

Modal Verbs

Can is a modal verb used to express ability and possibility. However, *can't* is a modal verb used to express inability and impossibility. Read the examples below:

Can	Can't
Ability • <i>I can swim well.</i> • <i>She can play computer games.</i> • <i>He can speak Spanish fluently.</i>	Inability • <i>I can't swim underwater well.</i> • <i>She can't play tennis.</i> • <i>He can't speak English fluently.</i>
Possibility • <i>You can learn to play basketball at a summer camp.</i> • <i>We can go to the cinema in July.</i>	Impossibility • <i>You can't learn to play hockey at a summer camp.</i> • <i>Due to the covid-19 pandemic, we can't go to the cinema now.</i>

Could is a modal verb used to express ability and possibility. However, *couldn't* is a modal verb used to express inability and impossibility. These are the past forms of *can* and *can't* respectively. Read the examples below:

Could	Couldn't
Ability (past) • <i>I could swim well when I was a child.</i> • <i>She could play computer games last summer, but now she must study for the school exams.</i>	Inability (past) • <i>I couldn't swim well last summer, but now I can.</i> • <i>He couldn't speak English fluently some years ago.</i>
Possibility (past) • <i>You could have learned to sky at Sierra Nevada last winter.</i> • <i>We could go to the cinema in January.</i>	Impossibility (past) • <i>We couldn't buy the tickets for the concert, they had sold out.</i> • <i>Due to the covid-19 pandemic, we couldn't go to the cinema in April.</i>

Modal Verbs

Should is a modal verb used to give advice (*aconsejar*). *Shouldn't* is also used to give advice. Read the examples below:

Should	Shouldn't
Advice • <i>I can swim well.</i> • <i>She can play computer games.</i> • <i>He can speak Spanish fluently.</i>	Advice • <i>I can't swim underwater well.</i> • <i>She can't play tennis.</i> • <i>He can't speak English fluently.</i>

Must is a modal verb used to express obligation, while *mustn't* is a modal verb used to express prohibition. Read the examples below:

Must	Mustn't
Obligation • <i>You must do your homework.</i> • <i>People must do their best at work.</i>	Prohibition • <i>People mustn't smoke at the cinema.</i> • <i>"You mustn't come home late", the mother said to her son.</i>

Notice: *can*, *could*, *should* and *must* are modal verbs, so you **don't** add "-s" to the third person singular when using them (*She plays the piano* ≠ *She can play the piano*).

Notice: *should* is sometimes used as a polite version of *must*, so their meaning is similar (*You mustn't smoke cigarettes* ≠ *You shouldn't smoke cigarettes*).

Modal Verbs

Exercises

✚ Choose one of the following modal verbs and fill in the blanks.

Should, can, can't, must, mustn't, couldn't, can't, can, could, shouldn't

- ❖ Sarah _____ play the guitar, she does very well.
- ❖ You _____ eat too much chocolate.
- ❖ I _____ go to Sierra Nevada last winter, but I will go next winter.
- ❖ Martin _____ skate very well, he should practice a lot.
- ❖ Richard's cousin _____ drive a car. He wants to learn next year.
- ❖ Berta is a polyglot, she _____ speak four languages.
- ❖ I _____ study hard to get good grades and learn a lot.
- ❖ You _____ do some exercise, that will be good for your health.
- ❖ People _____ smoke cigarettes, it is bad for health.
- ❖ We _____ go to the cinema in January but we can't go there now.

✚ Write sentences about what you must and mustn't do. Consider the examples.

> fasten your seat belt ⁽¹⁾	> drink alcohol ⁽³⁾	> study hard ⁽⁵⁾
> watch TV a lot ⁽²⁾	> eat too much candy ⁽⁴⁾	> be polite ⁽⁶⁾

1. In the car, I must fasten my seat belt.
2. I mustn't watch TV a lot.
3. _____.
4. _____.
5. _____.
6. _____.

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✚ Write sentences about what you can and can't do. Consider the examples.

> speak Spanish fluently ⁽¹⁾	> ride a bike ⁽⁴⁾	> play hockey ⁽⁷⁾
> speak English fluently ⁽²⁾	> drive a car ⁽⁵⁾	> play football ⁽⁸⁾
> bake a cake ⁽³⁾	> swim well ⁽⁶⁾	> play computer games ⁽⁹⁾

1. I can speak Spanish fluently.

2. I can't speak English fluently.

3. _____ .

4. _____ .

5. _____ .

6. _____ .

7. _____ .

8. _____ .

9. _____ .