Modal Verbs

1. Modals of Ability [can/can't/could/couldn't/be able to/(not) be able to]

Can is often used to express ability.

- I can speak three languages.
- They can run faster than me.

Subject + can/cannot (can't) + base verb is used to show ability in present time

- Andy can't come to class tomorrow.
- I cannot learn to play a musical instrument – it's too difficult

Negative forms: cannot or cannot; contraction-->can't

- When Tom was little, he could speak English and Spanish.
- Jerry couldn't come to work yesterday because he was sick.

Past ability and possibility: could and could not; contraction-->couldn't

- Can Gary play the piano too? Yes, he can.
- Can animals reason like humans? No, they can't.

Question forms and short answers

To be able to is also used to express ability

Subject + to be able to + base verb is used to show ability in past and present time. It has the same meaning as can

Affirmative Sentences

- Brad is able to see the board without glasses.
- They're able to translate the letter if you want.
- We were able to swim when we were children.
- She was able to talk before she was one.

Negative Sentences

- I'm not able to write any more on that topic. She is not able to cook anything complicated
- We were not able to speak English before we went to school. He was not able to play football until he practiced regularly
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Questions

- Are you able to go shopping in a foreign country?
- Were you able to drive a motorbike when you were fourteen?

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Modals + be able to: Modals such as should, will, might, may, and be going to can be used with be able to.

- I will be able to get my driver's license after I pass the written test and the driving test.
- We should be able to arrive in Corpus Christi by 11:00 if we leave San Antonio at 8:00.
- I think you might be able to set up the computer on your own without the help of a technician.

Practice

Choose the correct answer from a, b, c , or d:

1. A good 1500-meter runner _____ run in the race in less than 2 minutes.

a- can

b- could

c- was able to

d. couldn't

2) I _____ run at all. I'm very unfit.

a- can

b- couldn't

c- wasn't able

d. can't

3) When I was younger I _____ speak better Italian than now.

a- could

b- can

c- am able

d. couldn't

4) In the end Jessica _____ to save for her hi-fi equipment.

a- could

b- was able

c- can

d. is able

5) He _____ walk at three, but then he became a famous mountaineer.

a- wasn't able

b- couldn't

c- can't

d – was able

LIVEWORKSHEETS

6) _____ play a musical instrument?

a- Could you

b- Can you

c- Are you able

d – Can't you

7) I _____ understand why you won't let me.

a- couldn't

b- could

c- be not able to

d – can't

8) Although it contains many difficult words, I _____ read this book now.

a- can

b- could

c- able to

d – was able to

9) _____ speak a foreign language is always useful when you go abroad.

a- Be able to

b- Being able to

c- Can

d- I can

10) You must _____ swim if you want to come on the boating holiday with us.

a- be able to

b- can

c- to be able to

d- will be able to

11) There was a fire in his office but he _____ escape through a window.

a- can

b- be able to

c- could to

d- was able to

LIVEWORKSHEETS

12) My grandfather was an excellent athlete. He _____ run a mile in just over four minutes.

a- can

b- could

c- couldn't

d- is able to

13) The doctor says he will never _____ play tennis again after his accident.

a- can

b- could

c- be able to

d- is able to

14) After his car crashed, he was so confused that he _____ tell the police who he was or where he was going.

a- could

b- couldn't

c- didn't could

d- isn't able to

15) I live alone because I _____ come and go as I please.

a- can

b- to can

c- being able

d- be able to

2. Modals of Obligation:

(must/mustn't/have to/don't have to/ought to/ought not/need to/need not)

- You must improve your spelling.
- You must get up early.

Must is used to express necessity or obligation.

Must or **need to** are often used when the obligation comes from **the speaker**. We often use must or need to for more personal opinions about what it is necessary to do. When the obligation comes from **somewhere** else, **have to** is often used. We use **have to** for what somebody in authority has said it is necessary to do.

- I must go on a diet as I gained a lot of weight recently. (It's my own idea)
- I have to go on a diet otherwise I might get diabetic soon. (The doctor asked me to go on a diet.)
- I need to call my father to help me solve this problem. (I feel the obligation.)

LIVEWORKSHEETS

- I must remember to get a present for my cousin. (my opinion)
- You have to look after your dogs' hair regularly. (dog experts say so)
- Do you have to wear a tie for school? (asking about school rules)

Ought to expresses moral obligation

- We ought to respect our neighbours.
- You ought to know better.

Absence of Obligation

1. We use **must not** or **mustn't** to express that something is forbidden.

- In America, you must not drive your car on the left.
- In England, you mustn't drive your car on the right.

2. We use **don't have to**, **need not**, or **needn't to** show that there is no obligation.

- You don't have to study now; you can do it later.
- Children need not/needn't drink milk more than twice a day.

Practice

Choose the correct answer from a, b, c , or d:

1. In California, you _____ have a driver's license to drive a car.

a. has to

b. must

c. don't have to

d. must not

2. While you are driving, you _____ listen to the radio. It's not necessary.

a. doesn't have to

b. must

c. don't have to

d. mustn't

3. If you plan to take a long trip in the car, you _____ get a full tank of gas or you might run out of gas!

a. should

b. don't have to

c. has to

d. must not

LIVEWORKSHEETS

4. When you are putting gasoline in your gas tank, you _____ smoke! It is forbidden.

a. don't have to

b. must

c. have to

d. must not

5. It's not a good idea to talk on a cell phone while driving. Drivers _____ do that.

a. should

b. must

c. shouldn't

d. have to

6. In some states, it is illegal to talk on a cell phone in your car. Those drivers _____ use phones in their cars.

a. don't have to

b. must

c. have to

d. must not

7. If you plan to take a long car trip, you _____ take a cell phone with you in case of emergencies. It's a good idea.

a. should

b. must

c. shouldn't

d. must not

8. Drivers on the freeway _____ be very careful because UAE freeways are dangerous.

a. has to

b. must

c. don't have to

d. must not

LIVEWORKSHEETS

9. People who ride horses _____ take their horses on the freeway. That would be a stupid thing to do!

a. have to

b. must

c. don't have to

d. must not

10. In California, you _____ have a driver's license to ride a bicycle.

a. have to

b. must

c. don't have to

d. must not

11. When driving on the freeway, drivers _____ go faster than the speed limit, or they might get a speeding ticket!

a. don't have to

b. must

c. doesn't have to

d. must not

12. Drivers _____ be kind to other drivers on the road. It's a good thing to do.

a. should

b. must

c. shouldn't

d. must not

13. But drivers _____ be kind to other drivers on the road. It's a choice, not a law.

a. don't have to

b. must

c. doesn't have to

d. must not

LIVEWORKSHEETS

14. In the UAE, drivers _____ wear a seatbelt. It's the law.

a. have to

b. must

c. doesn't have to

d. must not

15. Motorcycle riders _____ wear helmets in most countries.

a. should

b. must

c. shouldn't

d. mustn't

16. Motorcycle riders _____ wear a leather jacket. It's their choice.

a. have to

b. must

c. don't have to

d. mustn't

17. Drivers _____ have sunglasses for driving. They make it easier to see, but they're not necessary.

a. have to

b. don't have to

c. shouldn't

d. mustn't

18. When a driver sees an ambulance or fire truck coming, drivers _____ move to the right side of the road to get out of the way.

a. have to

b. must

c. should

d. mustn't

LIVEWORKSHEETS

19. A bus driver _____ have a special license to drive passengers. They pass a test for this license.

a. should

b. must

c. doesn't have to

d. mustn't

20. Passengers on a bus _____ smoke. It is against the law.

a. should

b. must

c. don't have to

d. mustn't

3.Modals of Possibility/Probability : (must/might/may/could)

"Degree of certainty" refers to how sure we are-what we think the chances are-that something is true. If we are sure that something is true in the present, we do not need to use a modal. For example, if I say, "Mariam is sick," I am sure; I am stating a fact that I am sure of. My degree of certainty here is 100%. If I am asked "Why isn't Mariam in class?" and I am not sure of the reason, I can respond in the following ways:

- She must be sick.
- Here, I am 95% sure that she is (not 100%)
- She may be sick.
- Here, I am 50% sure that she is.
- She might be sick.
- Here, I am less than 50% sure that she is.
- She could be sick.
- Here, I am stating a mere guess.
- This is a very weak degree of certainty.

Practice

Choose the correct answer from a, b, c , or d:

1.Bob _____ English 1 next term. If he doesn't, I don't think he can graduate.

a. could take

b. may take

c. must take

d. can take

LIVEWORKSHEETS

2. Judy _____ that book next week.

a. might reads

b. mights read

c. may read

d. may reads

3. Bill _____ ESL 65 next year.

a. may teaches

b. mays teach

c. might teaches

d. might teach

4. Carol may _____ a movie tonight.

a. seen

b. saw

c. sees

d. see

5. The test _____ difficult.

a. may being

b. could be

c. might been

d. could will be

4. Modals of Prediction

"Will" or "Be Going to" to Express a Prediction

Both "will" and "be going to" can express the idea of a prediction about the future. Predictions are guesses about what might happen in the future. If we use going to, there is usually some evidence to support the prediction.

- I think it will rain later .(a guess based on a feeling I have)
- It's going to rain later .(I can see black clouds in the sky)
- Liverpool won't win the FA Cup this year – their team isn't good enough. (a prediction based on my own knowledge and feelings
- Chelsea are going to win the Championship. (I know they have enough points)

LIVEWORKSHEETS

With 'I believe', 'I'm sure', 'I think', we usually use will or won't as we may not have any evidence to support our prediction.

- I think you will pass.
- I believe she will score the highest.
- I'm sure they will win the match.

5. Modals of Permission : (can/could/may)

Can, could and may are used to ask for permission. Can, could and may are almost identical when used as modals of permission. Can is considered more informal than could and may. Since can, could and may are modals of permission, they are used in questions. The modals of permission are usually used with questions involving "I" or "we." However, they can be used in questions that ask permission for everyone except the person or people that one is asking. **Examples**:

- **Can** I have some candy, please?
- **Could** you close the window, please?
- **May** I have a cup of tea?
- **Can** we leave now?
- **Could** you keep the noise down, please?
- **May** I have a glass of water, please?
- **Could** they do it instead of me?

Practice

Choose the correct answer from a, b, c , or d:

1. No, you _____ leave the class without permission.

a. couldn't

b. may not

c. can

d. cannot

2. _____ I bring my juice in class?

a. Can

b. May

c. Be allowed

d Can't

3. Bring your bike. You _____ leave it in the school's garden.

a. may

b. can

c. could

d couldn't

LIVEWORKSHEETS

4. Children under six _____ leave the room without permission.

a. might

b. might not

c. could

d can

5. Sorry sir, this seat is taken. You _____sit on it.

a. can

b. can't

c. should

d. may

3. Modals of Advice (should)

'Should' is the modal for advice. It is used to give advice for or against something.
Note that "should" can be understood as the present or future tense when used as a modal of advice.

- He shouldn't exercise in hot weather.
- You should talk to your mother.

Practice

Choose the correct answer from a, b, c , or d:

1. When you play tennis, you _____clean the ball.

a. can

b. may

c. should

d, can't

2. You look tired. You _____work longer than this.

a. shouldn't

b. should

c. can't

d. will

LIVEWORKSHEETS

3. You _____clean your teeth after every meal.

a. can

b. must

c. should

d. have to

4. This film is so long and boring. You _____waste your time watching it.

a. should

b. can't

c. shouldn't

d. will

5. When you are driving, you _____fasten your seat belt.

a. mustn't

b. can't

c. shouldn't

d. should

LIVEWORKSHEETS