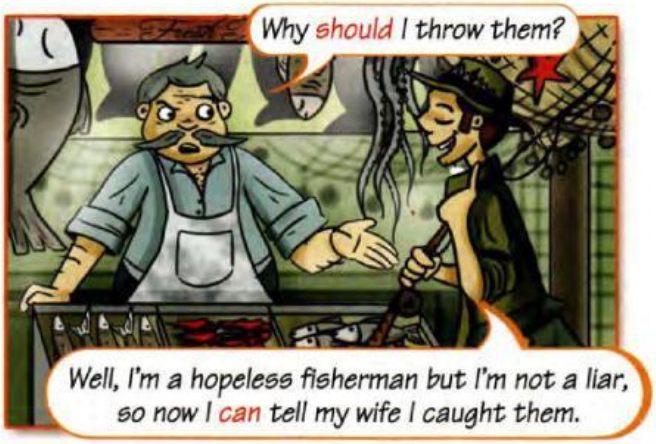
Modal Verbs

5

9 **Listen and repeat. Then act out.**



The modal verbs are: *can, could, may, might, must, ought to, will, would, shall, should, have to, need*. They take no *-s* in the third person singular except for *have to* and *need*. They come before the subject in questions and are followed by 'not' in negations. Except for *ought to* and *have to*, modal verbs are followed by an infinitive without *to*. *Sorry, I **can't** come. I **have to** meet Pam.*

Modal verbs are used to express: ability, possibility, probability, logical assumptions, permission, requests, offers, suggestions, advice, criticism, obligation, prohibition or necessity.

Ability

Can / Be able to (ability in the present/future) 'Can' is more usual and less formal than 'be able to' when talking about the present or future.
*Ann **can** type fast. I **can** pay you next week.* (usual) *I **will be able to** pay you next week.* (less usual)

Was able to (= managed to do) (ability in the past) is used for either repeated or single actions.
*I **was able to** go on a trip round the city last week.* (single action)

Could (ability in the past) 'Could' is more usual than 'was able to.' It is used in statements for repeated actions. However, with the verbs *see, hear, smell, understand*, etc. we normally use 'could' for single actions. *She **could** / **was able to** play the violin when she was six.* (repeated action)
*I **could** smell something burning.* (single action) (**NOT:** ~~*I was able to smell*~~ ...)

Could / Was able to can both be used in negations and questions for either repeated or single actions.
*She **couldn't** / **wasn't able to** pass her driving test.* (past single action)
***Were you able to** / **Could you** get to work every day last week?* (past repeated action)

Can is used in the present. Could is the past tense of can. We use be able to to form all the other tenses. *I **will be able to** get a job when I finish school.*

1 Complete the sentences with *can, can't, could* or *couldn't* and the verbs below.

~~come~~ open read drive use stop

1 I'm sorry I ...*can't come*... to your party on Saturday.
2 Oliver's joke was so funny that we .... laughing.
3 Xenia ..... but she hasn't got a car.
4 "Oh no, my battery's dead! I .... my mobile phone."
5 When Jake was five, he .... and write.
6 Claire tried but she ..... the door.

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5 Modal Verbs

2 Complete the answers using *was / were able to*.

1 A: Did you get to the concert on time?
B: Yes, although there was traffic, we .were.. .able.to.get.there.on.time.....

2 A: Did Ben manage to find his watch?
B: Yes. After searching the entire house, he ... .

3 A: Did you finish your work in the garden?
B: Yes. It took all afternoon but I ....

4 A: Did you have a hard time finding the place?
B: No. We ..... quite easily.

3 Fill in *can / be able* in the correct form.

1 I .....will.be.able..... to speak perfect English very soon.
2 " ..... you hear me, Mum?"
3 They ..... swim since they were five.
4 When he got to the front door, he ..... hear a dog barking inside the house.
5 I would love ..... to fly an aeroplane.

Possibility – Probability – Logical assumptions

Possibility	
may / might / could + present infinitive =perhaps; it's possible that something will happen in the future or perhaps it is true at the moment	*Sam **may / might / could** pass his test this time.* (It's possible that he will pass his test.) *Where's Jean? She **could** be at school.*
may / might / could + perfect infinitive =perhaps something happened in the past	*She looks miserable. She **may / might / could have lost** her job.* (Perhaps she has lost her job.)
Note: Could + perfect infinitive is also used for something which was possible but didn't actually happen.	*Don't drive so fast! You **could have hit** that dog.* (Luckily, you didn't hit the dog.)
Probability	
ought to / should + present infinitive = something is probable now or in the future	*Tom **ought to / should** pass his exams.* (He will probably pass.)
ought to / should + perfect infinitive = we expected something to happen but we don't know if it happened or not	*Has Nancy reached Paris yet? **She ought to / should have phoned** an hour ago.* (We don't know whether she phoned or not.)
Logical assumptions	
can't / couldn't + present infinitive =I don't think so; it's logically improbable	*She **can't** be rich. She lives in a small flat.* (I don't think she's rich.)
must + present infinitive =I think so, I'm fairly sure; it's logically probable	*His face is red. He **must** be very angry.* (I think he's very angry.)
can't is the opposite of must	*It **can't** be true. It **must** be a lie.*
can't / couldn't + perfect infinitive =It's impossible that something happened in the past.	*She **can't / couldn't have lost** her way; she **must have missed** the train.* (= It's not possible she lost her way. It's very probable she missed the train.)
must + perfect infinitive =It's very probable that something happened in the past.	

To express possibility in questions we don't use *may*. We use: *Can he? Could he? Is he likely to? Is it likely that? Might he? Can he* succeed? *Could he* succeed? *Is he likely* to succeed? *Is it likely that* he will succeed? *Might he* succeed? *Can / Could he have* finished? (NOT: ~~May he have finished?~~, ~~May he succeed?~~ ...)

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4 Complete the exchanges with *can't*, *may*, *should* or *must*.

1 A: Are you going out this evening?
B: We're not sure. We ...*may*... stay at home.

2 A: Juliet's not answering her telephone.
B: Well, she ..... be out then because she always picks up if she's in.

3 A: Are the boys playing in their room?
B: They ..... be. They're far too quiet.

4 A: Where's Victoria?
B: I don't know. She ..... have been here by now.

5 A: I ..... have to work late tonight. If so, would you mind starting dinner?
B: Of course not.

6 A: Have you posted your letter to me yet?
B: Yes. You ..... receive it in two days.

10 Listen and repeat. Then act out.

Permission

Asking for permission	
can (informal) / could (more formal) **may / might (very formal)**	***Can*** / ***Could*** *I interrupt you for a second?* ***May*** / ***Might*** *I speak to the bank manager, please?*
Giving or refusing permission	
can (informal; giving permission) **Note: *could* is not used in the present to give permission**	***Can*** *I use your phone? Of course you* ***can****.* (informal) ***Could*** *I use your phone? Of course you* ***can****.* (NOT: ~~*of course you could*~~)
may (formal; giving permission – also used in written notices or formal announcements)	***May*** *I use your phone? Certainly you* ***may****.* (formal) *Luggage* ***may*** *be left here.* (written notice)
mustn't / can't (informal – refusing permission)	*I'm afraid you* ***can't*** / ***mustn't*** *enter the room.*
may not (formal – refusing permission)	*Rubbish* ***may not*** *be left here.* (written notice)
Talking about permission	
can / be allowed to (to talk about the future or present)	*Pupils* ***are allowed to*** / ***can*** *use the school swimming pool free of charge.*
could (to talk about the past – used for repeated actions)	*She* ***could*** *always play at the park after school.* (repeated action)
was / were allowed to (to talk about the past – used for repeated or single actions)	*The reporter* ***was allowed to*** (NOT: ~~*could*~~) *take a photo of the pop singer.* (single action)
couldn't / wasn't allowed to (in negations or questions for either repeated or single actions)	*The foreigner* ***wasn't allowed to*** / ***couldn't*** *enter the country without a visa.* (single action)

LIVEWORKSHEETS