

LEARN YOUR MODAL VERBS

MODAL VERB	USE	EXAMPLES
Present & Future		
can / can't	Present ABILITY Informal permission Informal polite request	I can / can't swim very well. You can use my car tomorrow. Can I borrow your pen?
be able to	Present ABILITY (difficulty)	I am able to climb the highest mountain.
will/won't be able to	Future ABILITY (I will be able to swim by the end of the course)	(I will be able to run a race next Sunday)
shall	polite question to make a suggestion	Shall I open the window?
may(not) might(not) could(not)	Formal permission Polite request (only with I or we) Present & Future POSSIBILITY	You may leave the room. May I borrow your pen? I may go to the beach next month. He might not get tickets.
can't must	Present Logical DEDUCTION Believe or guess something is impossible Certain something is true (not mustn't)	It can't be time to go already! He must be on holiday / He mustn't be at the gym (can't be)
ought(not) to should(not)	Give ADVICE and make recommendations (present)	You ought(not) to overdo it. You should(not) overdo it.
had better(not)+inf	To give very strong ADVICE or make threats (present)	You'd better go or we'll be late. You'd better not crash my car, or I'll be furious.
have to must	OBLIGATION (present)	You must be fast. You have to do 4 years of ESO.
needn't don't have to	NO OBLIGATION (present)	You needn't buy any special equipment. She doesn't have to join a gym.
need (without to)	Negative and Interrogative (present)	I need some salt / I don't need anything.
need to	In affirmative is to express necessity	I need to get fitter / I need to get a job (I need get a job)
mustn't	PROHIBITION	You mustn't smoke / you mustn't take drugs.
must & have to - their meanings are similar in the affirmative. They are completely different in the negative (mustn't=prohibition / don't have to=no obligation)		
Past		
was/were able to	Particular ABILITY in the past (in one occasion)	He injured his foot, but he was able to continue playing.
could	General ABILITY in the past	She could run very fast when she was young.
couldn't	General & particular ABILITY in the past	He couldn't walk until he was two / I couldn't sing yesterday.
had to	Past OBLIGATION	I had to lose three kilos before the operation.
didn't have to didn't need to	To say that an action was not necessary (past)	I didn't need to/ didn't have to take my swimming costume. (It was not necessary for me to take my s.c)
could may might	POSSIBILITY in the past	I could/may/might have left my towel at the beach.
can't have +PastP		He can't have gone to London. I've just seen him.
must have +PastP	Certainty or make logical DEDUCTION about the past	It's frozen. It must have been very cold recently.
should ought to	Express regret or criticism about PAST events	I should have shouted !
needn't have +PastP		He ought to have left the team.
needn't have +PastP	To say that an action was not necessary , but it happened anyway.	I needn't have taken my swimming costume (I took my s.c but I didn't need it)