

MODALITY

Modals (also called **modal verbs**, **modal auxiliary verbs**, **modal auxiliaries**) are special verbs which behave irregularly in English. They are different from normal verbs like "work, play, visit..." They give additional information about the **function** of the main verb that follows it. They have a great variety of **communicative functions**. Modals are also those helping verbs, which express the 'mode' or 'manner' of the actions indicated by the main verbs. They express modes such as ability, possibility, probability, permission, obligation, etc. The most commonly used modals are shall, should, will, would, can, could, may, might, must, ought to, used to, need and dare. Here are some characteristics of modal verbs:

- They never change their form. You can't add "s", "ed", "ing"...
- They are always followed by an infinitive without "to" (e.i. the bare infinitive.)
- They are used to indicate modality allow speakers to express certainty, possibility, willingness, obligation, necessity, ability

List of modal verbs

Here is a list of modal verbs:

can, could, may, might, will, would, shall, should, must

The verbs or expressions ***dare, ought to, had better***, and ***need not*** behave like modal auxiliaries to a large extent and may be added to the above list.

Use of modal verbs:

Modal verbs are used to express functions such as:

- 1) Ask permission—may, can, could.

Examples: May I come in?, Could I use your pen, please?

- 2) Make a request—can, could.

Example: Could you please give me the doctor's telephone number?

- 3) Express a possibility—may, might, could.

Example: It might rain during the night.

- 4) Give advice or suggestion—should.

Example: You should wear a helmet while riding your motorbike.

- 5) Express necessity or compulsion—must, have to.

Examples: We must slow down while driving in front of a school, I have to submit my project by tomorrow.

- 6) Express prohibition.

Example: You must not talk loudly in the library.

- 7) Express a promise or intention—will, shall.

Example: I will mail you my address.

- 8) Express a wish—may.

Example: May you have a long life!

Examples of modal verbs

Here is a list of modals with examples:

Modal Verb	Expressing	Example
must	Strong obligation	You must stop when the traffic lights turn red.
	Logical conclusion/Certainty	He must be very tired. He's been working all day long.
must not	Prohibition	You must not smoke in the hospital.
can	Ability	I can swim.
	Permission	Can I use your phone please?
	Possibility	Smoking can cause cancer.
could	Ability in the past	When I was younger I could run fast.
	Polite permission	Excuse me, could I just say something?
	Possibility	It could rain tomorrow!

may	Permission	May I use your phone please?
	Possibility, probability	It may rain tomorrow!
might	Polite permission	Might I suggest an idea?
	Possibility, probability	I might go on holiday to Australia next year.
need not	Lack of necessity/ absence of obligation	I need not buy tomatoes. There are plenty of tomatoes in the fridge.
should/ ought to	50 % obligation	I should / ought to see a doctor. I have a terrible headache.
	Advice	You should / ought to revise your lessons
	Logical conclusion	He should / ought to be very tired. He's been working all day long.
had better	Advice	You 'd better revise your lessons