

MODAL VERBS

- The modal verbs are can, could, may, might, shall, should, will and would.
- The modals are used to do things like talking about ability, asking permission making requests, and so on.

ABILITY

- We use **can** to talk about someone's skill or general abilities:

She **can speak** several languages.

He **can swim** like a fish.

They **can't dance** very well.

- We use **can** to talk about the ability to do something at a given time in the **present or future**:

You **can make** a lot of money if you are lucky.

Help. I **can't breathe**.

They **can run** but they **can't hide**.

- We use **could** to talk about **past** time:

She **could speak** several languages.

They **couldn't dance** very well.

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- We use **could have** to say that someone had the ability/opportunity to do something, but did **not** do it:

She **could have learned** Swahili, but she didn't have time.

I **could have danced** all night [but didn't].

PERMISSION

- We use **can** to ask for permission to do something:

Can I ask a question, please?

Can we go home now?

- **Could** is more formal and **polite** than **can**:

Could I ask a question please?

Could we go home now?

- **May** is another **more formal** and polite way of asking for permission:

May I ask a question please?

May we go home now?

- We use **can** to **give** permission:

You can go home now if you like.

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You **can borrow** my pen if you like.

- **May** is a more formal and polite way of **giving** permission:

You **may go** home now, if you like.

- We use **can** to say that **someone has permission** to do something:

We **can go out** whenever we want.

Students **can travel** free.

- **May** is a more formal and polite way of saying that **someone has permission**:

Students **may travel** free.

INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUESTS

- We use **Could you...?** and **Would you...?** as polite ways of telling or asking someone to **do something**:

Could you take a message please?

Would you carry this for me please?

Could I have my bill please?

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- **Can** and **Will** are less polite:

Can you take a message please?

Will you carry this for me please?

SUGGESTIONS AND ADVICE

- We use **should** to make suggestions and give advice:

You **should** send an email.

We **should** go by train.

- We use **could** to make suggestions:

We **could** meet at the weekend.

You **could** eat out tonight.

- We use **conditionals** to give advice:

Dan **will** help you if you ask him.

- **Past tenses** are more polite:

Dan **would** help you if you asked him.

OFFERS AND INVITATIONS

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- We use **Can I...?** to make offers:

Can I help you?

Can I do that for you?

- We can also use **Shall I ...?**

Shall I help you with that?

Shall I call you on your mobile?

- We sometime say **I can ...** or **I could ...** or **I'll (I will) ...** to make an offer:

I can do that for you if you like.

I can give you a lift to the station.

I'll do that for you if you like.

I'll give you a lift to the station.

- We use **Would you like (to) ...?** for invitations:

Would you like to come round to morrow?

Would you like another drink?

- We use **you must** or **we must** for a very polite invitation:

You must come round and see us.

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We **must** meet again soon.

OBLIGATION AND NECESSITY

- We use **must** to say that it is necessary to do something:

You **must stop** at a red light.

Everyone **must bring** something to eat.

You can wear what you like, but you **must look** neat and tidy.

I'm sorry, but you **mustn't make** a noise in here.

- We use **had to** for this if we are talking about the past:

Everyone **had to bring** something to eat.

We could wear what we liked, but we **had to look** neat and tidy.

Information taken from:

BRITISH COUNCIL. Ability, permission, requests and advice

<https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/es/english-grammar/verbs/modal-verbs/ability-permission-requests-and-advice>