

## 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
<b>Ability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>I can swim well.</i></li><li>• <i>She can play computer games.</i></li><li>• <i>He can speak Spanish fluently.</i></li></ul>	<b>Inability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>I can't swim underwater well.</i></li><li>• <i>She can't play tennis.</i></li><li>• <i>He can't speak English fluently.</i></li></ul>
<b>Possibility</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>You can learn to play basketball at a summer camp.</i></li><li>• <i>We can go to the cinema in July.</i></li></ul>	<b>Impossibility</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>You can't learn to play hockey at a summer camp.</i></li><li>• <i>Due to the covid-19 pandemic, we can't go to the cinema now.</i></li></ul>

*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
<b>Ability (past)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>I could swim well when I was a child.</i></li><li>• <i>She could play computer games last summer, but now she must study for the school exams.</i></li></ul>	<b>Inability (past)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>I couldn't swim well last summer, but now I can.</i></li><li>• <i>He couldn't speak English fluently some years ago.</i></li></ul>
<b>Possibility (past)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>You could have learned to sky at Sierra Nevada last winter.</i></li><li>• <i>We could go to the cinema in January.</i></li></ul>	<b>Impossibility (past)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>We couldn't buy the tickets for the concert, they had sold out.</i></li><li>• <i>Due to the covid-19 pandemic, we couldn't go to the cinema in April.</i></li></ul>

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*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
<b>Advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>I can swim well.</i></li><li>• <i>She can play computer games.</i></li><li>• <i>He can speak Spanish fluently.</i></li></ul>	<b>Advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>I can't swim underwater well.</i></li><li>• <i>She can't play tennis.</i></li><li>• <i>He can't speak English fluently.</i></li></ul>

*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
<b>Obligation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>You must do your homework.</i></li><li>• <i>People must do their best at work.</i></li></ul>	<b>Prohibition</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>People mustn't smoke at the cinema.</i></li><li>• <i>"You mustn't come home late", the mother said to her son.</i></li></ul>

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*).

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### 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 <sup>(1)</sup>	> drink alcohol <sup>(3)</sup>	> study hard <sup>(5)</sup>
> watch TV a lot <sup>(2)</sup>	> eat too much candy <sup>(4)</sup>	> be polite <sup>(6)</sup>

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

1. I can speak Spanish fluently.

2. I can't speak English fluently.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ .

4. \_\_\_\_\_ .

5. \_\_\_\_\_ .

6. \_\_\_\_\_ .

7. \_\_\_\_\_ .

8. \_\_\_\_\_ .

9. \_\_\_\_\_ .