

Introduction to modals

Form

The modal verbs are:

statement	negative
can	can't / cannot
may	may not
will	won't / will not
shall	shan't / shall not
must	mustn't / must not

statement	negative
could	couldn't / could not
might	mightn't / might not
would	wouldn't / would not
should	shouldn't / should not

All modal verbs:

- have only one form
I/you/he/she/it/we/they **may** write an e-mail.
- are followed by the bare infinitive
You **should call** Stella.
- do not have an infinitive

Semi-modals

There are also some phrases that we use like modals:

- ought to (ought not to)
- have to (don't have to)
- need to (don't need to / needn't)

Like modals, ought to doesn't change.

Have to and need to change for person and tense like normal verbs and have infinitives.

Watch out!

- We form questions with modal verbs like this:
✓ **Can you** understand what he's saying?
- We use modals with the passive voice like this:
✓ The address **should be written** clearly on the front of the envelope.

Ability

Use	Modal	Example
Ability now or generally	can	Can you use a fax machine?
Ability in the past	could	Tom could read when he was two years old.

Watch out!

We use be able to to form other tenses.

- ✓ It's useful **to be able to** order things by e-mail. (infinitive)
- ✓ Soon, I'll **be able to** speak Italian quite well. (future)
- ✓ Have you **been able to** speak English for a long time? (present perfect)

Permission

Use	Modal	Example
Asking for permission	can / could / may	Can / Could / May I use the phone?
Giving permission	can / may	You can / may send the fax when you like.

Watch out!

May is more polite than could and could is more polite than can.

Advice

Use	Modal	Example
Asking for and giving advice	should ought to	Liam ought to / should watch less TV.

A Underline the mistake in each sentence and write the correct words.

- 1 My older brother can to ride a motorbike, but I can't.
- 2 He'll has his dinner early today because he's going out.
- 3 Do you can come to my party?
- 4 You should to see a doctor about your foot.
- 5 I couldn't bought any bread because the baker's was closed.
- 6 You needn't to do the washing-up. I've already done it.
- 7 The school ought listen to pupils' opinions.
- 8 People shouldn't to drop their rubbish in the street.

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B Look at the pictures and complete the sentences using **can**, **could** or the correct form of **be able to**. You may have to use some negative forms.

Amy really loves playing chess and she (1) play very well. When she was a baby she (2) play chess. She thinks that when she's older, she'll (3) win the national championships!



Amy has (4) ride a bicycle since she was three. She wants to learn to drive when she grows up, though. When she's eighteen, she hopes she'll (5) do her driving test. She (6) drive a car now though. It's against the law!

C Write what they say using the word given.

- 1 Tony wants to borrow his friend's pencil. **could**
'Could I borrow your pencil ?'
- 2 Alex wants to allow her friend to use her dictionary. **can**
' ?'
- 3 Julie wants permission from her teacher to leave the classroom. **may**
' ?'
- 4 Lou wants to wear his brother's new trainers. **can**
' ?'
- 5 Terry wants to ask her boss for permission to take the day off work. **could**
' ?'
- 6 Diane wants to use her dad's car this weekend. **can**
' ?'
- 7 A teacher wants to give her students five extra minutes to finish the test. **may**
' ?'

D Rewrite the sentences using **should** or **ought to** and the words in brackets. You may have to use some negative forms.

- 1 'I need to earn more money.' (a, get, job, new, you)

'You should/ought to get a new job.....'

- 2 'Brenda is angry about what I said.' (are, say, sorry, you, you)

'.....'

- 3 'Tom doesn't understand his homework.' (about, ask, it, he, his, teacher)

'.....'

- 4 'I'd like to learn to play the piano.' (having, lessons, start, you)

'.....'

- 5 'Tina is often tired at work.' (at, late, night, she, TV, watch)

'.....'

- 6 'I don't seem to have much energy at the moment.' (exercise, get, some, you)

'.....'

E Circle the correct word or phrase.



- 1 I've been having swimming lessons and now I **can** / **could** swim really well.
- 2 Please **could** / **should** I use your mobile phone? Mine doesn't have any power.
- 3 Sam **could** / **ought** to get a job instead of complaining about having no money.
- 4 Okay, yes – you **can** / **should** leave five minutes early today.
- 5 Do you think I **must** / **should** tell Michael the truth about what happened?
- 6 I **can't** / **couldn't** read until I was five years old.
- 7 I'm sorry, but you **can't** / **couldn't** leave your car there.
- 8 If you want to pass the exam, you **can** / **ought to** do some revision.
- 9 I know John lived in Tokyo, but I don't think he **can** / **may** speak Japanese.
- 10 Tracy **can** / **could** sing really well now that she's had a few lessons.

F Match to make sentences.

- 1 There's a lot of washing-up; I think we should
.....
- 2 It's getting quite late and we ought
.....
- 3 I don't have much money, but you can
.....
- 4 It's amazing that Andrew could
.....
- 5 Passengers travelling in first class may
.....

- A wait for their flight in the VIP area.
- B borrow some if you need it.
- C to think about getting a taxi.
- D offer to do it.
- E walk when he was just six months