GRAMMAR

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!~~ ✗)*

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?

a Frieda was able to design her own dresses when she was ten years old.

b 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.

1 **A:** Celia **can / could** read a newspaper when she was three!
B: Really? That's amazing!

2 **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.

3 **A:** Mum, **can I / am I able to** walk to the bakery to buy some biscuits?
B: No, you ate ten biscuits yesterday!

4 **A:** We **can / will be able** to do lots of shopping in Carnaby Street.
B: I know! I'm very excited!

5 **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**!

6 **A:** **Can / Could** your son ride a bike yet?
B: Oh, yes! He rides up and down the garden all da

7 **A:** Bridget, **could you / are you able to** go to the corner shop, please?
B: Of course, Mum. What do you need?

LIVEWORKSHEETS

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)?

a You mustn't take the shopping trolley out of the department store. ___

b You should buy these books – there's a special offer. ___

c 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.

1 It's not necessary for you to get me a birthday present.
   a You mustn't get me a birthday present.
   b You don't have to get me a birthday present.

2 It's a good idea to try on clothes before you buy them.
   a You have to try on clothes before you buy them.
   b You should try on clothes before you buy them.

3 Parents have an obligation to buy food for their children.
   a Parents shouldn't buy food for their children.
   b Parents have to buy food for their children.

4 It wasn't necessary for Diana to pay my telephone bill.
   a Diana didn't have to pay my telephone bill.
   b Diana has to pay my telephone bill.

5 You aren't allowed to take more than three dresses into the changing room at one time.
   a You mustn't take more than three dresses into the changing room at one time.
   b You won't have to take more than three dresses into the changing room at one time.

6 You have an obligation to tell the store manager you took the money.
   a You must tell the store manager you took the money.
   b You should tell the store manager you took the money.

LIVEWORKSHEETS