

Introduction to modal verbs

Introduction

Some facts about modal auxiliary verbs:

1. They do not have an infinitive form.

can ✓
to can ✗

2. We use them before other verbs to give more information. We use the **bare infinitive** of the main verb. We do not use 'to' after a modal.

I can swim. ✓
I can to swim. ✗

3. We use 'not' for the negative form

I can't swim. ✓
I don't can swim. ✗

and we do not use 'do' in questions.

Can you swim? ✓
Do you can swim? ✗

4. Modals have only one form.

I can
You can
He/she/it can
We can
They can

A list of modal auxiliary verbs

Can
Could
May

Might
Must
Shall
Should
Will
Would

Uses

Modal auxiliary verbs have different meanings. This table shows some common uses.

See the rules on each modal for more detailed information.

	can	can't	could	may	might	must	mustn't	have to	will	would	shall	should	ought to
ability	x	x	x										
advice						x	x	x				x	x
deduction		x				x		x	x			x	x
expectation												x	x
habit									x	x			
hypothetical										x			
necessity						x		x					
obligation						x		x					
offers	x			x							x		
permission	x	x		x									
possibility	x	x	x	x	x								
prediction									x				
prohibition							x						
requests	x		x	x					x	x			
suggestions											x		
wishing			x							x			

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