

modal verbs

and equivalents

can
be able to
may
might
must
have to

should
ought to
need
be to
will
shall

modal verbs

- take no -s in the third person singular
- followed by an infinitive without to except for ought to
- He must be at work. He ought to do what you asked him to.
- come before the subject in questions
- followed by not in negations
- “Could you help me with the dishes?” “I'm sorry, I can't.”
- certain verbs or expressions can be used with the same meaning as modals, eg. need (= must), had better (= should), have (got) to (= must), be able to (= can), used to (= would) etc. I've got to go to the library

ability

can
could
be able to
was able to

I can speak 3 languages

I could ride a bike when I was 5

I will be able to visit you tomorrow

I was able to set a record

obligation

must
have to
ought to

I must stop drinking coffee.

I have to stop drinking coffee.

I had to go to work early yesterday.

You ought to take care of animals.

different degrees of certainty

possibility-probability-logical assumption

50% sure				99%
might-	could-	may-	can-	must
				can't

He might/ may/ could pass the test.

He might/ may/ could have missed the bus.

It can be very cold in winter in Alaska.

It may be cold today.

He must have missed the bus.

He can't have forgotten about the meeting.

necessity

need

don't need to

don't have to

didn't need to

didn't have to

needn't have done

You needn't worry.

You don't have to take a jacket.

You don't need to take a jacket.

You didn't need to buy milk.

You didn't have to buy milk.

You needn't have taken warm clothes.

prohibition

mustn't
can't

You mustn't enter the room.

You can't stay here.

advice - criticism

should
ought to
had better
shall I
should have done
must

You should see a lawyer.

You'd better see a lawyer.

Shall I see a lawyer?

You ought to treat animals kindly.

You must watch this film!

You should have visited your grandmother.

requests

can
will
could
would you
would you mind

Can you help me please?

Will you bring a glass of water?

Could you give me a lift?

May I have a glass of water?

Would you post a letter for me?

Would you mind my opening the window?

offers

I'll do
Shall I help you
would you like

I'll do the washing-up.

Shall I help you with your luggage?

Would you like some more tea?

asking for permission

can
could
may
might

Can I use your pen?

Could I interrupt you for a second?

May I use your phone?

Might I speak to the manager, please?

giving/ refusing permission

can

may

can't

mustn't

to be allowed

Of course you can.

Certainly you may.

I'm afraid you can't / mustn't.

Rubbish may not be left here.

Students are allowed to use the pool.

suggestions

shall we
we can/ could...
why don't we
what about
let's

Shall we go to the theatre?

We can go to the theatre if you like.

Let's go to the cinema.

What about going to the cinema tonight?

Why don't we go to the cinema?