

Modal auxiliaries

33 Modal auxiliaries: introduction

Modal auxiliaries are also sometimes called modal verbs or modals.
The following are modal auxiliaries:

Present	Past form
can	could
may	might
will	would
shall	should
must	—
ought to	—
need	—

FORM

- Positive: subject + modal + bare infinitive:
*I **must** see you tomorrow.*
*We **must** go now.*
- Negative: subject + modal + **not/n't** + bare infinitive:
*You **shouldn't** go to bed so late.*
*They **needn't** come if they don't want to.*
- Question: modal + subject + bare infinitive:
***Can** you help me?*
***Will** she be here soon?*
- Short answers: subject + modal auxiliary:
*Yes, we **can**. No, they **won't**.*
- Modal auxiliaries always stay the same.
They cannot be:
 - put into different tenses.
 - used as infinitives.
 - used as gerunds or present participles.
- They can be followed by the infinitive in different forms:

	Active	Passive
modal +	<i>bare infinitive:</i> must take	<i>be + past participle:</i> must be taken
	<i>be + present participle:</i> must be taking	
	<i>have + past participle:</i> must have taken	<i>have been + past participle:</i> must have been taken
	<i>have been + present participle:</i> must have been taking	

Notes

- **need** can be a modal auxiliary only in the question or negative form.
- **ought** is the only modal auxiliary followed by **to**.
- **dare** can be used as a modal auxiliary in the question and negative forms. It can also be used as a main verb followed by the **to**-infinitive.
It is not a common modal auxiliary and is not therefore included in the practice exercises.

Practice

33 Rewrite the following sentences using a modal. The underlined words can be written as subject + modal + verb (or modal + subject + verb in questions). In some sentences, more than one modal is possible.

1 I promise to phone you next week.

I will/I'll phone you next week.

2 At the age of nine, he still didn't know how to read.

At the age of nine, he still couldn't read.

3 It's essential that we leave on time tomorrow morning.

4 Are you able to come with me tonight?

5 It's not a good idea for you to work so hard.

6 It's possible that they'll be here soon.

7 Why don't we go and see a film tonight?

8 He said that he intended to write to me soon.



9 Is it possible for me to sit here?

- 10 He refuses to give me an answer.
.....
- 11 It's not necessary for you to apologize.
.....
- 12 Am I allowed to smoke in here?
.....
- 13 He knew how to speak four languages by the time he was twelve.
.....
.....
- 14 I want to help you but I'm not able to.
.....
- 15 I think it's a good idea for me to stay in tonight: I've got a lot of work to do.
.....
.....
- 16 I don't know who she is but it's possible that she's Rick's sister.
.....
.....
- 17 Do not tell him any of this: it's vital that it remains a secret
.....
.....
- 18 I intend to finish this essay before I go to bed.
.....
.....
- 19 It's 7 o'clock. I assume that Clare will be here soon.
.....
.....
- 20 He's in but he's not answering the phone. I'm sure that he's asleep.
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