

EXPLANATIONS

In English, modal verbs are auxiliary verbs that express modality (obligation, necessity, ability, permission, suggestions, etc.) Although they are verbs, they differ from “regular” verbs. Their differences can be summed up as follows :

- 1- Modal verbs have **no tense**. (there are no present nor past forms)
- 2- They carry no mark for person. There is **no “ s ”** on the third person singular.
- 3- Modal verbs take the **negation directly**. (I may not go)
- 4- They **invert** with the subject to form questions (without auxiliary do : May I go ?)
- 5- They have **no infinitive** form : * to may, * to could.
- 6- You **cannot combine** a modal verb with another modal verb : * I may can go.

[MODAL VERBS AND THEIR FUNCTION]

The following is a list of some of the modal verbs and their function.

CAN

- Physical ability : *“I can lift up the car.”*
- Permission : *“Can I go to the bathroom?”*
- Possibility : *“It can fall.”*
- Knowledge : *“I can read.”*

COULD

- Conditional use of "can" : *“If he told me, I could repeat it.”*
- Future in the past (ability) : *“When it was sunny, I could get out.”*

WILL

- To express the future : *“I will go to Toronto tomorrow.”*
- To express desire/future : *“I’ll have a sandwich.”*

WOULD

- In conditional sentences : *“If I did it, I would be in trouble.”*
- Past habits : *“When I was young, I would visit her regularly.”*
- Future in the past : *“When he did it, I would copy him.”*

SHOULD

- Offers/suggestions/requests : *"You should visit me soon."*
- Duty/obligation : *"You should work harder."*

SHALL

- Future (permission) : *"Shall I open the window?"*
- Future (strong / emotional): *"You shall have it!"*

MAY

- Permission : *"May I go to the bathroom?"*
- Possibility : *"It may rain tomorrow."*
- Wishes : *"May you be happy every day."*

MIGHT

- Possibility (less than "may") : *"I might go there today."*
- Permission (uncertain/hesitant) : *"That might be right."*

MUST

- Obligation : *"You must stop complaining."*
- Deduction : *"Gary must have some problem, he keeps crying."*