

MODAL VERBS

Modals only exist in their helping form; they cannot act alone as the main verb in a sentence.

Modal verbs are:

Modal	Example	Uses
Can	They can control their own budgets. We can't fix it. Can I smoke here? Can you help me?	Ability / Possibility Inability / Impossibility Asking for permission Request
Could	Could I borrow your dictionary? Could you say it again more slowly?	Asking for permission. Request
May	May I have another cup of coffee? China may become a major economic power.	Asking for permission Future possibility
Might	We'd better phone tomorrow, they might be eating their dinner now. They might give us a 10% discount.	Present possibility Future possibility
Must/Mustn't	We must say good-bye now. They mustn't disrupt the work more than necessary.	Necessity / Obligation Prohibition
Shall (More	Shall I help you with your luggage?	Offer

common in the UK than the US)	Shall we say 2.30 then?	Suggestion
	Shall I do that or will you?	Asking what to do
Should	We should sort out this problem at once.	Saying what's right or correct
	I think we should check everything again.	Recommending action
	Profits should increase next year.	Uncertain prediction

Some basic characteristics of modals

a) Modals are always followed by the base form of the verb, e.g.:

I might play tennis tomorrow.

b) Modals never have *-ing* or *-ed* forms, and do not take *-s* in the third person singular present.

Louise can read. = Louise could read when she was three..

c) Unlike other verbs, modals do not use *do* and *did* to form negatives.

I might not play tennis tomorrow.

You ought not to tell her.

She can't come.

d) Modals do not use *do* and *did* to form questions. Questions are formed by placing the modal before the subject. In the case of *ought to*, *ought* is placed before the subject and *to* after it, e.g.:

Can she speak Spanish?

When *will* and *would* are used after a pronoun, they are often shortened to the contracted forms *'ll* and *'d* and joined to the pronoun, e.g.:

I'll help, if you want.

I'm sure she'll agree.