

Modal Verbs

When expressing politeness, opinions, making recommendations and suggestions, or simply giving advice, Modal Verbs are very useful. In fact, Modal Verbs are essential in formal situations.

The following group of verbs are called Modal Verbs – can / could, may / might, shall/should, will / would.

Modal Verbs can be part of a Verb Group and express particular meanings, such as ability, possibility, permission, advice, recommendations, necessity, obligation. **Will / shall** and **would / should** are also used to form future tenses.

STUDY TIPS

Modal Verbs are very useful in texts requiring opinions such as IELTS Writing Task 2, and the Speaking test.

When making **suggestions**, and **giving advice** use **should**.

When describing future **possibility** and **probability**, use **may** or **might**.

When giving **opinions**, use **Modal Verbs**.

Remember too, that Modality is a register of politeness.

Modal Verbs are followed by the **infinitive** form of the main verb:

- Eg. I would **like** a weekly bus ticket please.
 You should **have** a rest – you have been studying all weekend.
 May I **borrow** two books at a time from the library?
 You must **be** home and in bed by midnight.
 At the end of the semester I will **return** to my country.

MODAL VERB		MEANING	EXAMPLE
Present	Past		
can	could	ability, possibility	Of course I can swim! I'm an Australian! Yes, I can come tonight. I have nothing else to do. I could do that when I was young.
may		permission	May I start now? Yes, you may. (I permit you.) May I come in? Yes, you may. (I give you permission)
may	might	possibility	I may go to the concert tonight. I am not sure. I might go to the concert tonight. I am really not sure.
should		advice, recommendation suggestion	You look unwell. You should see a doctor. You look tired. You ought to go to bed.
must		necessity, obligation	Drivers must obey the road rules. I must go now. I am late for the meeting.

Future Tenses

Will / shall and **would / should** are also used to form future tenses.

will shall	would should	future	I promise I will return the book when I get to the library. He told me he would not go out because he was studying.
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When making **Future Predictions** or **Speculating** about the future we have several language choices.

1. **Verbs** I guess // imagine // suppose // think // hope // suspect // expect
2. **Modal Verbs** We **may** // People **might** // There **could** be // It **will** be // It **Would**
3. **Conditionals** If... I will // might // could...

Politeness

Some Modal Verbs are used to express politeness, to be more courteous.

Will / Would ; Can / Could

Can / will you help me please. This is a simple request.
Could / would you help me please. This is more polite.

Past Form of *must*

The Past Tense form of **must** is **had to**.

Last night I could not go out because I had to finish my final assignment.
My supervisor said I had to finish the report by today.

Semi-Modals

Some other verbs have a similar meaning to Modals but are followed by “to” and the Infinitive form of the main verb.

Eg. Advice / recommendation / suggestion ought to
Necessity / obligation have to / had to
Necessity need to