

Modal Verbs

MODAL VERBS

Use	Modal Verbs	Meaning / Function	Example
Ability – present	can	Something is possible because someone has the ability	People can access news instantly online.
Ability – past	could	Ability in the past	People could listen to the radio for news.
Possibility	may / might / could	Something is possible	The information might be inaccurate.
Strong probability / deduction	must	You are almost certain something is true	This must be an important news story.
Negative deduction	can't / couldn't	You are almost certain something is not true	This information can't be correct.
Obligation	must / have to	Something is necessary or required	Journalists must verify their sources.
No obligation / necessity	don't have to / don't need to	Something is not necessary	You don't have to read printed newspapers.
Prohibition	mustn't	Something is not allowed	People mustn't share false information.
Advice	should / ought to	Recommendation	You should check the source.
Permission	can / could / may	Asking for or giving permission	May I read the article?
Requests	can / could / would	Asking someone to do something	Could you send me the link?
Offers	can / could / shall	Offering to do something	Shall I send you the article?
Past deduction	must have + past participle	Strong belief about a past event	The journalist must have checked the source.
Past possibility	may/might/could have + past participle	Something possibly happened	The journalist might have missed the story.
Past negative deduction	can't/couldn't have + past participle	Something probably did not happen	They can't have verified the information.
Past criticism / regret	should/ought to have + past participle	Something was a mistake or should have happened differently	They should have checked the facts.
Past negative criticism	shouldn't have + past participle	Something should not have happened	The website shouldn't have published the story.

Important Grammar Rules

1. Modal + base verb

- People **can access** information.

Do not use to after a modal: must to verify → incorrect; must verify → correct.

2. Modal + be

- The information might be false.

3. Modal + have + past participle

- The journalist **must have forgotten** to check the source.

Meaning	Present / General	Past
Possibility	may / might / could	may / might / could have + PP
Strong deduction	must	must have + PP
Negative deduction	can't	can't have + PP
Advice	should	should have + PP
Ability	can	could
Obligation	must / have to	had to

Exercise 1 – Choose the correct modal

1. People _____ access news immediately through their phones.
a) can b) mustn't c) should have
2. This story _____ be inaccurate, so check another source.
a) might b) mustn't c) has to
3. Journalists _____ verify information before publishing it.
a) should b) might c) can
4. You _____ share information that you know is false.
a) don't have to b) mustn't c) could

Exercise 2 – Complete with the correct modal

1. In the past, people _____ wait for the evening news to learn about international events.
2. Today, we _____ receive news notifications on our phones.
3. You _____ believe everything you see on social media.
4. Journalists _____ provide accurate information.

Exercise 3 – Rewrite the sentences

1. It is possible that the story is false. (might)
→ _____
2. Journalists need to check their sources. (must)
→ _____
3. I advise you to read the complete article. (should)
→ _____
4. It was a mistake for the journalist to publish the story without checking it. (shouldn't have)
→ _____
5. I am almost certain that this website is reliable. (must)
→ _____
6. I am almost certain that this information is not true. (can't)
→ _____