



# Introduction to Modal Verbs

*College of Agriculture  
Department of Agricultural Machines  
English\_3  
Lecture #6*

# Introduction to Modal Verbs

The modal verbs are *can, could, may, might, must, will, would, should, ought to*. They are known as modal auxiliary verbs because they 'help' another verb. (See also Units 1, 5, 8, and 9.)

*I can swim.*

*Do you think I should go?*

## Form

- 1 There is no -s in the third person singular.  
*She **can** ski. He **must** be tired. It **might** rain.*
- 2 There is no *do/does/don't/doesn't* in the question or negative.  
*What **should** I do? Can I help you? You **mustn't** steal!*  
*He **can't** dance. I **won't** be a minute.*
- 3 Modal auxiliary verbs are followed by the infinitive without *to*. The exception is *ought to*.  
*You **must** go. I'll **help** you. You **ought to** see a doctor.*
- 4 They have no infinitives and no -ing forms. Other expressions are used instead.  
*I'd love to **be able to** ski.*  
*I hate **having to** get up on cold, winter mornings.*
- 5 They don't usually have past forms. Instead, we can use them with perfect infinitives:  
*You **should have told** me that you **can't** swim. You **might have** drowned!*  
or we use other expressions:  
*I **had to** work hard in school.*

## Note

*Could* is used with a past meaning to talk about a general ability.  
*I could swim when I was six.* (= general ability)

To talk about ability on one specific occasion, we use *was able to/managed to*.

*The prisoner was able to/managed to escape by climbing on to the roof of the prison.* NOT ~~could~~ escape



## Use

- 1 Modal verbs express our attitudes, opinions, and judgements of events. Compare:  
*'Who's that knocking on the door?'*  
*'It's John.'* (This is a fact.)  
*'Who's that knocking on the door?'*  
*'It could/may/might/must/should/can't/'ll be John.'* (These all express our attitude or opinion.)
- 2 Each modal verb has at least two meanings. One use of all of them is to express possibility or probability. (See Unit 9 p147.)  
*I must post this letter!* (= obligation)  
*You must be tired!* (= deduction, probability)  
*Could you help me?* (= request)  
*We could go to Spain for our holiday.* (= possibility)  
*You may go home now.* (= permission)  
*'Where's Anna?'*     *'I'm not sure. She may be at work.'* (= possibility)

# Have (got) to

## Form

### Positive and negative

I/You/ We/They	have to don't have to	work hard.
He/She	has to doesn't have to	

### Question

Do	I you (etc.)	have to work hard?
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## Use

*Have to* is not a modal verb.

- 1 *Have to* expresses strong obligation. It expresses a general obligation based on a law or rule, or based on the authority of another person. It is impersonal.

*Children **have to** go to school until they are 16.* (a law)

*Mum says you **have to** clean your room before you go out.* (mother's order)

- 2 *Have got to* is common in British English but it is more informal than *have to*.

*I've **got to** go now. See you!*

*Don't go to bed late. We've **got to** get up early tomorrow.*

*'Go and tidy your room.'* *'**Have I got to?**'* *'Yes, you **have!**'*

- 3 *Have to* expresses a general repeated obligation.

*I always **have to** tell my parents where I'm going.*

*Have got to* expresses an obligation on one particular occasion.

*I've **got to** get up early tomorrow to catch a train.*

# *Can and Be allowed to*

## **Form**

### **Affirmative and negative**

I/You/ We/They	can/can't are allowed to aren't allowed to	park here.
He/She	can/can't is allowed to isn't allowed to	



## Question

Can	I/you/we etc.	allowed to	park here?
Am	I		
Are	you		
Is	he		

## Use

*Can* is a modal verb.

*Can* and *be allowed to* express permission. *Can* is more informal and usually spoken.

You *can* borrow my bike, but you *can't* have the car. I need it.

They *can't* come in here with those muddy shoes!

You're *allowed to* get married when you're 16.

*Are we allowed to* use a dictionary for this test?

He *isn't allowed to* park here.

# *Should, ought to, and must*

## **Form**

*Should, ought to, and must* are modal verbs.

I/You/We/They He/She/ It	should/shouldn't ought to / ought not to must	work hard.
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## Use

- 1 *Should* and *ought to* express mild obligation, suggestions, or advice. They express what, in the speaker's opinion, is the right or best thing to do. We often use them with *I think/don't think ...*

*You're always asking me for money. I think you **should** spend less.*

*You **shouldn't** sit so close to the television! It's bad for your eyes.*

*You **ought to** be more careful with your money.*

- 2 *Should I/she/we ... ?* is possible. We often use *Do you think ... ?*

***Should** I try to eat less?*

*Do you think **I should** see a doctor?*

- 3 *Must*, like *have to*, expresses strong obligation. *Must* expresses an obligation that involves the speaker's opinion. It is personal.

*I **must** get my hair cut. (This is me talking to me.)*

*You **must** go and visit your grandmother. (A parent talking to a child.)*

- 4 *Must* is also associated with a formal, written style.

*All visitors **must** show proper ID. (Sign in the lobby of an office building)*

*Books **must** be returned on or before the due date. (Instructions in a library)*



## *Have to and must, don't have to and mustn't*

- 1 *Have to* and *must* are sometimes interchangeable.  
*I must be home by midnight. I have to be home by midnight.*  
But *have to* is used more often than *must*. If you are unsure which to use, it is probably safer to use *have to*.
- 2 *Must I ... ?* is possible, but question forms with *have to* are more common.  
*Do I have to do what you say, or can I do what I want?*
- 3 *Have to* has all forms; *must* does not.  
*I had to work until midnight last night.* (Past)  
*You'll have to study hard when you go to college.* (Future)  
*She's a millionaire. She's never had to do any work.* (Present Perfect)  
*I hate having to get up on cold, winter mornings.* (-ing form)  
*If you were a nurse, you would have to wear a uniform.* (Infinitive)
- 4 *Don't have to* and *mustn't* are completely different.  
*Don't have to* expresses absence of obligation – you can but it isn't necessary.  
*Some people iron their socks, but you don't have to. I think it's a waste of time.*  
*When you go into a shop, you don't have to buy something. You can just look.*  
*Mustn't* expresses negative obligation – it is very important not to do something.  
*You mustn't steal other people's things. It's wrong.*  
*You mustn't drive if you've been drinking. You could kill someone!*

# Making requests: *can, could, will, and would*

1 There are many ways of making requests in English.

Can	you	help me, please?
Could		pass the salt, please?
Will		
Would		

Would you mind helping me, please?

Can	I	ask you a question?
Could		speak to you, please?

Do you mind if I open the window?

Would you mind if I opened the window?

*Can, could, will, and would* are all modal verbs.

- 2 *Could* is a little more formal; *can* is a little more familiar. *Could I ... ?* and *Could you ... ?* are very useful because they can be used in many different situations.
- 3 Here are some ways of responding to requests:
- A *Excuse me! Could you help me?*
- B *Sure.*  
*Of course.*  
*Well, I'm afraid I'm a little busy right now.*
- A *Would you mind if I opened the window?*
- B *No, not at all.*  
*No, that's fine.*  
*Well, I'm a little cold, actually.*



# Making offers: *can, could, will, and would*

- 1 *Will* and *shall / should* are used to express offers. They are both modal verbs.
- 2 The contracted form of *will* is used to express an intention, decision, or offer made at the moment of speaking.

*Come over after work. I'll cook dinner for you.*

*'It's Jane's birthday today.' 'Is it? I'll buy her some flowers.'*

*Give him your suitcase. He'll carry it for you.*

*Don't worry about catching the bus. Dave'll give you a lift.*

*Give it back or we'll call the police!*

In many languages, this idea is often expressed by a present tense, but in English this is wrong.

*I'll give you my number.*      NOT    ~~*I give you my number.*~~

*I'll carry your suitcase.*      NOT    ~~*I carry your suitcase.*~~



3 *Shall / Should ...?* is used in questions with the first person, *I* and *we*. It expresses an offer, a suggestion, or a request for advice.

*'Shall I carry your bag for you?' 'That's very kind. Thank you.'*

*'Shall we go out for a meal tonight?' 'Mmm. I'd love to.'*

*'What shall we do? We haven't got any money.' 'We could ask Dad.'*

We use **should** to make an informal suggestion.

*What should we have for dinner?*

*What should we do tonight?*

THANK YOU

