**MODAL VERBS**

Modal verbs are also called modal auxiliary verbs, modal auxiliaries, or simply modals. These verbs are a subcategory of [auxiliary verbs](http://www.elearnenglishlanguage.com/blog/learn-english/grammar/auxiliary-verbs/) , which means they cannot be used without a main verb. English has ten modal verbs.

Frecuentemente, los verbos modales son difíciles a dominar para estudiantes porque su significación cambia según el contexto. A veces, se puede usar uno de cuatro verbos modales para decir la misma cosa.

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Los verbos modales ingleses, modal verbs, se llaman también modal auxiliary verbs, modal auxiliaries o simplemente modals. Estos verbos son un categoría de verbos auxiliares, es decir que no se puede usarlos sin verbo principal.

Has ten modal verbs.

Can Could

May Might

Shall Should

Will Would

Must Ought

**CAN**: Is indicates ability or possibility.

Birds can sing.

We can speak English.

I can take you to the train station.

Ideas can change.

In questions, the modal can is used to request permission to do something or to ask about possibilities.

[Yes / No questions](http://www.elearnenglishlanguage.com/blog/learn-english/grammar/questions-yes-no/)

Can I help you?

Can Tom eat dinner with us?

[Wh– questions](http://www.elearnenglishlanguage.com/blog/learn-english/grammar/questions-wh/)

Who can answer the question?

When can we have the results?

**Could:** Is used to indicate possibility now.

I could eat three pizzas. (I am very hungry)

This could be my big chance. (this is an excellent opportunity)

The modal **could + have** is used to indicate an unrealized possibility in the past. These examples resemble the conditional (explained below) because there is an implied “if” clause.

I could have told you that.

(If you had asked me)

It could have been a disaster.

(If they had lost control)

The rain could have ruined the party.

(If we had been outdoors)

Note that **can** indicates an ability in the present while **could** indicates an ability in the past.

**PRESENT**

I can speak French.

(I know how to speak French at this moment.)

**PAST**

I could speak French when I was young.

(In the past, I spoke French. Now, I am unable to speak it.)

The modal verb **could** is used to speculate about future possibilities. In the following examples **could** and **might**are synonomous.

It could / might rain tonight.

This could / might be dangerous.

In *Yes / No* questions, **could** is used to speculate about present of future possibilities.

Could she be the assasin?

Could this be a mistake?

Could you return tomorrow?

**Could** and **can** indicate a range of options (hypothetical possibilities).

We could / can go see a movie, or we could / can stay home.

I could / can become a doctor, or I could / can become an artist.

The modal **could** is also used to make requests. In these examples **could** and **can** are synonymous but **could** is more polite.

Could / Can you open the window?

Could / Can you help me move this sofa?

The modal verb **could** is very important in the formation of conditional sentences. Note there are two clauses: one clause contains the modal **could** and the other is the result clause. In these situations, **could** is used to express hypothetical results.

**MAY** AND **MIGHT:** Are used to indicate an uncertain future action. These two modals are synonymous.

I may / might go to the park, or I may / might stay home.

This may / might be a bad idea.

It may / might rain tonight.

The modal verbs **may** or **can** are used to give instructions or permission. **May** is more polite.

You may / can now board the airplane.

They may / can begin the exam in one minute.

The modals **may**, **can***,* and **could** are all used in *Yes-No* questions to make requests. **May** and **could** are more polite than **can**.

May / Can / Could I see your passport?

May / Can / Could we have some more water, please?

Sometimes the modal verb **might** is used in place of **may**, **can**, or **could**, but this is rare in American English.

May / Can / Could / Might I be of some assistance?

May / Can / Could / Might we offer you a suggestion?

The modal **must** is used to indicate a recommendation or an obligation.

You must see this movie.

Tom must see a doctor immediately.

**THE MODALS SHOULD AND** **OUGHT:** Are used to indicate an obligation. In this context, these two modals are synonymous. Remember, **ought** is the only modal verb followed by an infinitive.

You should call your mother.

You ought to call your mother.

I should go home now.

I ought to go home now.

In questions, the modal **should** is used to ask if an obligation exists. **Ought**is never used in questions in American English.

***Yes / No* questions**

Should he call her?

Should we pay now?

***Wh*– questions**

When should we leave?

What should I wear?

**THE MODAL VERB WOULD:** Followed by **like**, is a polite way of stating a preference.

We would like a table for two.

I would like a glass of white wine.

In questions, **would + subject + like** is a polite request for you to make a choice.

Where would you like to sit?

Would you like to start with a salad?

The modal **would** can make a request sound more polite.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **less polite** | **more polite** |
| Come here, please. | Would you come here, please? |
| Stop making that noise. | Would you stop making that noise? |

**Would** is used to explain a possibility which is a result of a hypothetical or real condition.

She would be surprised if you came to the party.

I would go with you if I didn’t have to work.

I would have arrived sooner if I had not lost my keys.

The modal verb **would** is used to introduce habitual actions in the past.

When I was a student, I would swim every day.

When Tom lived in France, he would write me letters in French.

**WILL AND SHALL:** Are used to talk about the future*.*These modals indicate an intention or an action that is expected to happen in the near or distant future. When used in this type of phrase, there is no difference in meaning between these two modals; however, **shall** is rarely used in American English.

I will / shall close the door for you.

Tom will / shall meet us at the train station.

They will / shall graduate in two years.

In *wh-* questions, **will** and **shall** are used to ask about future possibilities.

Who will / shall drive the car?

What time will / shall we meet?

When will / shall I see you again?

In *yes-no* questions, **will** is used to ask a favor and **shall** is used to offer a favor. Note that the modal verb **will** is used with the second person (singular and plural) while **shall** is used with the first person (singular and plural)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **singular** | **plural** |
| **1st pers.** | ~~Will~~ / Shall I close the door for you? | ~~Will~~ / Shall we close the door for you? |
| **2nd pers.** | Will / ~~Shall~~ you close the door for me? | Will / ~~Shall~~ you close the door for us? |

**Will** is also used to ask for information about a likely possibility regarding somebody or something.

Will you stay in a hotel?

Will good triumph over evil?

**Shall** is used to ask about a preference. In these examples, **shall** and **should** are synonymous. However, in American English, **shall** is rarely used. Remember, in questions **shall** is only used in the first person singular and plural.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **SINGULAR** | **PLURAL** |
| **1st pers.** | Should / Shall I stay here? | Should / Shall we stay here? |
| **2nd pers.** | Should / ~~Shall~~ you call him? | Should / ~~Shall~~ you call him? |
| **3rd pers.** | Should / ~~Shall~~ he return later? | Should / ~~Shall~~ they return later? |

**THE MODAL MUST**: Is used to indicate a recommendation or an obligation.

You must see this movie.

Tom must see a doctor immediately.

**Must** is also used to indicate an assumption.

My watch must be broken.

Tom must have left. He is not here.

In *Wh*– questions, **must** is used to indicate an obligation and can be replaced with the modal **should**. In American English, **should** is much more common in this context.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **more common** | **=** | **less common** |
| When should we be there? | When must we be there? |
| Who should I talk to? | Who must I talk to? |

The modal verb **must** is sometimes used to form rhetorical questions, especially when you want a person to stop doing something.

Must you make so much noise?

Please be quiet.

Must he be so cruel?

I wish he were kinder.