

MODAL AUXILIARY VERBS

Modal auxiliary verbs are the verbs that help other verbs to express doubt, certainty, possibility, probability, permission, necessity/obligation and ability. These verbs include **can, could, may, might, will, would, shall, should, must, ought to, dare, need not ...**

The following is the difference between primary auxiliary verbs and modal auxiliary verbs:

Primary auxiliary verbs	Modal auxiliary verbs
-They can be used as main verbs -They change their forms -We can have more than one primary aux. verb in a sentence Ex: be, have, do	-They must be used with other verbs. -They do not change their forms. -We cannot have more than one modal verb in a sentence. Ex: can, may, must...

1. WILL

It is used for:

a. Making predictions

Ex: I think the colour **will** change.

We know he **will** win the elections.

Note: When we use “will” to express future events, we are making predictions.

b. Expressing certainty.

Ex: The principal **will** not be in the office.

I am sure you **will** understand him.

c. Reassuring someone, making a decision.

Ex: It **will** be alright.

I am very tired. I **will** not go anywhere

d. Expressing an offer to do something, a premise or a threat.

Ex: I **will** pay for lunch. (offer)

Don't worry; I **will** be there. (promise)

If you don't do your assignment, your **will** be punished by the teacher. (threat)

e. Making a request.

Ex: **Will** you please pass the message to the mayor?

Who **will** help me to clean the class?

f. Expressing orders and rules.

Ex: All students **will** attend the assembly.

You **will** not see him without my permission.

2. SHALL

It is mostly used in the first person; however, its use is not very common.

It is used for:

a. Making offers.

Ex: **Shall** I get you a cup of tea?

Shall we open the window?

b. Making suggestions or asking for advice.

Ex: **Shall** we go to the stadium?

What **shall** we do? The baby's temperature is high.

- c. Saying what must be done.

Ex: You **shall** keep all your books out of the class during the examinations.

3. MAY/MIGHT

They are used to talk about possibilities in present, past and future. However, may is sometimes used when one is bit more sure, while might expresses some doubt.

They are use:

- a. To show possibility.

Ex: Claude **may** be in the staffroom.

Martin **might** win the cross-country race.

- b. To ask to be allowed to do something or saying that something is allowed.

Ex: I wonder if I **might** use your car.

You **may** go to watch the play tomorrow.

- c. To express polite offers, request or suggestions.

Ex: I had hoped we **might** have dinner soon

May I take a photograph of your baby?

- d. To express a wish.

Ex: May God bless you.

May you have a wonderful day.

May good sense and fairness prevail.

- e. To express permission in a formal and a more polite way.

Ex: May I use the bathroom?

Please teacher, **may** I go out?

Note: For the past, we use “may have + past participle” or “might + have past participle”

Ex: She **may** have been asleep. (perhaps she was asleep)

You **might** have left it at work. (perhaps you left it at work)

4. WOULD

It is used for:

- a. Making polite requests and offers.

Ex: Would you like some sugar?

Would you please call him for me?

- b. Offering advice or suggestions.

Ex: If I were you, I **would** be very nice.

I **would** rather talk to the teacher first.

- c. Expressing other’s willingness.

Ex: He **would** forgive you if you showed remorse.

Is it true that a lion **would** eat grass if it is very hungry?

- d. Talking about outcomes.

Ex: What **would** happen if a market caught fire?

I **would** have forgiven her if she had shown remorse.

e. Talking about past habits.

Ex: When I lived in Uganda, I **would** always visit Kenya in December.

f. Making reported speech when we have “will”.

Ex: “The meeting will start tomorrow”, he said. (direct speech)

He said that the meeting **would** start the next day. (reported speech)

g. Imagining a situation or action.

Ex: It **would** be nice to buy a new car, but we can't afford it.

I **wouldn't** like to live by the sea.

Note: In the past, we use “**would have + past participle**” when we imagine situations or things that didn't happen.

Ex: Kalisa **would have paid** the school fees, but he hadn't been informed.

5. CAN/COULD

They are used in the following ways.

a. To talk about ability, making requests and ask questions.

Ex: **Can** you lift the bag? (ability)

Anitha **can** swim in the lake. (ability)

Could you close the door, please? (request)

Could I visit Stella this afternoon? (permission)

b. In reported speech, **could** is used in places where direct speech has used can.

Ex: “**Can** you speak up?” he asked. (direct speech)

He asked her if she **could** speak up. (reported speech)

c. To express present, past and future possibilities.

Ex: My father thinks you **could** be right.

If I had known it, I **could** have stayed at home.

When I go to the market, I suppose I **could** buy some vegetables.

d. To say what sometimes happens.

Ex: Throat infections **can** cause heart problems.

Temperatures here **can** rise to 40°C.

e. To say that something is possible or allowed.

Ex: You don't have a pen. You **can** use mine.

The word 'dream' **can** be a verb or a noun.

Note: The negative form of can is **cannot (can't)**

Can = be able to

Ex: You **can** see the lake from the hotel.

You **are able to** see the lake from the hotel.

6. MUST

It is used to express:

a. Necessity and obligation.

Ex: Every student **must** work hard.

We don't have much time. We **must** hurry.

You **must** keep it a secret. You **mustn't** tell anyone.

We **must** be very quiet. We **must** not make any noise.

b. Strong advice and invitations.

Ex: I think you **must** read all the set books. (advice)

You **must** watch the play. It is very interesting. (invitation)

c. Something that is certain.

Ex: This **must** be his car. I recognize the registration number.

Note: The past form of ‘**must**’ is ‘**had to**’.

Ex: They **must** do that work. = They **had to** do that work.

7. SHOULD

It is used:

a. To give advice, express obligation.

Ex: You **should** read the instructions carefully. (advice)

Children **should** obey their parents. (obligation)

The visitor **should** be here any time now.

You **shouldn't** believe everything you read in newspapers.

b. To express things which did not happen or may/may not have happened.

Ex: I **should** have taken medicine today, but I forgot.

Mary **should not** have left so early.

You **should** have done something about the problem.

You went to bed late last night. You **should** have gone to bed earlier.

8. OUGHT TO

‘**Ought to**’ has the same meaning as ‘**should**’ when talking about something that should happen/has happened.

Ex: You **ought to** respect elders. (you should respect elders)

He **ought to** have been polite to the visitors. (he should have been polite...)

Jack **ought not to** go to school so late. (Jack should not go ...)

Ought I cross the road right now? (Should I cross the road?)

9. NEED NOT

a. Need not is used to remove necessity.

Ex: They **need not** accompany me.

You **need not** go away from your family without permission.

b. The past form of ‘**need not**’ is ‘**did not need to**’

Ex: I **need not** dance with her. I **did not need to** go with her.

He **need not** read the magazine. He **didn't need to** read the magazine.

10. DARE

Dare means “have the courage to do something”. As a modal verb, it is used in negative and interrogative sentences.

Ex: I **daren't** think how many they are.

How **dare** she criticise us.

Dare he fight?

You **dare not** do that.