

unit
5

Modal Auxiliaries

Modal auxiliaries indicate the speaker's attitude towards the verb that follows. The base form of the verb is used after a modal auxiliary.

Dorothy and Toto must get home to Kansas.
NOT: *Dorothy and Toto ~~must gets~~ to Kansas.*

Attitude	Examples
<p>ABILITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can is used to indicate whether someone is able to do something or not. • Could is used to discuss past ability. Negative forms: can't (cannot), could (couldn't) 	<p>Can you dance? Yes, I can. I can do the tango. No, I can't. (Formal = I cannot dance.)</p> <p>Could you rollerblade when you were twelve? Yes, I could. I could rollerblade very well. No, I couldn't.</p>
<p>POLITE REQUESTS AND OFFERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May, can and could are used with "I" and "we" in a question to ask permission. • Can, could and would are used with "you" in a question. <p>Note: Use can with friends. Negative forms: may not, can't (cannot), couldn't (could not), wouldn't (would not)</p>	<p>May I invite a friend to dinner please? Yes, you may. OR: No, you may not. (NOT: mayn't)</p> <p>Would you like to go to the movies? Yes, I would. OR: No, I wouldn't. NOT: No, I wouldn't like.</p> <p>Could your father call me later please?</p>
<p>OBLIGATION/NO OBLIGATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must is used to express obligatory rules or laws. • Have to is used in less formal contexts. • Must not is used to indicate that there is an obligation NOT to do something. • Don't have to (doesn't have to, didn't have to) is used when there is no obligation to do something. It means that it is your choice. 	<p>You must pay your speeding ticket. You must be a member to enter that club. You have to endorse your cheque before your cash it. You must not park on the streets in winter at night.</p> <p>She doesn't have to practice piano today. You don't have to come to the party.</p>



Attitude	Examples
<p>ADVICE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should is used for giving advice (<i>it is a good idea to ...</i>) or expressing a moral obligation. <p>Negative form: shouldn't (should not)</p>	<p>You should do your homework. You shouldn't drink wine on an empty stomach.</p>
<p>CERTAINTY/PROBABILITY/POSSIBILITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will is used to express certainty. Note: <i>Will</i> is also used to express the future. • Must is used to express probability. • Could, may and might are used to express possibility. Might often indicates less possibility than could or may. • Can't is used to indicate something is not possible. <p>Negative forms: won't (will not), must not, couldn't (could not), may not, might not, can't (cannot)</p>	<p>It's raining! He will get wet without an umbrella.</p> <p>The doctor must be here. I saw her car outside. Look at those storm clouds. It could snow today. I'm not sure what to order. I might have a steak for a change.</p> <p>The baby can't be hungry. I just fed her an hour ago.</p>

Exercise 1

What do the modals *can* and *could* mean in the sentences below? Circle your choice.

EXAMPLE: If you are a student, you can use the exercise room for free.

- a) you are able to
- b) you are allowed to

1. She can drive, but she doesn't have a license.
 - a) she is able to
 - b) she is allowed to
2. Mohamed can eat a large pizza all by himself when he's hungry.
 - a) he is able to
 - b) he is allowed to
3. Sung Lee can use my guitar if he wants to.
 - a) he is able to
 - b) he is allowed to
4. My grandfather could always beat me at chess.
 - a) he was able to
 - b) he was allowed to
5. When Krista was little, she could eat her dessert before her dinner if she wanted to.
 - a) she was able to
 - b) she was allowed to

Exercise 2

Write ten sentences about what you could (or couldn't) do as a child compared to what you can (or can't) do as an adult.

EXAMPLE: *When I was a child, I **couldn't** ride my bike in the street, but now I **can** ride my bike all over the city.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Exercise 3

The following chart indicates different levels of formality.

Level	Requests with "I"	Requests with "you"
informal (friendly) semi-formal formal, very polite	Can I help you? Could I help you? May I help you?	Can you open the door for me? Could you open the door for me? Would you open the door for me?

Look at the context and read the sentence. Then fill in the appropriate auxiliary.

can could may would

EXAMPLE: Two friends in a restaurant:

_____ *Can* you lend me five bucks to pay for lunch?

1. A written note to your teacher:

_____ I take the exam another day? I'm going to be leaving for Europe the day of our last class.

2. A child asking her mother if she can watch TV:

_____ I watch TV, Mommy?

3. A patient asking the secretary for an appointment with the doctor:

_____ I have an appointment in about a month's time please?

4. A doctor asking you to put on a blue hospital gown before an exam:

_____ you put on this gown please?

5. A stranger at a nearby table asking if anyone minds if he or she smokes:

_____ you mind if I smoke?

Exercise 4

Complete the sentences with *can't* or *must*.

EXAMPLE: Yoshi has worked for the last four years without taking any time off.
He must be ready for a vacation.

1. Lee is always here, but she didn't come to school today. She _____ be sick.
2. Karen and Roy are seeing a marriage counselor. They _____ be having problems.
3. Do you hear a cell phone ringing? It _____ be mine. I turned it off.
4. Philip just got a promotion. He _____ be thrilled!
5. Peekay told me he wants to become an astronaut. He's too old. He _____ be serious.
6. Mr. and Mrs. Stevens _____ be away. I don't see their car.
7. It _____ be very cold. The kids aren't wearing coats.
8. A: Hurry! We're late.
B: We _____ be late! My watch says 5:50 and we don't have to be there until 6:30.
9. I hear that Tammy is in Mexico. She _____ be having fun!
10. A: My CD player is broken.
B: It _____ be broken. It's brand new.

Interact 1



In small groups, discuss how certain these people are about what they are saying. Pay careful attention to the modal auxiliary used. Use the following scale in your discussion:

- 1 – not certain
- 2 – possible
- 3 – very certain

EXAMPLE: After studying for the math exam, Suzie says: "I **may be** able to get 100 percent in the course." 2: *Possible*

1. John had a skiing accident. The doctor who examined his leg said, "Your leg **could be broken**."
2. I told my friends I wanted to be a comedian and they said, "You **must be joking!**"
3. Some friends are talking about vacations. One says, "We **might go** to Portugal in the spring."
4. Our cat died. I suppose we **could get** another cat.
5. We've always wanted to go rock climbing. We **may try** it after school is finished.
6. No, I don't agree. You **must be** mistaken.
7. If you jump off that cliff, you'll **die**.
8. I **might be** pregnant.
9. Noreen can't find her purse. She says, "I **can't have** left it at home. I bought some coffee on the way to work."
10. The weather report says it **may rain** tomorrow.

NEGATIVE AND QUESTION FORMATION WITH MODAL AUXILIARIES

Forming Negative Statements	Forming Yes/No Questions	Forming Information Questions
They can work tomorrow. ↓ ↓ They can't work tomorrow.	They can work tomorrow. ↓ ↓ Can they work tomorrow?	They can work tomorrow. ↓ ↓ ↓ When can they work ?
He could print the book. ↓ ↓ He couldn't print the book.	He could print the book. ↓ ↓ Could he print the book?	He could print the book. ↓ ↓ ↓ What could he print ?
We should drink more milk. ↓ ↓ We shouldn't drink more milk.	We should drink more milk. ↓ ↓ Should we drink more milk?	We should drink more milk. ↓ ↓ ↓ What should we drink ?

Exercise 5

Write the verbs in the following sentences in the negative form. Just rewrite the auxiliary and the verb.

EXAMPLE: Users **have to be** careful of viruses with this new system.

don't have to be

- Parents **must censor** their children's reading material.
- Schools **should force** students to limit their research to the Internet.
- Internet users **can be** sure all Internet sites are dependable.
- You **can find** everything on the Internet.
- A Webmaster **has to approve** the content of an Internet site.
- Lewis **had to list** his references for his final composition exam.
- The information on that site **might be** true.
- Students **may make** the best decision based on that information.
- Careful research **could lead** to such an error.
- An expert **would be** impressed by that site.

Exercise 6

Write questions about the underlined parts of the sentences. See page 6 for common WH questions.

EXAMPLE: Students must wear gloves in the chemistry lab to protect their hands from acid burns.

Why must students wear gloves in the chemistry lab?

1. Isolation and cramped quarters can have a bad effect on team morale.

2. A good astronaut should listen well in order to function as part of a space team.

3. Group dynamics can vastly improve the success of a space mission.

4. The accumulation of fluids in the face may distort normal facial expressions.

5. One astronaut might misunderstand another's reaction because of this distortion.

6. Credit card holders must pay a minimum amount each month.

7. Rachel must now pay off \$3500 in credit card debts.

8. Banks should not send out unsolicited credit cards.

9. In the 1970s, you could pay for most things by cheque.

10. Stores had to change their policy because there were too many bad cheques.

Interact 2



What would you do?

In small groups, take turns reading the scenarios below. After you read the scenario, say what you think the person should do. Ask if your partners agree with you. If they don't, try to persuade them that you are right.

1. A man returns a saw that he rented for the weekend. Instead of charging him \$75 (\$25 a day) plus tax, they only charge him \$25 plus tax by mistake. Should he tell them about their mistake?

2. Candice loves to eat chocolate and she is certain that it helps reduce her stress level. Her doctor has just informed her that the migraine headaches she gets may be triggered by chocolate. Migraines are also often caused by too much stress. What should she do, for example, should she stop eating chocolate?
3. Michael has just been told that he must do 45 hours of mandatory volunteer work as a requirement for his college diploma. He is completely against forced volunteering. Should he do it anyway?
4. A good friend of mine just told me a story about herself that I know couldn't be true. Should I tell her I think she is lying (not telling the truth)?
5. I saw my best friend's boyfriend out with another girl last night. Should I tell my friend about her boyfriend?
6. A woman asks to exchange her defective bus pass for one that scans better. It's November 25, but they accidentally give her December's pass. Should she tell them about their mistake or keep the new pass and be quiet about it?
7. Peekay has wanted to be an astronaut all his life. He just found out that the space program will be testing for new astronauts the following year. He's thirty-three years old. Should he spend the next year preparing for the test?
8. Sam's mother, who has been divorced for six years, tells him that she is thinking of getting married. The problem is that he hates her boyfriend. Sam is eighteen and will probably only live at home for one or two more years. What should he say to her?
9. Your friend's rent is due on the first (a Wednesday), but she doesn't get paid until the third (a Friday). She asks you to lend her money. What should you do?
10. Winnie is on the metro. Across from her, a man suddenly falls on the floor and starts twitching violently. It looks like an epileptic seizure. Nobody else is doing anything. In fact, many people are looking away. What should she do?