

Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Modal auxiliary verbs appear before main verbs. They are used for a number of purposes. Here are some of the most common:

INDICATE ABILITY: She **can** speak English.

GIVE ADVICE: You **should** see a doctor.

EXPRESS CERTAINTY: We **will** finish by 8:00.

INDICATE POSSIBILITY: It **may** rain tonight.

INDICATE OBLIGATION: You **must** attend the last class.

GIVE PERMISSION: You **may** use your dictionaries during the exam.

INDICATE PAST HABIT: When I was little, we **would** go swimming every day.

Unlike other verbs, modal verbs have only one form. In other words, no *-s* is added to modal verbs to indicate third-person singular.

He/she/it **can/should/will/may/must** move.

exercise

20-1

Complete each sentence with the modal auxiliary verb that provides the meaning indicated in parentheses.

1. You _____ (certainty) receive a flight confirmation in the mail.
2. We _____ (advice) leave in ten minutes.
3. There _____ (possibility) be a storm tonight.
4. A notary public _____ (obligation) sign the form.
5. Alicia _____ (ability) draw well.

6. As a child, he _____ (past habit) play soccer every day.
7. _____ (permission) I borrow your pencil?
8. Pets _____ (obligation) be on leashes.
9. I _____ (possibility) leave work early tonight.
10. The package _____ (certainty) be delivered by noon.
11. They _____ (advice) be more careful.
12. _____ (ability) you come with us on Saturday?
13. You _____ (permission) enter the restricted area.
14. When we lived in San Diego, we _____ (past habit) often go to the beach.

Semi-Modal Auxiliary Verbs

English also has semi-modal auxiliary verbs. They are used for many of the same purposes as modal auxiliary verbs.

INDICATE ABILITY: He **is able to** speak three different languages.

GIVE ADVICE: You **ought to** finish the report.

EXPRESS CERTAINTY: We **are going to** complete the project tonight.

INDICATE OBLIGATION: You **have to** attend the meeting.

INDICATE PAST HABIT: We **used to** play basketball together.

Unlike one-word modal verbs, most semi-modals are marked for number and tense.

I **am** able to go.

You **have** to give a speech.

We **are** going to leave.

They **have** to work late.

I **was** able to go.

You **had** to give a speech.

We **were** going to leave.

They **had** to work late.

Used to is an exception. It has only one form and always refers to the past. *Ought to* is another exception. It does not change form; however, the main verb that follows it can.

It **ought to** be easy.

It **ought to** have been easy.

exercise

20-2

Complete each sentence with the semi-modal verb that provides the meaning indicated in parentheses. Use present tense forms.

1. You _____ (certainty) receive an award at the ceremony.
2. We _____ (advice) exercise daily.

3. Jorge and I _____ (past habit) play in a band.
4. We _____ (obligation) pay our tuition by Friday.
5. Devin _____ (ability) run the mile in five minutes.
6. I _____ (past habit) live in New York City.
7. He _____ (advice) take a multivitamin every morning.
8. You _____ (obligation) have a password.
9. They _____ (ability) help us move into our new apartment.
10. The concert _____ (certainty) start at 8:00.

exercise**20-3**

Complete each sentence with the semi-modal verb that provides the meaning indicated in parentheses. Use the past tense if possible.

1. It _____ (certainty) rain, so we left early.
2. She _____ (advice) have rested.
3. We _____ (obligation) pay a service charge.
4. The teacher _____ (ability) remember everyone's name.
5. I _____ (certainty) go with them, but then I got sick.
6. My father _____ (advice) have had a checkup yesterday.
7. Amber _____ (obligation) retype her paper, because she lost her disk.
8. They _____ (ability) hike long distances when they were young.

Combining Semi-Modals

Sometimes semi-modals can be used with other semi-modals or after some regular modals.

They **are going to have to** finish their papers by Friday. [semi-modal + semi-modal]
I **will have to** call you back later. [modal + semi-modal]

exercise

20-4

Underline the modals and circle the semi-modals in the following sentences.

1. I might be able to help you on Thursday.
2. They are going to be able to take a vacation next month.
3. She might have to quit her job.
4. You are going to have to work hard.
5. We will have to take notes at the lecture.

Forming Negatives

To make a modal negative, place *not* after it.

I should **not** eat so much at lunch.

Write the combination of *can* and *not* as one word: *cannot*. Write the other combinations as two words.

To make a semi-modal containing the verb *be* negative, place *not* directly after the *be* verb.

Our teacher is **not** going to cancel the exam.

To make a semi-modal containing the verb *have* negative, place the auxiliary verb *do* and *not* before it.

Jay **does not** have to go to class today.

exercise

20-5

Complete each of the following sentences using a negative form of the modal or semi-modal provided.

EXAMPLE: We, be going to
We are not going to go to the movies tonight.

1. You, should
_____ smoke in this restaurant.
2. We, can
_____ escape the heat today.

3. Martin, be able to
_____ find his books.
4. The supervisor, be going to
_____ be happy.
5. They, may
_____ stay very long.
6. You, must
_____ tell anyone.
7. We, would
When we were little, _____ go inside until 10:00.
8. They, will
For some reason, _____ answer their phone.
9. I, have to
Tomorrow, _____ get up early.
10. You, should
_____ worry so much.

Forming Contractions

Contractions are commonly used in conversation and informal writing.

are + not = aren't
do + not = don't
cannot = can't
will + not = won't

is + not = isn't
does + not = doesn't
should + not = shouldn't
must + not = mustn't

May not is never contracted.

exercise

20-6

Rewrite the sentences in exercise 20-5 using contractions. If *may not* appears, leave the line blank.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Modal Perfect Verbs

Modal perfect verbs follow these patterns:

ACTIVE VOICE: modal + *have* + perfect/passive form of the verb

PASSIVE VOICE: modal + *have been* + perfect/passive form of the verb

These are some of the common uses:

EXPRESSION OF REGRET: I **should have** tried harder.

CRITICISM OF A PAST ACTION OR LACK OF ACTION: He **should have** told me. She **could have** at least called. They **ought to have** told me.

EXPRESSION OF AN EXPECTATION ABOUT AN EVENT THAT MAY NOT HAVE HAPPENED: They **should have** arrived by now.

GUESS ABOUT A PAST EVENT: The window **may have been** shattered by the wind. I **might have** met him before.

STRONG CONJECTURE ABOUT A PAST EVENT: Someone **must have** stolen my purse.

exercise

20-7

Complete each sentence with the modal perfect verb that provides the meaning indicated in parentheses.

1. I _____ (regret, active voice) sent her a birthday card.
2. We _____ (expectation, active voice) heard from them by now.
3. They _____ (criticism, active voice) invited everyone in class, not just a few people.
4. The store _____ (guess, passive voice) closed early because of an emergency.
5. The Angels _____ (strong conjecture, active voice) won.
6. By this time, everyone _____ (expectation, active voice) been ready.
7. You _____ (guess, active voice) lost your wallet in the café.
8. I _____ (regret, active voice) brought an umbrella.
9. There _____ (strong conjecture, active voice) been an accident in this intersection.
10. The package _____ (criticism, passive voice) delivered earlier.