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

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

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 can swim well.* • *She can play computer games.* • *He can speak Spanish fluently.*	**Advice** • *I can't swim underwater well.* • *She can't play tennis.* • *He can't speak English fluently.*

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 • *You must do your homework.* • *People must do their best at work.*	**Prohibition** • *People mustn't smoke at the cinema.* • *"You mustn't come home late", the mother said to her son.*

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. _____ .

Modal Verbs

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. _____ .