** (NOT he had to went).

needn't is a modal verb

- We needn't finish today.

Use: necessity

GENERAL

- Students don't usually have to pay tax.
- You need to get a visa before you travel.

PRESENT AND FUTURE TIME

- I have to finish this report today.
- We can't find a babysitter; we'll have to stay in tonight.
- You needn't write it now. You can do it later.

Notice: We also use **have got to** for present and future necessity (Lesson 36).

PAST TIME

- There were no buses. I had to get a taxi.
- He said that they had to go.

Notice: The meanings of **have to**, **need to** and **needn't** are not exactly the same (Lesson 35).

Ex 12: Change the order of the words or groups of words to make a correct sentence.

Question 1

- ought
- you
- to have done
- better than that

Question 2

- finish it
- you
- n't
- need

Question 3

- have got
- work late
- to

Question 6

- to
- need
- you'll
- wear a coat

Question 7

- I
- n't
- have worn my sunglasses
- need

Question 8

- work late tonight
- have
- to

d. I

Question 4

- a. wear a uniform?
- b. did you
- c. to
- d. have

Question 5

- a. finish the dessert
- b. you
- c. to
- d. don't need

d. I

Question 9

- a. this work
- b. to
- c. be finished today
- d. has

Question 10

- a. to
- b. leave tomorrow morning
- c. I
- d. have

LESSON EIGHT

NECESSITY & ADVICE

Which do you use? **must, should, have to, need to, needn't or would ?**

Present and future time -- affirmative

- If I were you, I would see a dentist.
- I think you should see a dentist.
- I think it's a good idea (this is my advice).
- You really must see a dentist quickly.
It's very important
- I have to see the dentist tomorrow.
(a fact; it is arranged).
- He should get a new car. (I think it is necessary.)
- He needs to get a new car. (I know it is necessary.)
- He has to get a new car. (He knows it is necessary.)

Present and future time -- negative

- You don't need to do this exercise; you are good enough already.
(I think it is not necessary.)
- You don't have to do this exercise if you don't want to.
(I am giving you permission not to do it.)
- You needn't do this exercise if you don't want to.
(I am giving you permission not to do it.)
- You shouldn't do this exercise. (I think it's a bad idea.)
- You mustn't do this exercise. (I command you not to do it.)

Past time

- We had to go out. (It was necessary, so we went out.)
- We should have gone out. (It was necessary, but we didn't go out.)
- We didn't need to go out. (It was not necessary.)
- We didn't have to go out. (It was not necessary, so we didn't.)
- We needn't have gone out. (It was not necessary, but we went out.)
- We shouldn't have gone out. (We went out; this was bad.)
(The verbs answer two questions at the same time: **Was it necessary?** and **Did it happen?**)

Ex 13: Obligation - present and future time; Fill in the blank with must, should, have to or need to.

1. In Canada, people with dogs ____ have a dog license.
2. I ____ wear glasses when I read, but I don't.
3. Important notice: These doors ____ be kept locked at all times.
4. I ____ go to a meeting tomorrow. I hope it doesn't take long.
5. It's alright, you don't ____ come to the lesson. I won't mark you absent.
6. Passengers ____ not talk to the driver while the bus is moving or else pay a fine.

Ex 14: Obligation - past time; Complete each sentence/question in column A using a set of answers in column B.

Column A

1. I _____ see the dentist yesterday. It was horrible.
2. Maria _____ see the dentist. She's very lucky.
3. I walked back, thinking I _____ been more careful.
4. He told me that I _____ been so careless.
5. The teacher said we _____ to class.

Column B

- a. didn't have to
- b. didn't need to come
- c. should have
- d. shouldn't have
- e. had to

Ex 15: Change the order of the words or groups of words to make a correct sentence.

Question 1

- a. ought
- b. you
- c. to have done
- d. better than that

Question 2

- a. to
- b. you
- c. be there by now
- d. ought

Question 3

- a. finish it
- b. I was not
- c. to
- d. able

Question 4

- a. better
- b. I
- c. talk to him
- d. had

Question 5

- a. better be
- b. you
- c. had
- d. more careful

Question 6

- a. not been
- b. able to walk
- c. he
- d. has

Ex 16: Please choose the correct word to complete the sentence.

1. Will you _____ attend class today?
2. You _____ clean up that mess!
3. He _____ to be home by now.
4. I _____ be getting on with this work
5. I won't _____ to come.
6. Will you _____ to stay?

LESSON NINE

OTHER MODAL CONSTRUCTIONS

These constructions are not grammatically the same as modal verbs, but they have a modal meaning. We always use the base form of the verb after them.

Be able to

We use it to talk about ability. It is more polite than **can** or **could**.

- Will you be able to attend the class today?
- I'm afraid I may not be able to attend.
- Unfortunately, I wasn't able to attend the class yesterday.

Ought to

We use it for advice, necessity and probability (exactly the same way as **should**)

- You ought not to take it without asking.
- I think we ought to have apologized.
- It ought to be on the top shelf.

Have got to

We use it to talk about necessity for present or future time (the same as **have to**.)

- Have you got to work tomorrow?
- I've got to finish this report before I go home.

Had better

We use it for advice and necessity for a particular present or future time. It is stronger than **ought to** (above) or **should** .

- I think you'd better get some new clothes for the interview.
- We'd better be quick or we'll miss the bus.
- You'd better not be late again or I'll be very angry.

Notice: We nearly always use the short form of had.

Be going to

Going to is a way to talk about future time. We use the auxiliary verb **be** before it and the base form after it.

Formation (be going to + base form)

STATEMENTS

- She is going to have a baby.
- I'm really going to try hard.
- We are not going to have time to finish.
- He wasn't going to tell me.

QUESTIONS

- When are you going to see him.
- What were you going to say?
- Is he going to be at home tonight?

Use

FUTURE INTENTION

- John says he's going to be an engineer when he grows up.
(This is what he wants to be.)
- Are you going to watch the movie this evening?
NOT will you
- I'm going to speak to him about it.
(I have already decided to do this.)

BUT

- I'll speak to him about it.
(I am deciding now.)

PREDICTION OF THE NEAR FUTURE

- He's going to have an accident if he's not careful.
(He's driving very dangerously now.)
- Oh dear! I think I'm going to be sick.
(I feel a little ill already.)

FUTURE IN THE PAST

- I didn't know that you were going to become a policeman.
(I am surprised that you are a policeman.)
- I was going to tell you the news, but I forgot.
(It was my intention to tell you.)

Notice: **Be going to**, or **will**, or present simple, or present continuous?

Ex 17: Change the order of the words or groups of words to make a correct sentence.

Question 1

- to go
- to the beach
- were going
- they

Question 2

- late again
- I
- am going

Question 5

- I
- to call
- was going
- you

Question 6

- to leave the house
- we
- going

d. to be

Question 3

- a. am not going
- b. to tell
- c. I
- d. you

Question 4

- a. to be
- b. it
- c. a bad winter
- d. is going

d. were just

Question 7

- a. to go
- b. am not going
- c. out today
- d. I

Ex 18: Complete each sentence/question in column A using a word or phrase from column B.

Column A

1. It's easy to see that your car _____ start.
2. _____ you just _____ sit there all day?
3. I _____ pass that exam if it kills me.
4. He _____ to tell me.
5. Careful! You _____ an accident!

Column B

- a. 're going to have
- b. am going to
- c. is not going to
- d. are...going to
- e. wasn't going to

Ex 19: Choose the correct word to complete the sentence.

1. I _____ to go to Calgary next week.
2. My stomach feels terrible! I think I _____ be sick.
3. OK, bring it over here. I _____ have a look for you.
4. _____ you help me carry these books, please?
5. Are you _____ watch TV tonight?
6. He's a bad driver! He _____ have an accident if he isn't careful!

LESSON TEN

USED TO

Used to can be a verb or an adjective. The meanings of the verb and the adjective are not the same.

As a verb

It is a past simple formation . Put the base form of the verb after **to**:

used to go, didn't use to go or Did...use to go?

We use it to talk about habits or states in the past.

- Montreal used to be very polluted, but it is cleaner now.
- My uncle used to smoke eighty cigarettes a day. He died at forty-five.
- I never used to like coffee, but now I drink a lot of it.
- We didn't use to watch TV when it was hot.
- Did you use to go swimming when you lived in Victoria?

Notice: We can also use **would** for past habit:

- Henry VIII of England **would** often become angry if anyone disagreed with him.

As an adjective

Put **get** or **be** before used to. After used to, use a noun phrase or a verbal noun.

It means "familiar with". For example:

- I am used to working hard. It is not new to me.
- I am getting used to the cold weather, but it was difficult for me at first.
- Don't worry about the new job. You'll soon get used to it.
- He was not used to living on his own, so when he started, it felt very strange.

Notice: See the difference in meaning:

- He is used to getting up early.
He has got up early for a long time.
- He used to get up early.

But now he gets up late.

Ex 20: Change the order of the words or groups of words to make a correct sentence.

Question 1

- a. in the United States
- b. they
- c. live
- d. used to

Question 2

- a. used to
- b. live
- c. he
- d. next door

Question 3

- a. together
- b. we
- c. play
- d. used to

Question 4

- a. he
- b. used to
- c. be unfriendly
- d. never

Question 5

- a. work so hard
- b. didn't
- c. he
- d. use to

Question 6

- a. he
- b. used to
- c. isn't
- d. getting up early

Ex 21: Complete each sentence/question on the column A to using the set of answers on the column B.

Column A

- 1. I _____ not _____ anything the new teacher said.
- 2. I _____ at the Hyatt Hotel every time I went to Calgary.
- 3. I _____ keen on cars, but now I'm a fanatic.
- 4. Twenty years ago, people _____ to each other.
- 5. I never _____ English, but now I do.

Column B

- a. didn't use to be
- b. used to talk
- c. used to like
- d. did...use to understand
- e. used to stay