

Introduction to modals

Form

The modal verbs are:

statement

can
may
will
shall
must

negative

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

statement

could
might
would
should

negative

couldn't / could not
mightn't / might not
wouldn't / would not
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.

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!

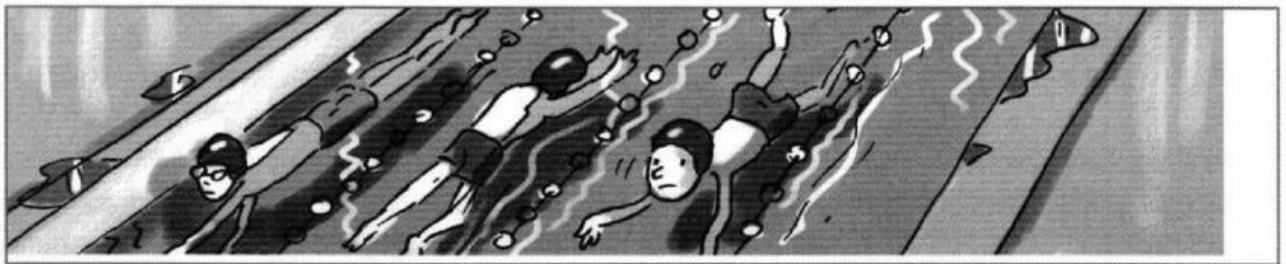
C Write what they say using the word given.

- 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 | | A wait for their flight in the VIP area. |
| 2 It's getting quite late and we ought | | B borrow some if you need it. |
| 3 I don't have much money, but you can | | C to think about getting a taxi. |
| 4 It's amazing that Andrew could | | D offer to do it. |
| 5 Passengers travelling in first class may | | E walk when he was just six months old. |