

Modals: ability, permission & requests

1 Read about modal verbs.

Ability

- We use **can** for general ability in the present and **could** for general ability in the past.
*Shoppers **can have** something to eat in our café.*
*Jake **could play** video games when he was only four years old!*
- We use **be able to** to talk about ability in the present, past or future.
*Shoppers **are able to have** something to eat in our café.*
*Jake **was able to play** video games when he was only four years old!*
*Penny **will be able to come** shopping with us on Friday.*
- We can use both **could** and **was/were able to** to talk about general ability in the past.
*My daughter **could/was able to count** money when she was only three years old.*
- We cannot use **could** for a single completed action in the past.
*What a great time I had in Paris; I **was able to buy** some beautiful designer clothes! (~~I could buy some beautiful designer clothes!~~ X)*

Permission

- We use **can** to talk about or ask for permission in the present or future.
*You **can spend** €20 at the shopping centre.*
***Can I use** your credit card this afternoon, Mum?*
- We use **can't** to refuse permission.
*No, you **can't use** my credit card!*

Requests

We use **can** or **could** to ask someone to do something for us.

Can/Could you **get** some meat at the butcher's, please?

2 Read the sentences. In which sentence can we replace **was able to** with **could**? Why can't we use **could** in the other sentence?

- Frieda was able to design her own dresses when she was ten years old.
- What a great time I had at the new department store; I was able to find lots of cool shoes!

Read 7.1-7.3 of the Grammar Reference before you do the task.



3 Circle the correct words to complete the dialogues.

- A: Celia **can / could** read a newspaper when she was three!

B: Really? That's amazing!
- A: The designer **was able to / could** sell lots of his designs at last month's fashion show.

B: I'm sure that made him very happy.
- A: Mum, **can I / am I able to** walk to the bakery to buy some biscuits?

B: No, you ate ten biscuits yesterday!
- A: We **can / will be able to** do lots of shopping in Carnaby Street.

B: I know! I'm very excited!
- A: Dad, can I take some money from your wallet – I want to buy a pair of Nike trainers.

B: No, you **can't / aren't able to**!
- A: **Can / Could** your son ride a bike yet?

B: Oh, yes! He rides up and down the garden all day!
- A: Bridget, **could you / are you able to** go to the corner shop, please?

B: Of course, Mum. What do you need?

Modals: obligation, lack of obligation, prohibition & advice

4 Read about modal verbs.

Obligation

- We use *must* and *have to* to express obligation. We can use *must* to talk about the present or future.
*I **must stop** spending all my money!*
*Mum **must buy** me some new shoes at the weekend.*
- We can use *have to* to talk about the present, past or future.
*You **have to leave** a 10% tip in many Canadian restaurants.*
*I **had to take** the jacket back to the shop because the zip broke.*
*Jordan **will have to pay** his credit card bill next week.*

Lack of obligation

- We use *don't have to* to talk about something that is not necessary in the present and future.
*You **don't have to go** shopping with me now.*
*I **don't have to buy** a present because I'm not going to the party.*
- We use *didn't have to* to talk about something that was not necessary in the past.
*Maria **didn't have to help** me look for a new dress for the party.*

Prohibition

We use *mustn't* to say that something is not allowed.
*You **mustn't take** things from a shop unless you pay for them.*

Advice

We use *should* and *shouldn't* to give advice.
*You **should try** to buy shoes when they are half price.*
*Ben **shouldn't buy** sweets every day.*

5 Read the sentences and underline the modal verbs. Which sentence expresses obligation (O)? Prohibition (P)? Advice (A)?

- You **mustn't** take the shopping trolley out of the department store. _____
- You **should** buy these books – there's a special offer. _____
- All of our shop assistants **must** be friendly and helpful. _____

Read 7.4-7.7 of the Grammar Reference before you do the task.

6 Choose the second sentence, a or b, that means the same as the first sentence.

- It's not necessary for you to get me a birthday present.
 - You **mustn't** get me a birthday present.
 - You **don't have to** get me a birthday present.
- It's a good idea to try on clothes before you buy them.
 - You **have to** try on clothes before you buy them.
 - You **should** try on clothes before you buy them.
- Parents have an obligation to buy food for their children.
 - Parents **shouldn't** buy food for their children.
 - Parents **have to** buy food for their children.
- It wasn't necessary for Diana to pay my telephone bill.
 - Diana **didn't have to** pay my telephone bill.
 - Diana **has to** pay my telephone bill.
- You aren't allowed to take more than three dresses into the changing room at one time.
 - You **mustn't** take more than three dresses into the changing room at one time.
 - You **won't have to** take more than three dresses into the changing room at one time.
- You have an obligation to tell the store manager you took the money.
 - You **must** tell the store manager you took the money.
 - You **should** tell the store manager you took the money.

