



GRAMMAR: MODAL VERBS

1) What are modal verbs?

Modal verbs, also called *modals*, are special verbs which behave irregularly in English. They are different from normal verbs like *work*, *play*, *visit*, etc. They give additional information about the function of the main verb that follows it. They have a great variety of communicative functions.

Here are some characteristics of modal verbs:

- They never change their form. You can't add -s, -ed or -ing.
- They are always followed by an infinitive without *to* (also called *bare infinitive*).
- They are used to indicate modality, which allows speakers to express obligation, certainty, prohibition, ability, permission, possibility, probability, advice, logical conclusion and so on.

2) List of modal verbs and usage

Modal Verb	Expressing	Example
must	strong obligation	You must stop when the traffic lights turn red.
	logical conclusion / certainty	He must be very tired. He's been working all day long.
must not	prohibition	You must not (= mustn't) smoke in the hospital.
have to	obligation	You have to work to earn money.

don't have to/ needn't	lack of obligation	There are a lot of tomatoes in the fridge; you don't have to/ you needn't (=need not) buy any
can	ability	I can swim.
	permission	Can I use your phone, please?
	possibility	Smoking can cause cancer.
could	ability in the past	When I was younger, I could run fast.
	polite permission	Excuse me, could I just say something?
	possibility	It could rain tomorrow!
may	permission	May I use your phone, please?
	possibility, probability	It may rain tomorrow!
might	polite permission	Might I suggest an idea?
	possibility, probability	I might go on holiday to Australia next year.
should/ought to	50% obligation (<i>debería</i>)	I should / ought to see a doctor. I have a terrible headache.
	advice	You should / ought to revise your lessons
had better	advice	You had better (= you'd better) revise your lessons

WORKSHEET

1) Fill in the gaps with a suitable modal verb and write its function. There might be more than one possibility.

- a) There is a lot of meat in the freezer. You buy any.
- b) It's a hospital. You smoke.
- c) He had worked for more than 11 hours. He be tired after such hard work.
- d) I speak Arabic fluently when I was a child and we lived in Morocco. But after we moved back to Canada, I had very little exposure to the language and forgot almost everything I knew as a child. Now, I just say a few things in the language.
- e) The teacher said we read this book for our own pleasure because it is optional. But we read it if we don't want to.
- f) If you want to learn to speak English fluently, you work hard. .
- g) Take an umbrella. It rain later.
- h) You leave small objects on the floor. Such objects be swallowed by children.
- i) You be careful when you drive.
- j) I ask a question? Yes, of course.
- k) You take your umbrella. It is not raining.
- l) There are a lot of clouds in the sky. It rain in a few minutes!
- m) You eat healthy if you want to lose some weight.