

# Modal Verbs

= the  
verb to  
be

The modal verbs are: **can, could, may, might, must, ought to, will, would, shall, and should**. They do not take -s in the third person singular. *He can ride fast.* They come before the subject in questions and are followed by 'not' in negations. "*Could I leave now?*" "*I'm afraid you can't leave.*" The modal verbs are followed by an infinitive without **to** except for 'ought to'. *She could leave early but she really ought to stay till the end.* Each modal verb normally has more than one use. *Shall I help you with the dishes?* (offer) *Shall we go out tonight?* (suggestion)

- Certain verbs or expressions have virtually the same meaning as some modals. These are: **need** (= must), **had better** (= should), **have to/have got to** (= must), **be able to** (= can), **used to** (= would), etc. *I have got to hurry to catch the bus.* (= I must hurry.)
- We use modal verbs to express: **ability, advice, criticism, logical assumptions, necessity, offers, obligation/duty, permission, possibility, probability, prohibition, requests or suggestions.**

# can and could

## Functions of Modal Verbs and Synonymous Expressions

Use	Present/Future	Past
ability	He <b>can</b> read Arabic.  She's <b>able to</b> run a marathon.	He <b>could/was able to</b> read Arabic when he was four. (repeated action – ability in the past) He <b>was able to</b> ride a bike when he was ten.

**can** + *infinitive* (**can do** / **can play** / **can come** etc.):

I/we/you/they he/she/it	<b>can</b> <b>can't (cannot)</b>	<b>do</b> <b>play</b> <b>see</b> <b>come</b> etc.
----------------------------	-------------------------------------	--

<b>can</b>	I/we/you/they he/she/it	<b>do?</b> <b>play?</b> <b>see?</b> <b>come?</b> etc.
------------	----------------------------	--

**I can** do something = I *know how* to do it, or *it is possible* for me to do it:

- ❑ I **can play** the piano. My brother **can play** the piano too.
- ❑ Sarah **can speak** Italian, but she **can't speak** Spanish.
- ❑ '**Can you swim?**' 'Yes, but I'm not a very good swimmer.'
- ❑ '**Can you change** twenty pounds?' 'I'm sorry, I **can't**.'
- ❑ I'm having a party next week, but Paul and Rachel **can't come**.

For the past (yesterday / last week etc.), we use **could/couldn't**:

- ❑ When I was young, I **could run** very fast.
- ❑ Before Maria came to Britain, she **couldn't understand** much English. Now she **can understand** everything.
- ❑ I was tired last night, but I **couldn't sleep**.
- ❑ I had a party last week, but Paul and Rachel **couldn't come**.

**Can you ... ? Could you ... ? Can I ... ? Could I ... ?**

We use **Can you ... ?** or **Could you ... ?** when we ask people to do things:

- ❑ **Can you** open the door, please? or **Could you** open the door, please?
- ❑ **Can you** wait a moment, please? or **Could you** wait ... ?

We use **Can I have ... ?** or **Could I have ... ?** to ask for something:

- ❑ (*in a shop*) **Can I have** these postcards, please? or **Could I have ... ?**

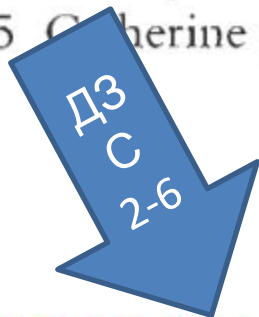
**Can I ... ?** or **Could I ... ?** = is it OK to do something?:

- ❑ Tom, **can I** borrow your umbrella? or Tom, **could I** borrow your umbrella?
- ❑ (*on the phone*) Hello, **can I** speak to Gary, please? or ... **could I** speak ... ?

Complete these sentences. Use **can** or **can't** + one of these verbs:

~~come~~      find      hear      see      speak

- 1 I'm sorry, but we can't come to your party next Saturday.
- 2 I like this hotel room. You ..... the mountains from the window.
- 3 You are speaking very quietly. I ..... you.
- 4 Have you seen my bag? I ..... it.
- 5 Catherine got the job because she ..... five languages.



Complete these sentences. Use **can't** or **couldn't** + one of these verbs:

decide      eat      find      go      go      ~~sleep~~

- 1 I was tired, but I couldn't sleep.
- 2 I wasn't hungry yesterday. I ..... my dinner.
- 3 Kate doesn't know what to do. She .....
- 4 I wanted to speak to Martin yesterday, but I ..... him.
- 5 James ..... to the concert next Saturday. He has to work.
- 6 Paula ..... to the meeting last week. She was ill.

# should

**should** + *infinitive*

(**should do** / **should watch** etc.):

I/we/you/they he/she/it	<b>should</b> <b>shouldn't</b>	<b>do</b> <b>stop</b> <b>go</b> <b>watch</b> etc.
----------------------------	-----------------------------------	--

You **should** do something = it is a good thing to do, it is the right thing to do:

- Tom doesn't study enough. He **should study** harder.
- It's a good film. You **should go** and see it.
- When you play tennis, you **should** always **watch** the ball.

You **shouldn't** do something = it is not a good thing to do.

**Shouldn't** = should not:

- Tom **shouldn't go** to bed so late.
- You watch TV all the time. You **shouldn't watch** TV so much.

We often say **I think ... should ...**

**I think ... should ... :**

- **I think** Lisa **should buy** some new clothes.  
(= I think it is a good idea.)
- It's late. **I think** I **should go** home now.
- A: Shall I buy this coat?  
B: Yes, I **think** you **should**.

**I don't think ... should ... :**

- **I don't think** you **should work** so hard.  
(= I don't think it is a good idea.)
- **I don't think** we **should go** yet. It's too early.

**Do you think ... should ... ?:**

- **Do you think** I **should buy** this hat?
- What time **do you think** we **should go** home?

Another way to say **should** is **ought to**:

- It's a good film. You **ought to go** and see it. (= you should go)
- I think Lisa **ought to buy** some new clothes. (= Lisa should buy)

Write about the people in the pictures. Use He/She shouldn't ... so ...

13



1 She shouldn't watch TV so much.

2 He .....

3 .....

hard.

4 .....

Write sentences with I think ... should ... and I don't think ... should ... .

1 We have to get up early tomorrow. (go home now) ... I think we should go home now.

2 That coat is too big for you. (buy it) ... I don't think you should buy it.

3 You don't need your car. (sell it) .....

4 Karen needs a rest. (have a holiday) .....

5 Sally and Dan are too young. (get married) .....

6 You're not well this morning. (go to work) .....

7 James isn't well today. (go to the doctor) .....

8 The hotel is too expensive for us. (stay there) .....

# must    mustn't    don't need to

**must** + *infinitive* (**must do** / **must work** etc.):

I/we/you/they he/she/it	<b>must</b>	<b>do</b> <b>go</b> <b>see</b> <b>eat</b> etc.
----------------------------	-------------	---

**Must** is stronger than **should**:

- It's a **good** film. You **should** go and see it.
- It's a **fantastic** film. You **must** go and see it.

**I must** (do something) = I need to do it:

- I'm very hungry. I **must eat** something.
- It's a fantastic film. You **must see** it.
- The windows are very dirty. We **must clean** them.

For **the past** (yesterday / last week etc.), we use **had to** ... (*not must*):

- I was very hungry. I **had to eat** something. (*not I must eat*)
- We **had to walk** home last night. There were no buses. (*not We must walk*)



**mustn't** (= must not)

**I mustn't** (do something) = it is necessary *not* to do it,  
it is the wrong thing to do:

- ☐ I **must hurry**. I **mustn't be** late.
- ☐ I **mustn't forget** to phone Jane.  
(= I **must remember** to phone her)
- ☐ Be happy! You **mustn't be** sad. (= don't be sad)
- ☐ You **mustn't touch** the pictures.  
(= don't touch the pictures)

### **don't need to**

**I don't need** (to do something) = it is not necessary:

- ☐ I **don't need to go** yet. I can stay a little longer.
- ☐ You **don't need to shout**. I can hear you OK.

You can also say **don't have to** ... :

- ☐ I **don't have to go** yet. I can stay a little longer.

Compare **don't need to** and **mustn't**:

- ☐ You **don't need to go**. You can stay here if you want.
- ☐ You **mustn't go**. You must stay here.

## Complete the sentences. Use **must** + these verbs:

be    ~~eat~~    go    learn    meet    wash    win

- 1 I'm very hungry. I must eat something.
- 2 Marilyn is a very interesting person. You ..... her.
- 3 My hands are dirty. I ..... them.
- 4 You ..... to drive. It will be very useful.
- 5 I ..... to the post office. I need some stamps.
- 6 The game tomorrow is very important for us. We .....
- 7 You can't always have things immediately. You ..... patient.

## Write **I must** or **I had to**.

- 1 I had to walk home last night. There were no buses.
- 2 It's late. .... go now.
- 3 I don't usually work on Saturdays, but last Saturday ..... work.
- 4 ..... get up early tomorrow. I've got a lot to do.
- 5 I went to London by train last week. The train was full and ..... stand all the way.
- 6 I was nearly late for my appointment this morning. .... run to get there on time.
- 7 I forgot to phone David yesterday. .... phone him later today.

**Write must / mustn't / had to / don't need to.**

- 1 You don't need to go. You can stay here if you want.
- 2 It's a fantastic film. You must see it.
- 3 The restaurant won't be busy tonight. We ..... reserve a table.
- 4 I was very busy last week. I ..... work every evening.
- 5 I want to know what happened. You ..... tell me.
- 6 You ..... tell Sue what happened. I don't want her to know.
- 7 I ..... hurry or I'll be late.
- 8 'Why were you so late?' 'I ..... wait half an hour for a bus.'
- 9 We ..... decide now. We can decide later.
- 10 It's Lisa's birthday next week. I ..... forget to buy her a present.

# I have to ...

**I have to** do something = it is necessary for me to do it, I am obliged to do it

I/we/you/they	<b>have</b>	<b>to do</b> <b>to work</b>
he/she/it	<b>has</b>	<b>to go</b> <b>to wear</b> etc.

- I'll be late for work tomorrow. I **have to go** to the dentist.
- Jane starts work at 7 o'clock, so she **has to get** up at 6.
- You **have to pass** a test before you can get a driving licence.

The past (yesterday / last week etc.) is **had to** ... :

- I was late for work yesterday. I **had to go** to the dentist.
- We **had to walk** home last night. There were no buses.

In questions and negatives we use **do/does** (present) and **did** (past):

*present*

<b>do</b>	I/we/you/they	<b>have to ... ?</b>
<b>does</b>	he/she/it	

I/we/you/they	<b>don't</b>	<b>have to ...</b>
he/she/it	<b>doesn't</b>	

*past*

<b>did</b>	I/we/you/they he/she/it	<b>have to ... ?</b>
------------	----------------------------	----------------------

I/we/you/they he/she/it	<b>didn't have to ...</b>
----------------------------	---------------------------

- What time **do you have to go** to the dentist tomorrow?
- Does** Jane **have to work** on Sundays?
- Why **did** they **have to leave** the party early?

## **must** and **have to**

You can use **must** or **have to** when you say what *you* think is necessary, when you give *your* opinion:

- It's a fantastic film. You **must** see it. *or* You **have to** see it.

When you are *not* giving your personal opinion, use **have to** (*not must*). Compare:

- Jane won't be at work this afternoon. She **has to** go to the doctor.  
(this is not my personal opinion – it is a fact)
- Jane isn't well. She doesn't want to go to the doctor, but I told her she **must** go.  
(this is my personal opinion)

**Complete the sentences. Use have to or has to + these verbs:**

do    hit    read    speak    travel    ~~wear~~

- 1 My eyes are not very good. I have to wear glasses.
- 2 At the end of the course all the students ..... a test.
- 3 Sarah is studying literature. She ..... a lot of books.
- 4 Albert doesn't understand much English. You ..... very slowly to him.
- 5 Kate is not often at home. She ..... a lot in her job.
- 6 In tennis you ..... the ball over the net.

**Complete the sentences. Use have to or had to + these verbs:**

answer    buy    change    go    ~~walk~~

- 1 We had to walk home last night. There were no buses.
- 2 It's late. I ..... now. I'll see you tomorrow.
- 3 I went to the supermarket after work yesterday. I ..... some food.
- 4 This train doesn't go all the way to London. You ..... at Bristol.
- 5 We did an exam yesterday. We ..... six questions out of ten.

Complete the questions. Some are present and some are past.

- 1 I have to get up early tomorrow.
- 2 George had to wait a long time.
- 3 Liz has to go somewhere.
- 4 We had to pay a lot of money.
- 5 I have to do some work.

- What time do you have to get up .....
- How long .....
- Where .....
- How much .....
- What exactly .....

Which is correct? Sometimes **must** and **have to** are both correct. Sometimes only one correct.

- 1 It's a fantastic film. You must see / have to see it. (both are correct)
- 2 Julia won't be at work this afternoon. She ~~must go~~ / has to go to the doctor.  
(has to go is correct)
- 3 You can't park your car here for nothing. You must pay / have to pay.
- 4 I didn't have any money with me last night, so I must borrow / had to borrow some.
- 5 I eat too much chocolate. I really must stop / have to stop.
- 6 Paul is in a hurry. He must meet / has to meet somebody in five minutes.
- 7 What's wrong? You must tell / have to tell me. I want to help you.