

# Modals

- Modals are helping verbs
- Used with the base form of the verb, modals create verbal phrases.
- Modals do not change form.
- Modals never end in “s” even in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular
- Use “not” to make modal verbs negative.
- Don’t use double modals.
- Modals lack past tense forms, except **could** and **would** which serve as the past of **can** and **will**.

can	may	shall	will
could	might	should	would
	must		

<b>Can</b>	<p>present ability – I <i>can</i> ride a bike.</p> <p>opportunity – She <i>can</i> help you learn to ride a bike, when she is finished studying.</p> <p>permission – <i>Can</i> I try to ride the bike now?</p> <p>possibility and conditional – Anyone <i>can</i> learn to ride a bike, <i>if</i> they are not afraid to try.</p> <p>request – <i>Can</i> you teach me to ride a bike?</p> <p>willingness – I <i>can</i> teach you.</p>	
<b>Could</b>	<p>past ability – I <i>could</i> ride a bike when I was younger.</p> <p>conditional – He <i>could</i> learn to ride a two wheeler, <i>if</i> his father removes the training wheels.</p> <p>possibility – Bill <i>could</i> be the best bike rider with some more practice.</p> <p>suggestion – Mark <i>could</i> ride his bike to campus, instead of driving his car.</p> <p>request – <i>Could</i> I use your bike?</p>	
<b>May</b>	<p>polite request or permission – <i>May</i> I borrow your bike?</p> <p>possibility – He <i>may</i> be able to help you assemble the bike tomorrow.</p>	
<b>Might</b>	<p>possibility, but not certainty – I <i>might</i> be able to let you borrow the bike, after I put air in the tires.</p> <p>conditional – This bike <i>might</i> be a good choice for cross country riding, <i>if</i> the seat is comfortable.</p> <p>suggestion – You <i>might</i> want to lower the seat, so that your legs reach the pedals.</p>	
<b>Must</b>	<p>strong obligation – You <i>must</i> return the bike, if you use it.</p> <p>necessity – I <i>must</i> ride my bike to get my exercise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substitute must with “have to” – You <i>have to</i> return the bike, if you use it.</li> </ul>	
<b>Shall</b>	<p>formal invitation and future action. – <i>Shall</i> we go bike riding together tomorrow?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• British English</li> </ul>	
<b>Should</b>	<p>mild obligation, recommendation, advice – You <i>should</i> wear a helmet when you ride a bike.</p> <p>expectation – He <i>should</i> finish the race around noon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substitute should with “ought to” – You <i>ought to</i> wear a helmet when you ride a bike.</li> </ul>	
<b>Will</b>	<p>future intent – I <i>will</i> go riding on Saturday.</p> <p>promise – We <i>will</i> definitely make time to ride together next weekend.</p> <p>prediction – The weatherman, however, reports that the winds <i>will</i> be strong.</p> <p>voluntary action – I <i>will</i> go anyway.</p>	
<b>Would</b>	<p>conditional – I <i>would</i> ride the bike at night, <i>if</i> it had a light.</p> <p>past of will – He <i>would</i> ride his bike before he hurt his knee.</p>	

**Use the base form of the word with the modal. Modals do not change form.**

- He could **ride** for long distances. (correct)      He could **rode** for long distances. (incorrect)

**Modals never end in “s” even in the third person singular.**

- She **should** peddle slower. (correct)      She **shoulds** peddles slower. ( incorrect)

**Combine the base form of the verb with the modals – not with the infinitive “to.”**

- He should ride with traffic. (correct)      He should to ride with traffic. (incorrect)

**Use “not” to make modal verbs negative.**

- I **cannot** ride a bike.
- I **could not** ride a bike because I was afraid of falling.
- I **may not** be riding next weekend because I have to work extra hours.
- She **might not** wear a helmet, but she is careful when she rides.
- Bike riders under 17 years of age **must not** ride without helmets in Pennsylvania.
- Riders **shall not** break the traffic rules that apply to cars.
- When using hand signals to indicate turning, riders **should not** use their right arm.
- He **will not** go riding when it rains.
- The bike club **would not** participate in the race because they objected to the high entrance fee.

**To form questions:**

- **Can** I teach you how to ride a bike?
- **Should** we ask your mother first?
- **Might** it help if I let her know that you’ll be wearing a helmet?
- **Will** you let me take the training wheels off?

**Do not use double modals.**

- He **could can** fix the flat tire.
- I **will might** enter the bicycle challenge marathon.

**Practice: Circle the best modal.**

- He **can/ would** ride his bike when his car broke down.
- Bob **should not/ may not** ride down the middle of the busy road.
- **Might you/ could you** repair my broken wheel?
- My mother always said, “You **could/ought to** wear a helmet to protect your head.”
- **May/ can** I borrow your bike?
- **Can you/ will you** go riding in the park with us on Sunday?
- I **have to/ can** return the bike to the rental shop by 5 o’clock this evening.
- **Shall/ should we** take a tire patch kit with us to make repairs?

**1. Rewrite the sentences using the modal verbs in brackets.**

1. It's possible that Jane will visit Switzerland next year. (could)
2. I'm thinking about taking Spanish lessons. (may)
3. I'm sure they'll be home by now. (must)
4. James definitely isn't eighteen yet! (can't)
5. It's possible the weather will be sunny tomorrow. (might)
6. I'm sure that Mrs Smith didn't leave home. (can't)  
Mrs Smith ...
7. Perhaps she's gone to stay with her mother. (might)  
She ...
8. It's possible that Mr Smith committed a crime. (may)  
Mr Smith ...
9. I'm certain that he buried something in the garden. (must)  
He ...
10. Perhaps he won the lottery. (could)  
He ...
11. I'm sure he bought a new car. (must)  
He ...
12. Perhaps Mr Smith murdered his wife. (might)  
Mr Smith ...
13. I'm sure she's at home. (must)
14. I know that isn't Janet-She's in America. (can't)
15. I'm sure she thinks I'm stupid. (must)
16. I bet I look silly in this coat. (must)
17. They're always buying new cars. I'm certain they have a lot of money. (must)
18. I'm sure he's not a teacher. He's too well dressed. (can't)
19. You're an architect? I'm sure that's an interesting job. (must)
20. I'm sure you're not serious. I know you're joking. (must)
21. I'm sure he's got another woman. He keeps coming home late. (must)
22. This water is possibly dangerous. (could)
23. Politics is sometimes really boring. (can)

**2. Rewrite the sentences using a modal verb.**

1. It isn't necessary for you to take a jacket.
  2. I advise you to see a dentist.
  3. You aren't allowed to talk during the exam.
  4. It's forbidden to park here.
  5. I advise you to study harder.
  6. He is obliged to go to the police station twice a week.
-

- 
7. Tom knows how to speak Spanish.
  8. He had permission to go to the party.
  9. It isn't possible that that is our plane.
  10. It isn't necessary to take a thick coat.
  11. I wish I had paid for half of the meal, but I didn't.
  12. It was wrong of Mary to tell Steve about us.
  13. Perhaps Anita didn't get the text message.
  14. It's possible that they went to the cinema.
  15. It wasn't a good idea to ask the other couple to come with us.
  16. I am certain you haven't seen John because he is on a trip.  
You...
  17. It is possible that Jake is in his room.  
Jake...
  18. Perhaps we will not see them at the weekend.  
We...
  19. I don't know if I will go to the concert.  
I...
  20. They are certain that bringing up children is not easy.  
Bringing up children...
  21. It is unnecessary for you to come.  
You...
  22. I advise him to give up smoking.  
He...
  23. Eating chewing-gum in the class is prohibited.  
Students...
  24. There was an obligation to turn off the mobile phone.  
We...
  25. I didn't have the ability to cook when I was younger.  
I...
-

---

## **KEY**

### **1. Rewrite the sentences using the modal verbs in brackets.**

1. Jane could visit Switzerland next year.
2. I may take Spanish lessons.
3. They must be home by now.
4. James can't be eighteen yet!
5. The weather might be sunny tomorrow.
6. Mrs Smith can't have left home.
7. She might have gone to stay with her mother.
8. Mr Smith may have committed a crime.
9. He must have buried something in the garden.
10. He could have won the lottery.
11. He must have bought a new car.
12. Mr Smith might have murdered his wife.
13. She must be at home.
14. I know that it can't be Jane-She's in America.
15. She thinks I must be stupid.
16. I must look silly in this coat.
17. They're always buying new cars. They must have a lot of money.
18. He can't be a teacher. He's too well dressed.
19. You're an architect? It must be an interesting job.
20. I'm sure you're not serious. You must be joking.
21. He must have another woman. He keeps coming home late.
22. This water could be dangerous.
23. Politics can be really boring.

**There may be more  
than one possible  
answer.**

### **2. Rewrite the sentences using a modal verb.**

1. You **needn't / don't have to** take a jacket.
  2. You **should** see a dentist.
  3. You **must** talk during the exam.
  4. You **mustn't** park here.
  5. You **should** study harder.
  6. He **must** go to the police station twice a week.
  7. Tom **can** speak Spanish.
  8. He **could / was allowed to** go to the party.
  26. That **can't be** our plane our plane.
  27. You **needn't / don't have to** take a thick coat.
  28. I **should have paid** for half of the meal, but I didn't.
  29. Mary **shouldn't have told** Steve about us.
  30. Anita **may not** have got the text message.
  31. They **may have gone** to the cinema.
  32. You **shouldn't** have asked the other couple to come with us.
  33. You **can't** have seen John because he is on a trip.
  34. Jake **may** be in his room.
  35. We **may not** see them at the weekend.
  36. I **may** not go to the concert.
  37. Bringing up children **can't** be easy.
  38. You **needn't / don't** have to come.
  39. He **should** give up smoking.
  40. Students **mustn't** eat chewing-gum in the class.
  41. We **must** turn off the mobile phone.
  42. I **couldn't** cook when I was younger.
-