

## Modals and semi-modals

- The nine main modals (*will, would, can, could, may, might, shall, should, must*) have only one form (ie they do not change tense or person) and are followed by a simple or continuous bare infinitive (eg *could + do, be doing, have done, have been doing*). They can also be followed by a bare infinitive in the passive (eg *could + be done, have been done*).
- Semi-modals have similar meanings to modals. They include: *need (to), ought to, had better* and *have (got) to*.
- Some semi-modals, such as *had better*, do not change tense or person. Others, such as *have (got) to*, do.
- Some semi-modals can be used in combination with modals, producing phrases such as *might have to*.

### Ability

Real ability	Current or general ability	<i>can, can't</i>	You <b>can't</b> really <b>speak</b> seven languages fluently, <b>can</b> you?
	Past ability	<i>could, couldn't</i>	There's no way you <b>could read</b> when you were two!
	Decisions made now about future ability	<i>can, can't, could, couldn't</i>	I <b>can get</b> you a paper when I go to the shop, if you like.
	Future ability	<i>will/won't be able to</i>	One day, maybe, all adults <b>will be able to read</b> and write.
Hypothetical ability	Current or general hypothetical ability	<i>could, couldn't</i>	I <b>couldn't go</b> on a quiz show. I'd be too scared!
	Future hypothetical ability	<i>could, couldn't</i>	I <b>could go</b> with them to the cinema tomorrow but I won't because I've already seen the film.
	Past hypothetical ability	<i>could have, couldn't have</i>	They <b>could have asked</b> the Prime Minister much more searching questions. I wonder why they didn't.

### Watch out!

- The full negative form of modals is written as two words, eg *could not*. The exception is *cannot*, which is one word.
- *Can* and *could* cannot be used as infinitives. We can use *to be able to* instead.  
✓ I'd love **to be able to** come with you to the cinema tomorrow but I just **can't**.
- We don't usually use *could* for past ability on one occasion. We use *was/were able to, managed* or *succeeded*, etc.  
✓ Luckily, she **was able to** finish the article in time.  
However, with verbs such as *see, hear, feel*, etc we can use *could* for past ability on one occasion.  
✓ I **could see** that she was tired.

### Permission

Asking for permission	<i>may, could, couldn't, can, can't</i>	<b>Can I finish</b> watching this before I go to bed?
Giving/refusing permission	<i>may, may not, could, couldn't, can, can't</i>	No, you <b>can't</b> .

### Watch out!

- *May* is more polite and formal than *could*, and *could* is more polite and formal than *can*.
- We don't usually use modals to talk about past permission. We can use *was/were allowed to*.  
✓ We **were allowed to** buy one comic each.
- However, we do use *could* to talk about past permission in reported speech. (see Unit 25 for more information)  
✓ Mum said we **could** buy one comic each.

### Advice

Asking for and giving advice	<i>should, shouldn't, ought to, oughtn't to, had better</i>	You <b>should try</b> to get that poem published.
------------------------------	---	---

### Watch out!

- We can only use *hadn't better* in questions.  
✓ **Hadn't you better** check that these facts are actually true?
- We can also use *might/may* as well to give advice and make suggestions. This suggests that, although the suggestion is not perfect, there is no better option.  
✓ We **may as well** watch this as there's nothing else on.

## Criticism

Criticising past behaviour	<i>should have, shouldn't have, ought to have, oughtn't to have</i>	You <b>shouldn't have spoken</b> to Mrs Todd like that.
Expressing annoyance at past behaviour	<i>could have, might have</i>	You <b>could/might have told</b> me you were going to be late!
Criticising general behaviour	<i>will</i>	He <b>will slam</b> the door every time he goes out.
Criticising a specific example of someone's general behaviour	<i>would</i>	You <b>would take</b> the car just when I wanted to go out.

### Watch out!

We can also use *might* as well to suggest criticism.  
✓ I **might as well** be dead for all you care.

## Obligation

Current or general obligation	<i>must, mustn't, have (got) to, need (to)</i>	You <b>have to be</b> a good communicator to be a press spokesperson.
A lack of current or general obligation	<i>don't have to, haven't got to, needn't, don't need (to)</i>	You <b>don't always need to have</b> a degree to become a journalist.
Future obligation	<i>will have to, must, mustn't, have (got) to, (will) need (to)</i>	You'll <b>have to do</b> quite a lot of research before you write this report.
A lack of future obligation	<i>don't/won't have to, haven't got to, needn't, don't/won't need (to)</i>	I'm glad we <b>won't have to write</b> any more essays on this course.
Past obligation	<i>had to, needed (to)</i>	We <b>had to come up with</b> three questions each.
A lack of past obligation	<i>didn't have to, didn't need (to), needn't have</i>	In the past, politicians <b>didn't have to deal with</b> being in a 24-hour media spotlight.

### Watch out!

- We are more likely to use *must* for personal obligation (making our own decision about what we must do) and *have to* for external obligation (someone else making a decision about what we must do).
- Using *must* for questions is extremely formal. We usually use *have to*.  
✓ **Do you have to** have a degree to be a journalist?
- *Mustn't* is used for prohibition. *Don't have to* is used for a lack of obligation.
- We can use *didn't have to* and *didn't need to* for things that we did or didn't actually do. However, we only use *needn't have done* for things that we actually did but weren't obliged to do.

## Degrees of certainty

Certainty (or near certainty) about now, the future or generally	<i>will, would, must, can, can't, could, couldn't</i>	'There's someone at the door.' 'That'll <b>be</b> the postman.' 'It <b>can't be</b> . He's already been.'
Certainty (or near certainty) about the past	<i>will have, won't have, would have, wouldn't have, must have, can't have, couldn't have</i>	'They <b>won't have heard</b> the news, will they?' 'They <b>must have heard</b> by now, surely.'
Probability about now, the future or generally	<i>should, shouldn't, ought to, oughtn't to, may/might well (not), could well, might easily</i>	'The weather <b>should be</b> good tomorrow, shouldn't it?' 'Actually, the forecast said it <b>may well rain</b> .'
Probability about the past	<i>should have, shouldn't have, ought to have, oughtn't to have, may/might well (not) have, might easily (not) have</i>	'Jan <b>should have finished</b> writing her article by now, shouldn't she?' 'She <b>may well have done</b> , but I haven't seen it yet.'
Possibility about now, the future or generally	<i>could, may (not), might, mightn't, may/might/could just</i>	I <b>might (just) have</b> time to get to the library before it closes.
Possibility about the real past	<i>could have, may (not) have, might have, mightn't have</i>	Jim <b>might not have checked</b> his e-mail yet.

### Watch out!

*should* and *should have* can be used in *that* clauses after words expressing importance and reactions.  
✓ It's strange that you **should** say that.    ✓ Was it necessary that Alan **should have been invited** to the meeting?