

# Shall

## Introduction



Shall we dance?

## Definition and construction

**Shall** is a modal auxiliary verb which has different uses. It is usually only used with 'I' and 'we' in the interrogative form.

**Shall** + 'I'/'we' + bare infinitive -> **Shall** I help?



Like other modal auxiliaries, **shall** has no infinitive and 'do' is not used to form negative or interrogative sentences. In the uses in this table, it is only used with 'I' and 'we'.

## Uses and examples

| Use   | Examples  |
|---|---|
| To make or ask for suggestions  | Shall we have a break now?<br>Where shall we go tonight?              |
| To ask for advice   | Shall we park here or over there?<br>Shall I return his call?         |
| To make offers  | Shall I help you with that?<br>Shall we take you to the airport?      |
| In question tags for suggestions with 'Let's' and with 'will' for spontaneous decisions | Let's go out for dinner, shall we?<br>I'll do that tomorrow, shall I? |
| In legal documents  | See below for more information and examples.                          |

**Shall** can also be followed by the present continuous when making suggestions. For example: **Shall** I be preparing the vegetables while you're making the dessert?

Unlike using **shall** as an alternative to 'will' when talking about the future, **shall** as a modal is very common in conversation:

- What **shall** we have for dinner tonight?

- Shall I apply for the job I told you about? What do you think?
- Shall I do that for you?



Well, we need a break. Shall I be clearing up while you're making tea?

Let's get together again on Friday, shall we?



I'll prepare the corn, shall I?

Shall I explain that again or do you understand now?



Where shall we go next?

Which one shall I buy?

## Legal terms



The supplier shall dispatch all orders within three days of payment.

In some legal documents, contracts, laws and formal rules, shall is also used with 'he', 'she', 'it' and 'they'.

**Affirmative:** He/she/it/they **shall**

**Negative:** He/she/it/they **shall not**



1. These documents are written in formal English so contractions are not used.
2. There is no necessity for an interrogative form in these documents.

| Use                             | Examples   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| To express obligations          | The employer <b>shall</b> pay compensation in the event of a successful claim.<br>These rules <b>shall</b> apply to all participants.<br>The terms of this lease <b>shall</b> be from 2016 until 2022.                             |
| To express negative obligations | The company <b>shall not</b> be liable for any loss or damage.<br>The amount paid <b>shall not</b> exceed the insured sum set.   |
| To express prohibition          | Members of the forum <b>shall not</b> purchase nor sell any music that is known to be stolen from its legal owner.<br>No candidate <b>shall</b> be allowed to enter the room more than thirty minutes after the start of the exam. |
| To state requirements           | A score of 60% <b>shall</b> be deemed a pass.<br>The Contractor's sub-contractors <b>shall not</b> be considered as being employees or agents.   |

Note that in both the UK and USA, there is some disagreement about this use of **shall**. For example:

1. Some people believe it should be avoided and that 'will' should always be used. Others use 'will' in order to express a client's obligations and **shall** for the other party's obligations with no difference in meaning.
2. Others believe that shall can also be used to mean 'may' or 'can', as in the United States Constitution, or to state a fact: No Person **shall** be a Representative who shall not have attained to the Age of twenty five Years, and been seven Years a Citizen of the United States, and who shall not, when elected, be an Inhabitant of that State in which he shall be chosen.

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