



19 Listen and repeat. Then act out.



I know but if I've got it, he won't be able to play it either.

- The modal verbs are: **can, could, must, will, would, shall, should, may, might, ought (to)**, etc. They have the same form in all persons. They come before the subject in questions and take **not** after them in negations. They take an **infinitive without to** after them except for **ought** which is followed by a **to infinitive**.

Can she play tennis? No, she **can't** play tennis but she **can** play golf.

He **ought to** listen to you.

We express **ability** with:

can (ability in the present or future) Can you swim? No, I **can't**. I **can** run fast though.

could / was able to (ability in the past for repeated actions)

She **could / was able to** dance for hours when she was young. (repeated action)

was able to (= managed to) (ability in the past for repeated actions or a single action)

He **was able to** win the race. (single action) (NOT ~~He could win the race.~~)

BUT: I **couldn't / wasn't able to** find my keys. (single action)

He **couldn't / wasn't able to** ski when he was young. (repeated action)

Can is the Present Simple form and **could** is the Past Simple. **Can** borrows the rest of its tenses from the verb phrase **be able to**. She **hasn't been able to** finish it yet.

1

Fill in: **can, could or be able to** in the correct tense.

John: 1) ... **Can** ... you ski?

Dave: Yes, I 2) I went skiing last year and I 3) go down the learner's slope easily.

John: I 4) ski when I was younger but since I hurt my leg I 5) (not).

Dave: Actually, I think ice-skating is much easier. I 6) ice-skate when I was five years old.

John: Really? I tried ice-skating once but I 7) (not) stand up at all!



2 Fill in: **can / can't, could / couldn't, was / wasn't able to or have been able to.**

1 A: I'd like to speak to Mr Turner, please.
B: I'm sorry but Mr Turner **can't**....
come to the phone right now. He's busy.

2 A: I ride a bicycle until
I was ten.
B: Well, I didn't learn until I was twelve.

3 A: How was the test, Lily?
B: It was difficult but I
answer all the questions.

4 A: Is Kim good at languages?
B: Yes, she already
speak French, German and Spanish.

5 A: Maksim was a very talented child.
B: I know. He play the
violin when he was seven.

6 A: you swim, Sophie?
B: Of course. I swim
since I was five.



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We express possibility / probability with:

- **may / might** + present infinitive He **may** be back before noon. (It's possible.)
There **might** be some cheese in the fridge. (It's possible.)
- **could** + present infinitive He **could** still be at home. (It's possible.)
- **must** + present infinitive They look alike. They **must** be twins. (I think they are twins.)
- **can't** + present infinitive You have been sleeping all day. You **can't** be tired.
(I don't think it's possible that you are tired.)
- **Can ...? + present infinitive** **Can** he still be at work? (Is it possible?)
- **could / might** + perfect infinitive We **could have had** an accident. (It was possible but it didn't happen.)

Might is the past form of **may**. **Might** can also be used for present situations, too.

There's a lot of traffic. I **might** be a little late for the meeting.

Functions of Modal Verbs

3

You are Auntie Claire. This is part of a letter that a 13-year-old student has sent you. Read it, then write him/her a letter giving your advice. Use *may / might, could, must or can't*.

Dear Auntie Claire,

I lied to my parents about my exams. When they found out that I had failed, they became very angry. They shouted at me and made me go to my room. They don't let me go out with my friends now. I can't even watch TV. I feel terrible.

Unhappy

Auntie *Claire*



Dear Unhappy,

You 1) ... *may / might* ... have some problems with your family right now but it 2) be that serious. You 3) try talking to a friend or a relative. You 4) have an aunt or a cousin who can help you. You 5) find that discussing the problem with them is better. Your parents 6) really be as angry as you think; they 7) be upset but they 8) realise why you're so unhappy. I suggest you try talking to them again – you 9) be surprised.

Good luck,

Auntie Claire



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May I see Mr Parson?



I'm sorry, you *can't* see him.
He is busy at the moment.

We express **permission** with:

(**asking for permission**)

can (informal)

Can I borrow your pen?

could (more polite)

Could I borrow your car?

may (formal)

May I use your phone?

might (more formal)

Might I see your driving

licence, please?

(**giving / refusing permission**)

can (informal, giving permission)

You **can** have one more if you want.

may (formal, giving permission)

You **may** stay a little longer.

mustn't (refusing permission)

You **mustn't** park here.

can't (refusing permission)

You **can't** enter this room.