

MODALS

- obligation
- prohibition
- ability
- permission

Michela Giordano
mgiordano@unica.it

WHAT ARE MODAL VERBS?

Modal verbs are special verbs which behave very differently from normal verbs. Here are some important differences:

1. Modal verbs do not take "-s" in the third person.

He can speak Chinese.

She should be here by 9:00.

2. You use "not" to make modal verbs negative, even in Simple Present and Simple Past.

He should not be late.

They might not come to the party.

3. Many modal verbs cannot be used in the past tenses or the future tenses. Other forms should be used.

He will can go with us. *Not Correct*

She musted study very hard. *Not Correct*

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ALL MODALS

- can
- could
- may
- might
- must
- ought to
- shall
- should
- will
- would
- have to: this expression is not a modal but is closely related to modals in meaning and is often interchanged with them



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Modals of obligation and prohibition-present

Present	Positive	Negative
have to / don't have to	strong obligation (possibly from outside); rule <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have to go to school. • I have to be home by ten. • She has to wear a uniform at work. 	no obligation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't have to work on Sundays. • You don't have to eat anything you don't like.
must / mustn't	strong obligation (possibly based on the speaker's opinion); necessity; advice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I must study today. • We must say good-bye now. • You must start looking after yourself. 	negative obligation; prohibition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You mustn't smoke here. • You mustn't park here. • You mustn't eat in the classroom.
should / shouldn't	mild obligation or advice; recommending action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You should save some money. • You should take a few days off. • I think we should check everything again. 	mild negative obligation or advice; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You shouldn't smoke so much. • You shouldn't talk to him.

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Difference between mustn't and don't have to

Mustn't means **it's not allowed**, or it's a bad idea.

a) You mustn't eat so much chocolate, you'll be sick.

Don't have to means you **don't need to do something**, but it's fine if you want to do it. There's no obligation at all, no need to do it.

b) I don't have to get up early at the weekend (I can stay in bed as long as I want).

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Modals of obligation and prohibition-past

Past	Positive	Negative
had to / didn't have to	obligation/necessity in the past <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had to wear a school uniform when I was a child. • I had to do all my homework before dinner. • Everyone had to bring something to eat. 	no obligation in the past <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We didn't have to go to school on Saturdays.
must*	changes to 'had to'	-
should have + past participle / shouldn't have + past participle	a past action which didn't happen: the advice / regret is too late <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You should have gone to bed earlier, now you have missed the train. • I should have apologized earlier. 	a past action which didn't happen: the advice / regret is too late <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You shouldn't have taken that job, it was a bad idea. • I shouldn't have spoken to him like that.

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MUST (1)

We can use **must** to show that we are certain something is true. We are making a **logical deduction** based upon some clear evidence or reason.

- a) There's no heating on. You must be freezing.
- b) You must be worried that she is so late coming home.
- c) I can't remember what I did with it. I must be getting old.
- d) It must be nice to live in Florida.
- e) You must be thirsty after all that running.
- f) It must be John. He said he would come at three o'clock.

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MUST (2)

We also use **must** to express a **strong obligation**. This usually means that some personal circumstance makes the **obligation necessary** (and the speaker almost certainly agrees with the obligation or the obligation comes from the speaker himself/herself).

- a) I must go to bed earlier.
- b) They must do something about it.
- c) You must come and see us some time.
- d) I must say, I don't think you were very nice to him.
- e) I must stop smoking.
- f) You must have a permit to enter the park.

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MUST (3)

Must is used to express a **strong recommendation**. It can be substituted for by **should** to mitigate the strength of the sentence.

- a) You simply must see that film.
- b) You must take a day off and have some rest.
- c) You should take a day off.
- d) You should have a rest. = You **ought to** have a rest.

We use **you must** or **we must** for a **very polite invitation**.

- e) You must come round and see us.
- f) We must meet again soon.

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HAVE TO (1)

Have to is used to express obligation (when something is **necessary**). We can also express a **strong obligation**. **Some external circumstance makes the obligation necessary**.

Positive

- a) I have to work very unsociable hours.
- b) She has to wear a uniform.

Negative

- c) I don't have to work at weekends.
- d) John doesn't have to do any work at home.

Question

- e) Do I have to pay in advance?
- f) Does your father have to travel a lot at his job?

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HAVE TO (2)

In British English, we often use **have got to** to mean the same as **have to**.

- a) I've got to take this book back to the library or I'll get a fine.
- b) We've got to finish now as somebody else needs this room.

will have to is used to talk about strong obligations. Like **must**, this usually means that that **some personal circumstance makes the obligation necessary**. (**will** is often used to show 'willingness'.)

- c) I'll have to speak to him.
- d) We'll have to have lunch and catch up on all the gossip.

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The differences between the positive/affirmative forms of **must** and **have to** are sometimes very small and very subtle. However, there is a huge difference in the **negative forms**.

We use **mustn't** to express **strong obligations NOT to do something**.

- a) We mustn't talk about it. It's confidential.
- b) I mustn't eat chocolate. It's bad for me.
- c) You mustn't phone me at work. We aren't allowed personal calls.
- d) They mustn't see us talking or they'll suspect something.
- e) Cars must not be parked in front of the bank.

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We use **don't have to** (or **haven't got to** in British English) to state that there is **NO obligation or necessity**.

- a) We don't have to get there on time. The boss is away today.
- b) I don't have to listen to this. I'm leaving.
- c) You don't have to come if you don't want to.
- d) He doesn't have to sign anything if he doesn't want to at this stage.
- e) I haven't got to go. Only if I want to.

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Must or mustn't?

- 1) She is ill, so she _____ see the doctor.
- 2) It is raining. You _____ take your umbrella.
- 3) You _____ throw litter on the stairs.
- 4) This is a secret. You _____ tell anybody.
- 5) You _____ make noise in the library.
- 6) We _____ hurry or we will miss the bus.
- 7) You _____ eat fruit and vegetables.
- 8) The baby is sleeping. You _____ shout.
- 9) You _____ be friendly to everybody.
- 10) You _____ walk on the grass.
- 11) You _____ take notes during the lessons.
- 12) You _____ speak loudly in hospitals.

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Must or mustn't?

- 1) You _____ light fires in the forests.
- 2) You _____ do your homework.
- 3) You _____ have a shower every morning.
- 4) You _____ drink cold water.
- 5) You _____ watch TV a lot.
- 6) You _____ eat in class.
- 7) You _____ be late for class.
- 8) You _____ listen to your teacher.
- 9) You _____ give place to old people.
- 10) You _____ be polite.
- 11) You _____ fasten your seat belt.

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have to, has to, don't have to, or doesn't have to?

1. When you make pizza, you _____ have some pizza sauce.
2. You also _____ have some cheese on top of the pizza.
3. You _____ have peppers on your pizza, but you can if you want to.
4. A good pizza _____ taste good.
5. So, you _____ choose the pizza toppings that you like best.
6. Personally, I love tomatoes, so I always _____ have tomatoes on my pizza!
7. You _____ make your own pizza, you can buy a pizza from a pizza shop if you want to.
8. Pizza tastes best when it's hot, but you _____ eat hot pizza. You can eat it cold too.

have to, has to, don't have to, or doesn't have to?

- 1) The secretary _____ know how to type.
- 2) A secretary _____ be a woman. The secretary can be a man.
- 3) _____ the secretary _____ work Saturdays?
- 4) No, he/she _____ go to work on Saturdays.
- 5) The secretary also _____ answer the company's phones....
- 6) ...and he/she _____ file reports every week.
- 7) _____ the secretary _____ use a computer?
- 8) Yes, he or she _____ use a computer.

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mustn't or don't have to ?

- 1) It is forbidden. You _____ do that.
- 2) You _____ ask my permission. You can do what you want.
- 3) You _____ speak to the driver when the bus is moving. It's dangerous.
- 4) Help yourself to anything you want. You _____ ask.
- 5) You _____ park here. There is a double yellow line.
- 6) Pay me back when you can. You _____ do it immediately.
- 7) It's optional. We _____ to go if you don't want to.
- 8) I'll tell you a secret. You _____ tell anybody else. Promise?

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mustn't or don't have to ?

- 1) Be on time. You _____ be late or we will leave without you.
- 2) He's a millionaire. He _____ work but he does because he enjoys it.
- 3) I like Saturdays because I _____ go to work.
- 4) This is very important. You _____ forget what I said.
- 5) It's very informal here. You _____ wear a tie unless you want to.
- 6) The train is direct. You _____ change trains.
- 7) In boxing, you _____ hit your opponent below the belt.
- 8) In athletics, you _____ start before the gun is fired.
- 9) In bridge, you _____ look at other people's cards.

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mustn't or don't have to?

- 1) Canadians _____ get a visa to travel to the US.
a) don't have to
b) mustn't
- 2) This bus is free! You _____ buy a ticket.
a) mustn't
b) don't have to
- 3) Shops _____ sell cigarettes to children.
a) mustn't
b) don't have to
- 4) You _____ be late for class, or the teacher will be angry.
a) mustn't
b) don't have to
- 5) You _____ buy the text book for this course, you can borrow mine.
a) mustn't
b) don't have to

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- 6) You _____ pass a test to ride a bicycle.
a) mustn't
b) don't have to
- 7) You _____ live in Canada to study at the University of Victoria. You can take a course by Internet.
a) mustn't
b) don't have to
- 8) In Canada, employers _____ discriminate against women or minorities. It's against the law.
a) don't have to
b) mustn't
- 9) You _____ unplug the computer while it is turned on.
a) mustn't
b) don't have to
- 10) You _____ smoke in a gas station.
a) mustn't
b) don't have to

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MODALS OF ABILITY

Ability can mean two things.

- 1) **general ability:** this is something that once you have learned you can do any time you want, like being able to read or swim or speak a language, for example.
- 2) **specific ability:** this means something that you can or can't do in one particular situation. For example, being able to lift something heavy, or find somewhere you are looking for.

There are three modal verbs used to show ability:

Can

Could

Be Able To

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PRESENT

can / can't (for both general and specific ability)

- a) I can play the piano.
- b) She can speak English.
- c) He can't drive, he's too tired.
- d) We can't come now.

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PAST (1)

could / couldn't (for general ability)

- a) I could read when I was four.
- b) She could speak French when she was a child, but now she has forgotten it.

was able to / couldn't (for specific ability) when someone actually succeeded in doing something.

- a) When the computer crashed yesterday, I was able to fix it. (not 'I could fix it')
- b) She was able to pass the exam, even though she hadn't studied much. (not 'she could pass')
- c) He called us because he couldn't find the house.
- d) I couldn't open the window.

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PAST (2)

There is an exception with the **verbs of sense perception** (*see, hear, smell, taste, feel*) and some **verbs of thinking** (*understand, remember, decide, believe, guess*). When we form sentences that express **ability in particular past situations**, we must always use the modals **could** or **couldn't**. **Was / were able to** or **wasn't / weren't able to** are never used with these verbs.

- a) When I came into the kitchen, I could smell something burning.
- b) When I looked out of the window, I could see a man walking down the street.
- c) The woman spoke only French, therefore I couldn't understand what she said.
- d) I couldn't decide whether to ask her out or not.

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PAST (3)

could + have + past participle (an ability someone had in the past, but didn't use).

We use **could have** to say that someone had the ability/opportunity to do something, but **did not** do it:

- a) I could have played the piano well but I didn't practise enough.
- b) We could have come earlier.
- c) She could have studied law, but she preferred to become a secretary.

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FUTURE

will / won't be able to (general ability)

- a) At the end of the course, you will be able to make your own website.
- b) He won't be able to speak Japanese in a week! It will take months.

can / can't (specific ability)

- c) I can help you tomorrow.
- d) I can't come to the party.

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MANAGE TO

If we want to emphasize that the action is difficult we can use **manage to** in the present or past.

- a) I usually manage to visit 20 countries every year.
- b) I managed to finish the book but it was very boring.

In the negative we can use **couldn't, wasn't able to, and didn't manage to** for a specific action.

- c) I couldn't book the tickets.
- d) I wasn't able to book the tickets.
- e) I didn't manage to book the tickets.

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MODALS: ASKING FOR PERMISSION

We use **can** to **ask for permission** to do something:

- a) Can I ask a question, please?
- b) Can we go home now.

could is more formal and **polite** than **can**:

- c) Could I ask a question please?
- d) Could we go home now?

may is another **more formal** and polite way of asking for permission:

- e) May I ask a question please?
- f) May we go home now?

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MODALS: GIVING PERMISSION

We use **can** to **give** permission:

- a) You can go home now if you like.
- b) You can borrow my pen if you like.

may is a **more formal** and polite way of **giving** permission:

- c) You may go home now, if you like.

We use **can** to say that **someone has permission** to do something:

- d) We can go out whenever we want.
- e) Students can travel free.

may is a **more formal** and polite way of saying that **someone has permission**:

- f) Students may travel free.

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can, could or be able to?

- 1) Last week we _____ swimming, this week we can't. (*can/to go*)
- 2) Maybe the Smiths _____ a new house next year. (*can/to build*)
- 3) If you try hard, you _____ your examinations. (*can/to pass*)
- 4) Dennis _____ the trumpet after four months. (*can/to play*)
- 5) Luke has passed his driving test, now he _____ a car. (*can/to drive*)
- 6) I _____ to him on the phone for three weeks last month. (*not/can/to speak*)
- 7) Alex _____ his homework when his desk is in such a mess. (*not/can/to do*)
- 8) They were so busy, they _____ me a text message. (*not/can/to write*)
- 9) Lisa _____ her dress. She can wear it again. (*can/to clean*)

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can, can't, could, couldn't, or be able to ?

- 1) _____ you swim when you were 10?
- 2) We _____ get to the meeting on time yesterday, because the train was delayed by one hour.
- 3) He _____ arrive at the party on time, even after missing the train, so he was very pleased.
- 4) He's amazing, he _____ speak five languages, including Chinese.
- 5) I _____ drive a car until I was 34. Then I moved to the countryside, so I had to learn.
- 6) I looked everywhere for my glasses but I _____ find them anywhere.
- 7) Gill _____ play the piano. She has never studied it.

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can, can't, could, couldn't, or be able to ?

- 1) I searched for your house for ages. Luckily I _____ find it in the end.
- 2) She's seven years old, but she _____ read yet. Her parents are getting her extra lessons.
- 3) I read the book three times, but I _____ understand it.
- 4) James _____ speak Japanese when he lived in Japan, but he's forgotten most of it now.
- 5) I _____ understand the chapter we had to read for homework. It was so difficult.
- 6) I _____ lift this box - it's too heavy! Would you help me?
- 7) I _____ open this window! I think it's stuck.

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can, can't, could, couldn't, or be able to ?

- 1) Lucy _____ make it to our meeting after all. She's stuck in traffic.
- 2) John _____ play tennis really well. He's champion of his club.
- 3) Unfortunately, I _____ really sing at all. No-one in my family is musical either.
- 4) When the car broke down I was really pleased because I _____ solve the problem.
- 5) Julian _____ play excellent golf when he was only ten.
- 6) My grandmother _____ use a computer until last month. Since then she's been taking lessons at the library.

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can, could or be able to ?

1. I'm sorry, I _____ take you to the airport in the morning because I've got a business meeting at 9 o'clock.
2. I think I _____ pass my driving test before my 50th birthday.
3. One day in the future I think we _____ live on the moon.
4. If we left now, we _____ arrive before the shops close.
5. I'm not working this weekend so we _____ go cycling on Sunday.
6. I _____ meet you for coffee at 11, but I'll only have fifteen minutes.

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7. I'll do the washing and the ironing, but I _____ do the shopping.

8. If we worked together, we _____ finish it before the film starts.

9. She was bad after the accident, but I think she _____ go back to work next week.

10. It's not possible yet, but I think computers _____ do the housework for us in a few years.

11. I _____ go for a run this evening. My parents are coming to visit and I won't have time.

12. I _____ do your job. It's so complicated and stressful.

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could, couldn't or managed to ?

- I _____ play the piano when I was four.
- They _____ to get to the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro, but it took them six days.
- Eventually Luis _____ convince me that there's no future in teaching English.
- Mark wanted to see the final of the European Cup, but he _____ get tickets.
- Henry was so advanced for his age that he _____ burn music CD's when he was 8 months old.

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could, couldn't or managed to ?

- Val and John were amazed that they _____ to drive over the Pyrenees in such an old car.
- I spoke to her for more than an hour, bought her a drink, and finally _____ get her phone number.
- Carlos _____ speak English when he was six years old. His parents are from Liverpool.
- Cathy grew up near the beach in South Africa. She _____ swim, sail and dive when she was very young.
- Danny lost his job at the clock factory because he _____ get up on time in the mornings.

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Complete the sentences using *could* or *couldn't* where possible (the context should tell you which). Where this is not possible use a suitable form of *(not) be able to*.

- She _____ ride a pony almost before she walk.
- Luckily we _____ get tickets for the show.
- We went to the sales and _____ find lots of bargains.
- We _____ find a restaurant open anywhere.
- Jenny wasn't at home but I _____ contact her on her mobile.
- They _____ hear footsteps behind them in the dark.
- I _____ ski until I was in my twenties, when I took lessons.
- He _____ distinctly remember asking for black coffee, not white.
- She didn't want to come, but finally I _____ persuade her.
- Even as a small child, David _____ play the piano really well.

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Complete the sentences using the word in brackets and a word from the box in a suitable form. You may also have to add a word or two.

everything remember dance make meet pick get understand find open
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- We _____ up a real bargain in the sales. (manage)
- They only _____ the problem worse. (succeed)
- He used to _____ like Fred Astaire. (able)
- I _____ that attachment you sent me. (manage)
- She always _____ she did. (succeed)
- He was busy and wasn't _____ me at the station. (able)
- We've finally _____ just the right present for her. (manage)
- It was so embarrassing, I could _____ his name. (never)
- I never _____ the theory of relativity. (could)
- Great news! She's _____ into Oxford after all. (succeed)

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TEST

- I don't have enough money to buy lunch. _____ you lend me a couple of dollars?
a) May
b) Could
- That ice is dangerously thin now. You _____ go ice-skating today.
a) mustn't
b) have not to
- It's way past my bedtime and I'm really tired. I _____ go to bed.
a) should
b) ought
- He _____ have committed this crime. He wasn't even in the city that night.
a) shouldn't
b) couldn't
- John is over two hours late already, He _____ missed the bus again.
a) should have
b) must have
- It's the law. They _____ have a blood test before they get married.
a) should
b) have to

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