Name:_____ Date:_____

Modal Auxiliaries: Meaning, Certainty, and Tone

Modal auxiliary verbs never show physical action alone. Instead, they pair with a main verb to express the speaker's stance, such as ability, permission, advice, necessity, or certainty.

Section 1: Identifying Communicative Roles

Modal verbs perform four primary communicative roles: **Ability**, **Permission**, **Advice**, and **Necessity**. For items **1-4**, identify the primary role expressed by the bold modal verb.

1. "Drivers **must** stop completely at a red signal."

Role:

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2. "Maya **can** solve complex equations mentally."

Role:

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3. "Students **may** begin their laboratory trials now."

Role:

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4. "You **should** cite primary sources in your essay."

Role:

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Section 2: Degrees of Certainty and Possibility

5. Read the two trail signs below and analyze their urgency.



- **Sign A:** "Hikers *might* avoid the cliff path after dark."
- **Sign B:** "Hikers *must* avoid the cliff path after dark."

Which sign creates a compulsory safety rule, and which suggests a loose possibility? Explain how the single auxiliary verb alters the stakes for a hiker.

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6. Rank these modal verbs in order of certainty from lowest (1) to highest (4): **could**, **must**, **might**, **should**.

Certainty Level	Modal Verb
1. Low certainty (~30% chance)	
2. Theoretical possibility (~50% chance)	
3. High expectation (~80% chance)	
4. Absolute certainty (~100% deduction)	

7. Which sentence correctly uses a modal auxiliary verb to express a high degree of certainty based on evidence?

☐ **A.** With clear tracks in the mud, the bear *might to be* nearby.
☐ **B.** With clear tracks in the mud, the bear *must be* nearby.
☐ **C.** With clear tracks in the mud, the bear *should being* nearby.
☐ **D.** With clear tracks in the mud, the bear *can is* nearby.

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8. A meteorologist observes dropping barometric pressure and severe storm radar returns five miles out. Which modal verb (**will**, **might**, or **could**) best conveys this near-certain forecast in the blank below?

"Severe thunderstorms _____ arrive before nightfall."

Section 3: Grammar Mechanics and the Base Verb Pairing Rule

Modal auxiliaries never take an **-s** ending in the third person, and they must pair directly with the **bare base form** of the verb (no past tense forms and no infinitive "to"). For questions **9-12**, identify the grammatical error and rewrite the sentence correctly.

9. "Julian cans play the cello beautifully when he concentrates."

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10. "Every student must to wear protective safety goggles in the lab."

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11. "The debate team should studied the counterarguments before the tournament."

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12. "Biologists could discovered new treatments if research funding continues."

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13. Explain why the sentence *"She ought visit the library"* is ungrammatical, while *"She must visit the library"* is correct.

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Section 4: The Editorial Desk

You are copyediting an upcoming issue of the student newspaper. Complete questions **14-16** by choosing the most precise modal verb from the word bank.

Word Bank: ought | can | shall | must | could

14. Jordan suggests the editorial staff _____ write that the town may postpone the festival.

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15. Marcus insists that readers _____ know the paper verifies every factual claim before printing.

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16. Jordan concludes that reporters _____ to double-check their modal verbs to protect credibility.

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17. Examine how modal choice affects authorial tone in an editorial argument:

- **Claim 1:** "A later start time *will* eliminate all teenage fatigue."
- **Claim 2:** "A later start time *could* reduce teenage fatigue."

Why does Claim 2 sound more credible and defensible to an informed reader than Claim 1?

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Section 5: Persuasive Application and Revision

Modal verbs control whether a writer sounds timid, dogmatic, or authoritative. Apply your understanding to revise the claims below.

18. Revise this overly timid sentence into a decisive, urgent demand for city action. Use a modal expressing **necessity** (*must* or *have to*).

Draft: "The city council might think about repairing the broken pedestrian signals on Main Street sometime soon."

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19. Revise this overly aggressive claim into a nuanced, scientifically credible claim. Use an appropriate modal expressing **possibility** or **reasoned expectation** (*may*, *might*, or *should*).

Draft: "Consuming energy drinks guarantees that middle school students will fail their morning tests."

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