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Lec. 5 (Unit 5)

Modal Verbs

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Modal Verbs

Introduction to modal verbs

The modal verbs are *can, could, may, might, must, will, would, should, ought to*. They are known as modal auxiliary verbs because they 'help' another verb. (See also Units 1, 5, 8, and 9.)

*I **can** swim.*

*Do you think I **should** go?*

Form

- 1 There is no -s in the third person singular.
*She **can** ski. He **must** be tired. It **might** rain.*
- 2 There is no *do/does/don't/doesn't* in the question or negative.
*What **should** I do? **Can** I help you? You **mustn't** steal!*
*He **can't** dance. I **won't** be a minute.*
- 3 Modal auxiliary verbs are followed by the infinitive without *to*. The exception is *ought to*.
*You **must** go. I'll **help** you. You **ought to** see a doctor.*
- 4 They have no infinitives and no -ing forms. Other expressions are used instead.
*I'd love to **be able to** ski.*
*I hate **having to** get up on cold, winter mornings.*
- 5 They don't usually have past forms. Instead, we can use them with perfect infinitives:
*You **should have told** me that you **can't** swim. You **might have** drowned!*
or we use other expressions:
*I **had to** work hard in school.*

Note

Could is used with a past meaning to talk about a general ability.
*I **could** swim when I was six. (= general ability)*

To talk about ability on one specific occasion, we use *was able to/managed to*.

*The prisoner **was able to/managed to** escape by climbing on to the roof of the prison. NOT ~~could~~ escape*

Use

- 1 Modal verbs express our attitudes, opinions, and judgements of events. Compare:
'Who's that knocking on the door?'
'It's John.' (This is a fact.)
'Who's that knocking on the door?'
*'It **could/may/might/must/should/can't**/ll be John.'* (These all express our attitude or opinion.)
- 2 Each modal verb has at least two meanings. One use of all of them is to express possibility or probability. (See Unit 9 p147.)
*I **must** post this letter!* (= obligation)
*You **must** be tired!* (= deduction, probability)
***Could** you help me?* (= request)
*We **could** go to Spain for our holiday.* (= possibility)
*You **may** go home now.* (= permission)
*'Where's Anna?' 'I'm not sure. She **may** be at work.'* (= possibility)

Modal Verbs of Obligation and Permission

- have (got) to

Form

Positive and negative

I/You/ We/They	have to don't have to	work hard.
He/She	has to doesn't have to	

Question

Do	I you (etc.)	have to work hard?
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Use

Have to is not a modal verb.

- 1 *Have to* expresses strong obligation. It expresses a general obligation based on a law or rule, or based on the authority of another person. It is impersonal.
*Children **have to** go to school until they are 16. (a law)*
*Mum says you **have to** clean your room before you go out. (mother's order)*
- 2 *Have got to* is common in British English but it is more informal than *have to*.
I've got to go now. See you!
Don't go to bed late. We've got to get up early tomorrow.
'Go and tidy your room.' 'Have I got to?' 'Yes, you have!'
- 3 *Have to* expresses a general repeated obligation.
*I always **have to** tell my parents where I'm going.*
Have got to expresses an obligation on one particular occasion.
I've got to get up early tomorrow to catch a train.

- Can and be allowed to

Form

Affirmative and negative

I/You/ We/They	can/can't are allowed to aren't allowed to	park here.
He/She	can/can't is allowed to isn't allowed to	

Question

Can	I/you/we etc.		park here?
Am	I	allowed to	
Are	you		
Is	he		

Use

Can is a modal verb.

Can and *be allowed to* express permission. *Can* is more informal and usually spoken.

You **can** borrow my bike, but you **can't** have the car. I need it.

They **can't** come in here with those muddy shoes!

You're **allowed to** get married when you're 16.

Are we **allowed to** use a dictionary for this test?

He **isn't allowed to** park here.

- should, ought to, and must

Form

Should, ought to, and must are modal verbs.

I/You/We/They He/She/ It	should/shouldn't ought to / ought not to must	work hard.
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Use

- 1 *Should* and *ought to* express mild obligation, suggestions, or advice. They express what, in the speaker's opinion, is the right or best thing to do. We often use them with *I think/don't think ...*.

*You're always asking me for money. I think you **should** spend less.*

*You **shouldn't** sit so close to the television! It's bad for your eyes.*

*You **ought to** be more careful with your money.*

- 2 *Should I/she/we ... ?* is possible. We often use *Do you think ... ?*

***Should I** try to eat less?*

*Do you think **I should** see a doctor?*

- 3 *Must*, like *have to*, expresses strong obligation. *Must* expresses an obligation that involves the speaker's opinion. It is personal.

*I **must** get my hair cut. (This is me talking to me.)*

*You **must** go and visit your grandmother. (A parent talking to a child.)*

- 4 *Must* is also associated with a formal, written style.

*All visitors **must** show proper ID. (Sign in the lobby of an office building)*

*Books **must** be returned on or before the due date. (Instructions in a library)*

have to and *must*, *don't have to* and *mustn't*

- 1 *Have to* and *must* are sometimes interchangeable.

*I **must** be home by midnight. I **have to** be home by midnight.*

But *have to* is used more often than *must*. If you are unsure which to use, it is probably safer to use *have to*.

- 2 *Must I ... ?* is possible, but question forms with *have to* are more common.

*Do I **have to** do what you say, or can I do what I want?*

- 3 *Have to* has all forms; *must* does not.

*I **had to** work until midnight last night. (Past)*

*You'll **have to** study hard when you go to college. (Future)*

*She's a millionaire. She's never **had to** do any work. (Present Perfect)*

*I hate **having to** get up on cold, winter mornings. (-ing form)*

*If you were a nurse, you would **have to** wear a uniform. (Infinitive)*

- 4 *Don't have to* and *mustn't* are completely different.

Don't have to expresses absence of obligation – you can but it isn't necessary.

*Some people iron their socks, but you **don't have to**. I think it's a waste of time.*

*When you go into a shop, you **don't have to** buy something. You can just look.*

Mustn't expresses negative obligation – it is very important not to do something.

*You **mustn't** steal other people's things. It's wrong.*

*You **mustn't** drive if you've been drinking. You could kill someone!*

Making requests: can, could, will, and would

- 1 There are many ways of making requests in English.

Can	you	help me, please?
Could		pass the salt, please?
Will		
Would		

Would you mind helping me, please?

Can	I	speak to you, please?
Could		ask you a question?

Do you mind if I open the window?

Would you mind if I opened the window?

Can, could, will, and would are all modal verbs.

- 2 *Could* is a little more formal; *can* is a little more familiar. *Could I ... ?* and *Could you ... ?* are very useful because they can be used in many different situations.
- 3 Here are some ways of responding to requests:
- A *Excuse me! Could you help me?*
B *Sure.*
Of course.
Well, I'm afraid I'm a little busy right now.
- A *Would you mind if I opened the window?*
B *No, not at all.*
No, that's fine.
Well, I'm a little cold, actually.

- Making offers: will and shall/ should

- 1 Will and shall /should are used to express offers. They are both modal verbs.

- 2 The contracted form of will is used to express an intention, decision, or offer made at the moment of speaking.

Come over after work. I'll cook dinner for you.

'It's Jane's birthday today.' 'Is it? I'll buy her some flowers.'

Give him your suitcase. He'll carry it for you.

Don't worry about catching the bus. Dave'll give you a lift.

Give it back or we'll call the police!

In many languages, this idea is often expressed by a present tense, but in English this is wrong.

I'll give you my number. NOT ~~*I give you my number.*~~

I'll carry your suitcase. NOT ~~*I carry your suitcase.*~~

Other uses of will are dealt with in Unit 5.

- 3 Shall / Should ...? is used in questions with the first person, I and we. It expresses an offer, a suggestion, or a request for advice.

'Shall I carry your bag for you?' 'That's very kind. Thank you.'

'Shall we go out for a meal tonight?' 'Mmm. I'd love to.'

'What shall we do? We haven't got any money.' 'We could ask Dad.'

We use **should** to make an informal suggestion.

*What **should** we have for dinner?*

*What **should** we do tonight?*

Reference:

Soars, L. (2009). *New headway: Intermediate student's book*.

Soars, L. (2009). *New headway: Intermediate Working book*.