

Modal Verbs



Definizioni:

Come in italiano, anche in inglese i verbi modali (o verbi servili) si utilizzano per precisare la relazione tra il soggetto e il verbo che li segue.

Si definisco modali in quanto esprimono una modalità che definisce il verbo principale. Si chiamano verbi servili perché svolgono un servizio al verbo principale.

Gli stessi principi valgono per i modal verbs inglesi, che talvolta sono definiti "helping verbs", dato che aiutano a definire il significato del verbo principale.

In italiano, i verbi modali si integrano a un verbo principale (recante contenuto lessicale) all'infinito:

Devo andare tra cinque minuti.

Potremmo bere qualcosa.

Non sa nuotare.

In inglese, i modal verbs anticipano un verbo principale espresso in forma base:

We should go in five minutes.

She can speak spanish very good.

I modal verbs funzionano come gli ausiliari, sono cioè i verbi che variano nelle domande e nelle frasi negative; inoltre, in presenza di un verbo modale, il verbo principale non varia al variare del soggetto.

May I go out?

He should study more.

You must stay silent.

Let's run, he might leave!

May – Might – Can – Could

Si tratta di quattro forme del verbo potere e indicano permesso, possibilità e abilità.

John can swim.

It can be quite windy in Trieste.

May I go out?

Can you walk?

He might not like it.

May/might e can/could possono indicare il permesso e si utilizzano in situazioni in cui esista una relazione di superiorità o subordinazione tra i soggetti della frase.

May I go?

You may go.

I'm sorry, you can't smoke here.

Could you move on a little?

Might

"Might" è il passato di "may," aspetto che diventa necessario in tre casi:

1. discorso indiretto:

I may arrive a little late.

He said he might arrive a little late.

2. il periodo ipotetico:

If we hurry, we may be home before the storm.

If we hurried, we might be home before the storm.

If we had hurried, we might have been home before the storm.

3. Possibilità non realizzate nel passato.

You might have killed yourself!

We might have missed the train.

Can

"Can" per esprimere possibilità non implica il giudizio o l'opinione del soggetto. Indica la possibilità teorica che un'azione avvenga ma non la possibilità concreta:

It can rain heavily in Ireland.

Can you use technological devices in planes?

Where can he be?

Could

"Could" utilizzato per indicare possibilità suggerisce una situazione meno probabile rispetto a "can".

It could rain later. = There is no theoretical reason why it shouldn't rain later.

Where could he be? = I haven't the faintest idea where he can be.

"Can" per indicare abilità

"Can" (o "to be able to") corrisponde all'italiano sapere inteso come "essere in grado di".

I can swim.

She can speak Russian.

I could play the guitar when I was younger.

*Can I go out?

May/might as well

She is not answering at the phone, you may as well send her an email.

When we were in Spain it rained all the time. We might as well have gone to Scotland.

May as well e might as well sono pressoché intercambiabili e traducono l'espressione italiana "tanto vale/valeva che".

Must – have to

Entrambe le forme indicano dovere, obbligo o necessità.

Must si utilizza quando chi parla è coinvolto nell'obbligo, quando il dovere è imposto da una situazione gerarchica o un divieto.

Have to si utilizza quando la necessità o il dovere è imposto da circostanze esterne.

Mentre must, usato in forma negativa, risponde alla medesima logica, have to in forma negativa equivale all'espressione italiana "non è necessario che..."

When I speak you must pay attention.

She has to be in class at 10.30.

The problem with shirts is that you have to iron them. T-shirts are different, you don't have to iron them.

Is this the first time you have to speak in public?

This is too important, you must have an opinion!

The children _____ keep away from Mr. Smith. That guy is creepy!

This project is finished, you _____ to worry.

Need – don't need – needn't

Need si può utilizzare come verbo dal significato pieno (= avere bisogno, necessitare).

I need a dollar!

Do you need a ride?

She doesn't need a pen.

Può anche funzionare come modale,
modificando cioè un altro verbo che segue
all'infinito:

I need to make a phone call.

She needs to eat something!

We need to review the entire grammar part.

Dare si può utilizzare anche come verbo modale nella forma interrogativa e negativa.

How dare you speak to me like that?

I daren't reply to him.

Può anche funzionare come modale,
modificando cioè un altro verbo che segue
all'infinito:

I need to make a phone call.

She needs to eat something!

We need to review the entire grammar part.

She doesn't need to study for the exam, she's bilingual.

She doesn't have to study for the exam, she's bilingual.

Needn't

Must I come?

No, you needn't come.

Needn't si può utilizzare in combinazione con il verbo must e presuppone una struttura gerarchica nella frase (sei scusato dall'obbligo di venire). Qualora il divieto o il permesso non dipendesse da una gerarchia non si utilizza needn't.

You don't need t bring your passport to go to Germany.

*You needn't bring your passport to go to Germany

Should – ought to

Si tratta di due modali intercambiabili (should è più usato) che indicano consigli, suggerimenti, o "doveri morali".

Costituiscono il condizionale di must e have to.

It's getting late, we should go.

She should call me.

You shouldn't talk like that to your sister.

Be supposed to

Si utilizza questa forma modale per indicare cosa ci si aspetta o si suppone a proposito di qualcuno o qualcosa. Tali aspettative o supposizioni si basano su regole (1), ciò che si ritiene probabile (2), o su ciò che è stato promesso o garantito (3).

You are not supposed to use your phone in class.

This exhibition is supposed to be very interesting.

She was supposed to study for the exam!

Dare

Dare si può utilizzare come verbo dal significato pieno (= osare, sfidare).

She doesn't dare to contradict her mother.

I dare you to say that again in front of everybody

Would rather – had better

Shall we go on studying for another hour?

I would rather have a beer.

(I'd rather)

(Preferirei...)

Shall we go to bar?

We had better study for another hour.

(we'd better)

(faremmo meglio a...)

Be likely/unlikely

1. She is very likely/unlikely to pass the exam.

She will probably pass the exam.

2. You are likely to be out by that time.

You will probably be out by that time.

3. They are likely to go to the movies tonight.

They will probably go to the movies tonight.

Be bound to

This issue is bound to give us problems sooner or later.

This issue is going to give us problems sooner or later.

You never wear a scarf. You're bound to catch a cold.

Your never wear a scarf. You're going to catch a cold

The train leaves in five minutes. She's bound to miss it.

The train leaves in five minutes. She's going to miss it.

Don't worry! There's no you're going to win the game.

John may have forgotten his phone.

It's obvious that that vase is going to fall.

He doesn't have a map: he will probably get lost.

The Republicans are going to win the election.

Tom and Sue are at Victoria Station. They are going to take a train to the airport, from where they are going to fly to Glasgow. A train leaves for the airport every twenty minutes. They are waiting for their friend, Jim.

T. Where _____ (he, be)? He _____ (arrive) two hours ago. We have already let two trains go. We _____ (take) the next one!

S. Let's wait a couple of minutes more. He _____ (turn up) at the last moment, you know. In this very moment he _____ (get) a taxi for all we know.

T. Yes, and he _____ (sleep) in his house as well. We _____ (not phone) him because he doesn't have a smartphone, and I told him many times that he _____ (get) one. If he had one, at least we could call him and wake him up. Let's go.

S. Let's wait two more minutes. If he arrives and he doesn't see us, he _____ (panic).

T. Jim panic! You _____ (joke)! He _____ (never, panic) in his life. I have tried so often to make him understand the meaning of urgency. You know what his problem is? He _____ (never, earn) money in life. If anything goes wrong, his father pays and settles things down.

S. Don't exaggerate! Oh look, there he is!
_____ (you see) him?

T. Yes, and he's running, I _____ (believe)
my eyes.

J. Hi! _____ (we, get) on the next train?

S. We were so worried Jim! We thought you
_____ (not arrive)!

J. Don't worry! If I had missed the train I
_____ (take) the next one.

S. Yes, but our flight leaves at eleven and we
_____ (be) there at least two hours before.

J. Not to go to Glasgow: it's a domestic flight and you _____ (go) through customs. That's one of the advantages. In fact, it is the only advantage I _____ (think) of in going to Glasgow on holiday.

T. You _____ (not accept) our invitation if that's how you feel. As for going abroad, you know I _____ (stand) fooreign travel since I got food-poisoning in France.

J. We _____ (go) to Gibraltar, if that's how you feel. You _____ (get) fish and chips there and an English beer.

T. Yes, but we _____ (book) months ago, if we had wanted to find accomodation there.

S. Now you _____ (stop) arguing. We _____ (go)!