

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 been + past participle:</i> must have been taken |
| | <i>have + past participle:</i> must have 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.

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.....

4 Are you able to come with me tonight?

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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.

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12 Am I allowed to smoke in here?

.....

13 He knew how to speak four languages by the time he was twelve.

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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.

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16 I don't know who she is but it's possible that she's Rick's sister.

.....

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17 Do not tell him any of this: it's vital that it remains a secret

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18 I intend to finish this essay before I go to bed.

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19 It's 7 o'clock. I assume that Clare will be here soon.

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20 He's in but he's not answering the phone. I'm sure that he's asleep.

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