



B1 — Crossroads decision

Review: Modals (can, could, may, might, should, ought to, will, would, have to, shall)

Core modal verbs in English

Primary / Pure Modals

These are the “true” modal verbs — no -s, no infinitive, no past participle forms.

Can, could, may, might, must, will, would, shall, should

Semi-modals (Modal-like expressions)

These behave almost like modals but follow regular verb rules.

have to, ought to, be able to, be allowed to, need to (as a semi-modal), used to (for past habits)

Less common / formal modal expressions

Good for advanced C1/C2 precision:

dare (not) (as a modal-like negative: “I daren’t say.”)

had better (strong advice/warning)

Categorized modal chart (1/2)

Ability

- can – *present ability*
- could – *past ability / polite requests*
- be able to – *ability in all tenses*

Permission

- can – *informal permission*
- may – *formal permission*
- might – *very tentative permission*
- be allowed to – *permission in all tenses*

Obligation / Necessity

- must – *strong internal obligation*
- have to – *external obligation (rules, policies)*
- need to – *necessity*
- don't have to – *lack of necessity*
- mustn't – *prohibition*
- be required to – *formal obligation (work contexts)*

Categorized modal chart (2/2)

Advice / Suggestions

- should – *general advice*
- ought to – *strong recommendation*
- had better – *strong warning (“danger” or consequence implied)*

Possibility / Probability

- might, may, could – *possibility*
- must – *strong probability (logical conclusion)*
- can’t – *strong negative deduction (logical conclusion)*

Habits

- used to – *past habits*
- would – *past repeated actions (not states)*

Requests / Offers / Promises

- will – *offers, promises*
- would – *polite requests*
- shall – *formal offers/suggestions (“Shall we...?”)*

Modals of ability

Can — Structure: S + can + base verb

Use: Present ability

Example: *I can solve complex problems under pressure.*

Could — Structure: S + could + base verb

Use: Past ability; polite request

Example: *I could speak Italian when I was younger.*

Example: *Could you send me the report?*

Be able to — Structure: S + be (any tense) + able to + base verb

Use: Ability in all time frames

Example: *She was able to finish the project before the deadline.*

Modals of permission

Can — *Can I leave early today?*

May (more formal) — *May I ask a question?*

Be allowed to — *Employees are allowed to work remotely twice a week.*

Modals of obligation / necessity

Must — Structure: S + must + base verb

Use: Internal obligation

Example: *I must prepare for the meeting.*

Have to — Structure: S + have to + base verb

Use: External rules

Example: *You have to follow company policies.*

Don't have to — *You don't have to join the call if you're not available.*

Mustn't — *You mustn't share confidential data.*

Modals of advice

Should — *You should update your profile before applying.*

Ought to — *You ought to take more breaks.*

Had better — Strong warning.

You'd better double-check the numbers — mistakes can affect performance reviews.

Modals of possibility / probability

might / may / could

Amazon might open a new hub this year.

This may take longer than expected.

He could be the right candidate.

Must (strong probability) — *She must be very experienced — she's leading the team.*

Can't — *They can't be serious — that deadline is impossible.*

Modals of habits

Used to — *She used to work in retail.*

Would — *When I lived in Milan, I would walk to work every day.*

'Should' vs. 'could' vs. 'would' (1/3)

Meaning: Use **should** to say what is a good idea, the right thing, or the expected action.

Uses:

- Advice
- Opinions
- Mild obligation
- Expectation

Examples:

- *You should update your profile before applying.* (advice)
- *He should be here soon.* (expectation)
- *You shouldn't worry too much.* (negative advice)

Memory Trick: SHOULD = "*It's a good idea.*"

The difference between 'may' and 'might'

Both mean possibility. In everyday English, *may* and *might* both express that something is possible, but not certain.

- She *may* come to the meeting.
- She *might* come to the meeting.

In most contexts, the meaning is nearly the same.

The difference between 'may' and 'might'

Might is usually a weaker possibility than ***may***.

If we want to show the *possibility is smaller*, we usually choose ***might***.

- It ***may*** rain later. (50–60% chance)
- It ***might*** rain later. (20–40% chance)

It's not a strict rule, but it's a useful guide.

May is more formal; ***might*** is more conversational.

- ***may*** → slightly formal, polite
- ***might*** → neutral, everyday tone

Example:

- ***May*** I sit here? (polite)
- ***Might*** not be a good idea. (casual)

'Should' vs. 'could' vs. 'would' (2/3)

Meaning: Use **could** to talk about possibility, past ability, or polite suggestions.

Uses:

- Present/future possibility
- Past ability
- Polite suggestions/requests
- Theoretical ability

Examples:

- *We could finish early if we work fast.* (possibility)
- *I could speak French when I was younger.* (past ability)
- *Could you help me with this?* (polite request)
- *She could be the right candidate.* (possibility)

Memory Trick: **COULD** = “possible” or “able.”

'Should' vs. 'could' vs. 'would' (3/3)

Meaning: Use **would** for unreal, imaginary, or future-in-the-past situations. Also used for polite requests and past habits.

Uses:

- Imaginary / hypothetical situations
- Polite requests
- Preferences
- Past repeated actions (not states)

Examples:

- *I would move to London if I had the chance.* (imagined situation)
- *Would you like some help?* (polite offer/request)
- *When I was a child, we would visit my grandparents every summer.* (past habits)
- *I would prefer to work remotely.* (preference)

Memory Trick: WOULD = “Imagine it... hypothetically.”

Side-by-side comparison

Modal	Core meaning	Use type	Example
should	Good idea / advice	Advice & expectations	<i>You should practice more before the interview.</i>
could	Possible / able	Possibility, ability, polite requests	<i>We could change the strategy if needed.</i>
would	Imaginary / polite	Hypothetical, polite offers, preferences	<i>I would accept the offer if it matched any goals.</i>

Mini-test

Choose the correct modal:

1. “You _____ update your CV. It will help your application.”
2. “We _____ finish early if everyone joins the meeting.”
3. “I _____ move to another country if the job is interesting.”
4. “When I worked at Amazon, I _____ help the new team members.”
5. “_____ you explain how the dashboard works?”

No obligation & prohibition

Use: To show **no necessity** or **strict prohibition**.

1. don't / doesn't / didn't have to + base verb

= *It's not necessary.*

You **don't have to** come to the office every day. You can work remotely.

2. must not / mustn't + base verb

= *It is not allowed / It is very important NOT to do this.*

You **mustn't share** your password with anyone.

Employees **must not smoke** inside the building.

Nice contrast slide:

You **don't have to** join the meeting. (It's optional.)

You **mustn't** record the meeting. (It's forbidden.)

Requests, offers, and invitations

Use: Polite **requests** and **offers**.

Requests:

1. **Informal:**

Can you help me with this report?

Will you send me the file?

2. **Polite / formal:**

Could you please explain that again?

Would you mind checking this for me?

Offers / suggestions:

Shall we start the meeting?

Shall I share my screen?

Probability / certainty (past)

Use: To talk about **probability about the past**.

Structure: modal + have + past participle

1. **must have + past participle** (almost sure it happened):
*He **must have forgotten** the meeting.*
*They **must have left** early. The office is empty.*
2. **might have / may have / could have + past participle** (possible):
*She **might have sent** the email to the wrong address.*
3. **can't have / couldn't have + past participle** (almost sure it didn't happen):
*He **can't have read** my message. There's no reply.*
*They **couldn't have finished** the project so quickly.*

The difference between 'shall' and 'will' (1/2)

Modern Everyday English

- Today, **“will”** is used far more often than **“shall.”**
- In most contexts, **“shall”** sounds formal, old-fashioned, or legal.

Use in modern English:

1. **Will** = natural, standard, everyday future
2. **Shall** = formal, polite, or used for offers/suggestions (mainly British English)

Traditional Rule (rarely followed today)

Traditionally:

- **I / We + shall** for the simple future
- **You / He / She / They + will** for the simple future
- Reversed for emphasis

But **this rule is now mostly historical.**
Modern speakers almost always use **“will”**.

The difference between 'shall' and 'will' (2/2)

Will — normal future

Used for:

- predictions
- decisions
- promises
- future facts

Examples:

- *I will call you tomorrow.*
- *The meeting will start at 9.*

Shall — polite suggestions, offers, or invitations

Mostly used with I and we in very specific situations:

Polite suggestions:

- *Shall we start?*
- *Shall we go now?*

Polite offers:

- *Shall I make some coffee?*
- *Shall I help you with that?*

Here, **shall** sounds friendly and cooperative.

Legal, formal, and contractual “shall”

Used to indicate **obligations, requirements, or conditions**.

Example (formal/business/legal):

- *Employees **shall** wear ID badges at all times.*
- *Payment **shall** be made within 30 days.*

Here, “**shall**” behaves like a **strong must**.

Modals — positive and negative forms

1. **can** → cannot (can't)
2. **could** → could not (couldn't)
3. **may** → may not
4. **might** → might not (mightn't)
5. **must** → must not (mustn't)
6. **will** → will not (won't)
7. **would** → would not (wouldn't)
8. **shall** → shall not (shan't)
9. **should** → should not (shouldn't)
10. **ought to** → ought not to (oughtn't to)
11. **have to** → don't/doesn't/didn't have to
12. **had better** → had better not



Thank you for your support.

YouTube: @elucidatedenglish