

*Can, could, shall, should, will, would, may, might* and *must* are all examples of modal auxiliary verbs. We use modal verbs in different ways. Some things they can be used to express:

**facts, ability, permission, possibility, polite requests or offers, condition, prohibition and obligation.**

- \* *Can I help you?*
- \* *Could I go to the movie night on Friday?*
- \* *I can't do this homework. It's too difficult!*
- \* *You might be able to go out and play soon. It's stopped raining.*

## Modal Forms

Modal auxiliaries are always used with another verb, which is always in the base form.

- \* *She can speak five languages.*

The form of a modal verb is always the **infinitive** without 'to'. A modal verb never has an ending like 's' or 'ed'. Modals do not have **do** or **does** in questions. To make questions, we reverse the word order.

- \* *Must you go?*
- \* *Shall I see you tomorrow?*

To make a negative, **not** or **n't** is added to the modal.

- \* *He shouldn't be so rude to me.*
- \* *I should not be watching this.*

**Modals have a number of different uses and you need to spend some time learning them.**

You could keep a list of their different uses and add to it each time you discover a new one.

For example, some uses of **can** and **may**:

1. **Can** expresses ability: *Can you speak English? Yes, I can. (I am able to speak English.)*
2. **Can** also expresses permission: *Can I go home now? Yes, you can.*
3. **May** also expresses permission. *May is considered more polite than can, but younger speakers of English may ignore this rule nowadays. May is used in more formal situations. Student: May I go home please? Teacher: Yes, you can/may.*
4. **May** also expresses possibility: *I may go out tonight, or I may stay at home.*
5. **Might** is exactly the same as **may** in this situation: *We may / might see you at the picnic next week.*

## Modals that express different degrees of obligation

**Should** is used to say that we think something is right or the best thing for someone to do. We use **should** when we are advising someone. We are telling them that it is a good idea. We use **should** to recommend something or give our opinion on something. We also use it to ask other people what they think about something.

- \* *You should go and see your doctor if you're worried about your weight.*

**Should** expresses weak obligation. We are not insisting that someone do something.

- \* *I think you should think some more about the issue before you do anything.*
- \* *Do you think I should try this new diet?*

**Shouldn't** is used to say that we think something isn't the best thing for someone to do.

- \* *You shouldn't believe everything you read on the Internet!*



## Have to

When we have to do something, it is necessary for us to do it. We have no choice. Must is also used in this way.

- \* *I have to do more exercise. I am getting fat. (I think this is necessary.)*
- \* *You have to eat more vegetables.*
- \* *Do you have to make all that noise? I'm trying to do my homework.*



Have to is different to modal verbs like must or may because it can have other forms.

**Has to** is used instead of have to with he, she or it when we make a sentence in the affirmative.

- \* *She has to try harder at school.*

Unlike modal verbs, we use **do/does** with **have to** in questions.

- \* *Does she have to go to school today?*
- \* *Do you have to talk so loudly? Please talk more quietly.*

**Don't/doesn't** is used to make negatives.

- \* *I don't have to get up early tomorrow.*
- \* *She doesn't have to go to school today.*

Have to is also used when we are talking about something impersonal. An outside authority like the police may demand that someone does something. It could be necessary for someone to do something because their job or employer requires it. The law or government requires it. Their health specialist might prescribe a course of treatment. (*Must isn't used in this way.*)

- \* *I have to wear a white coat when talking to patients. (This is a requirement of my job.)*
- \* *You have to slow down when you come to a zebra crossing. (This is one of the laws for motorists.)*

The past tense of have to is **had to**.

We use **don't have to** when it isn't necessary to do something. There is no obligation to do something.

- \* *I'm a nurse but I don't have to wear a uniform.*

The past tense of don't have to is **didn't have to**.

## Must

Must is used in the same way as have to to say that we are obligated to do something. It is necessary.

We really need to do something. We use must when the pressure comes from ourselves:

- \* *I must remember to do some piano practice. My teacher was angry with me last week.*

We can also use must to recommend something strongly to someone else.

- \* *You must try that new cafe in the square. It's wonderful. (I strongly recommend you do this.)*
- \* *You must believe me. I'm telling you the truth. (I really want you to believe me!)*

Must is used when we are angry with someone.

- \* *Must you watch television now? I'm trying to sleep!*

The negative of must is **mustn't**.

- \* *I mustn't forget to turn the lights out.*

Be careful using must with other people because must has a very strong meaning. If we use must inappropriately, it can make us sound bossy and rude.

\* **Guest:** *Where shall I sit?* \* **Host:** *You must sit there. (Incorrect - the host wants the guest to have the best chair, but if the host uses must it suggests the host is ordering you to do this and you have no choice.)*

Must does not have a future form, and the future is expressed by "**will have to...**"

- \* *You will have to listen more carefully to your teacher if you want to pass that exam.*

Must has no past tense either. We use "**had to...**" for this.

- \* *I was late because I had to wash my hair.*



### Exercise 1a:

Dave is your friend. He has some problems. Think of one or more ideas to solve each of his problems. Write the ideas next to Dave's problems. The first is done for you as an example.

Dave's problems....

- I can't find anything on my desk. Idea 1 : **Tidy your desk.** Idea 2: **Don't let your desk get untidy.**
- My back is sore from doing sitting in a chair for most of the day.
- My job is boring.
- I am spending a lot of money on junk food.
- I've lost my keys.
- My car is dirty.

### Exercise 1b:

Imagine you are talking to Dave.

Use **should** or **shouldn't** and give him your ideas from 1a in sentences. The first is done for you as an example.

- You should tidy your desk. / You shouldn't let your desk get untidy.*
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### Exercise 2:

Put these words in the correct order to make sentences using have to.

a. every person by name/ In my work / I have to / remember to greet

b. at all times / be cheerful / I have to / and pleasant

c. yesterday because / I didn't have to / it was a holiday / go to work

d. to do my / My workmate has / I am at lunch /work when

e. a performance review / to give me / every six months / My boss has

f. work / Does she / have to / very long hours?

g. their rooms/ or is there / Do they have / to clean / a cleaner?

h. all my tasks./ to stay at / work / until I've / completed / I don't have

#### Answer Key:

**Exercise 1a** b. Do some exercises. / Don't sit at your desk for too long., c. Find a new job., d. Cook some healthy meals. / Don't eat junk food more than once a week., e. Think of the places you went to and look for your keys in those places., f. Wash your car.

**Exercise 1b:** b. You should do some exercises and take breaks from sitting. / You shouldn't sit at your desk for too long., c. You should find a new job., d. You should cook some healthy meals./ You shouldn't eat junk food more than once a week., e. You should think of the places you went to and look for your keys in those places. f. You should wash your car.

**Exercise 2:** a. In my work I have to remember to greet every person by name., b. I have to be cheerful and pleasant at all times., c. **I didn't have to go to work yesterday because it was a holiday.**, d. My workmate has to do my work when I am at lunch., e. My boss has to give me a performance review every six months., f. Does she have to work very long hours?, g. Do they have to clean their rooms or is there a cleaner?, h. **I don't have to stay at work until I've completed all my tasks.**