

Modal auxiliary verbs of probability, present and future

- Will: the most certain.
 - o Used to predict a future action.
 - o *I'll see you later.*
- **Must and can't**
 - o Must is used to assert what we infer or conclude to be the most logical or rational interpretation of a situation. We do not have all the facts.
 - *You must be joking! I simply don't believe you.*
 - o Can't: the negative of this use.
 - *Whose is this coat? It can't be Mary's. It's too small.*
- **Should**
 - o It expresses what may reasonably be expected to happen.
 - Expectation means believing that things are or will be as we want them to be.
 - This use of should has the idea of if everything has gone according to plan.
 - *This homework shouldn't take you too long (if you've understood what you have to do).*
 - o Should in this use has the idea that we want the action to happen.
 - It is not used to express negative or unpleasant ideas.
 - *You should pass the exam. You have worked hard.*
- **May and might**
 - o May expresses the possibility that an event will happen or is happening.
 - *We may go to Greece this year. We haven't decided yet.*
 - o Might is more tentative and slightly less certain than may.
 - *It might rain. Take your umbrella.*
- **Could**
 - o Could has a similar meaning to might.
 - *You could be right. I'm not sure.*
 - o Couldn't is not used to express a future possibility. The negative of could in this use is might not.
 - *You might not be right.*
 - o Couldn't has a similar meaning to can't, only slightly weaker.
 - *She couldn't have a 10-year-old daughter! She's only 21 herself.*

bound to ...
likely to ...

Other uses of modal auxiliary verbs and related verbs

→ Ability

- **Can expresses ability.** The past is expressed by **could**.
 - o *I can speak three languages.*
 - o *I could swim when I was three.*
- Other forms are provided by **be able to**.
 - o *I've never been able to understand her. Present Perfect*
 - o *I would love to be able to drive. Infinitive.*
 - o *Being able to drive has transformed my life. -ing form*
 - o *You will be able to walk again soon. Future*
- To express a fulfilled ability on one particular occasion in the past could is not used. Instead we use **was able to** or **managed to**.
 - o *She was able to survive by ...*
 - o *The prisoner managed to escape ...*

→ Advice

- **Should** and **ought** express mild obligation or advice. Should is much more common.
 - o *You should go to bed. You look very tired.*
 - o *You ought to take things easier.*
- We use **had better** to give strong advice, or to tell people what to do. There can be an element of threat.
 - o *You had better get a haircut before the interview.*
 - o *I'm late. I had better get a move soon.*

The form is always past, but it refers to the immediate future.

→ Obligation

- **Must** express strong obligation. Other verb forms are provided by **have to**.
 - o *You must try harder!*
 - o *I had to work hard. Past Simple*
 - o *You will have to ... Future*
 - o *She has never had to do a single ... Present Perfect*
- **Must** express the opinion of the speaker.
 - o *I must get my hair cut.*
- **Have to** expresses a general obligation based on a law or rule, or based on the authority of another person.
 - o *Children have to go to school ...*
 - o *Mum says you have to tidy your room.*
- **Mustn't** expresses negative obligation. **Don't have to** expresses the absence of obligation.
 - o *You mustn't steal.*
 - o *You don't have to go to England if you want to learn English.*
- Related verbs:

to be required to

to be supposed to

need to

→ Permission

- **May, can** and **could** are used to ask for permission.
 - o *May I ask you a question.*
 - o *Can/Could I go home?*
- **May** is used to give permission, but it sounds very formal. Can and can't are more common.
 - o *You can't stay up till midnight.*
- To talk about permission generally, or permission in the past, we use **can, could, be allowed to**.
 - o *Children are allowed to do what they want these days.*
 - o *I wasn't allowed/couldn't to go on my own ...*
- Related verbs:

to be not permitted to

to allow sb sth

to let sb sth

→ Willingness and refusal

- **Will** expresses willingness. **Won't** expresses a refusal by either people or things. **Shall** is used in questions.
 - o *I'll help you.*
 - o *The car won't start.*
 - o *Shall I give you a hand?*
- The past is expressed by **wouldn't**.
 - o *My mum said she wouldn't give me any more money. Isn't she mean.*