

Modal	Example	Uses
Can	They can control their own budgets.	Ability / Possibility
	We can't fix it.	Inability / Impossibility
	Can I smoke here?	Asking for permission
	Can you help me?	Request
Could	Could I borrow your dictionary?	Asking for permission.
	Could you say it again more slowly?	Request
	We could try to fix it ourselves.	Suggestion
	I think we could have another Gulf War.	Future possibility
	He gave up his old job so he could work for us.	Ability in the past
May	May I have another cup of coffee?	Asking for permission
	China may become a major economic power.	Future possibility
Might	We'd better phone tomorrow, they might be eating their dinner now.	Present possibility
	They might give us a 10% discount.	Future possibility
Must	We must say good-bye now.	Necessity / Obligation
	They mustn't disrupt the work more than necessary.	Prohibition
Ought to	We ought to employ a professional writer.	Saying what's right or correct
Shall (More common in the UK than the US)	Shall I help you with your luggage?	Offer
	Shall we say 2.30 then?	Suggestion
	Shall I do that or will you?	Asking what to do
Should	We should sort out this problem at once.	Saying what's right or correct
	I think we should check everything again.	Recommending action
	Profits should increase next year.	Uncertain prediction
Will	I can't see any taxis so I'll walk.	Instant decisions
	I'll do that for you if you like.	Offer
	I'll get back to you first thing on Monday.	Promise
	Profits will increase next year.	Certain prediction

Would	Would you mind if I brought a colleague with me?	Asking for permission
	Would you pass the salt please?	Request
	Would you mind waiting a moment?	Request
	"Would three o'clock suit you?" - "That'd be fine."	Making arrangements
	Would you like to play golf this Friday?	Invitation
	"Would you prefer tea or coffee?" - "I'd like tea please."	Preferences

Modal Verbs

[Click here for all the exercises about modal verbs](#)

Here's a list of the modal verbs in English:

can could may might will
would must shall should ought to

Modals are different from normal verbs:

- 1: They don't use an 's' for the third person singular.
- 2: They make questions by inversion ('she can go' becomes 'can she go?')
- 3: They are followed directly by the infinitive of another verb (without 'to')

Probability:

First, they can be used when we want to say how sure we are that something happened / is happening / will happen. We often call these 'modals of deduction' or 'speculation' or 'certainty' or 'probability'.

For example:

- It's snowing, so it **must be** very cold outside.
- I don't know where John is. He **could have missed** the train.
- This bill **can't be** right. £200 for two cups of coffee!

[Click here to find out more about probability](#)

Ability

We use 'can' and 'could' to talk about a skill or ability.

For example:

- She **can speak** six languages.
- My grandfather **could play** golf very well
- I **can't drive**

[Click here to find out more about ability](#)

Obligation and Advice

We can use verbs such as 'must' or 'should' to say when something is necessary or unnecessary, or to give advice.

For example:

- Children **must do** their homework.
- We **have to wear** a uniform at work.
- You **should stop** smoking.

Permission

We can use verbs such as 'can', 'could' and 'may' to ask for and give permission. We also use modal verbs to say something is not allowed.

For example:

- **Could I leave** early today, please?
- You **may not use** the car tonight.
- **Can we swim** in the lake?

Habits

We can use 'will' and 'would' to talk about habits or things we usually do, or did in the past.

For example:

- When I lived in Italy, we **would** often **eat** in the restaurant next to my flat.
- John **will** always **be** late!