

Modals

The finites which express the mode or manner of the actions denoted in the principal verb are termed as Modals. This class of helping verbs not only assists in forming questions and negatives, but also expresses a wide range of meanings. These helping verbs are **can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might, must, ought to, have to, has to and had to**. These are also known as modal auxiliaries. They express the degree of certainty of the action in the sentence or the attitude or opinion of the writer/speaker concerning the action. **Need, dare and used to** are called semi-modals.

Nature of Modals

- Modals are never used alone.

e.g. (a) I **can** upon the harmonium.
(b) I **can** play upon the harmonium.

(Incorrect)

(Correct)

Modals always have a principal verb with them.

- Modals don't change according to the number or person of the subject.

e.g. (a) I **can** play. (b) He **can** play. (c) We **can** play. (d) They **can** play.

- Modals don't have the infinitive form. We can't place 'to' with them in order to use them in a sentence.

e.g. (a) We **must** to get there before time.
(b) We **must** get there before time.

(Incorrect)

(Correct)

- Two modals can never go together.
- We always use first form of verb with modals.

Functions of Modals

Will

- To show promise, intention, willingness, determination with the first person (I, we)

e.g. (a) I **will** give you a gift of your choice. (*promise*)
(b) We **will** help you. (*willingness*)
(c) I **will** change the system of our organisation. (*determination*)

- To express request, invitation, insistence, assumption, characteristic or habit

e.g. (a) **Will** you please help me? (*request*)
(b) She **will** be in the school during school hours. (*assumption*)
(c) The lion **will** usually kill other animals. (*characteristic, habit*)

• **Negative Form of will : Will not/ Won't**

- e.g. (a) I *will not* spend my pocket money.
 (b) She *won't* eat unhygienic food.
 (c) They *won't* win the match.
 (d) My friend *will not* attend the party.

Would (Past form of 'Will')

(i) It expresses the past form of 'will'

- e.g. (a) He informed me that he *would* dance at my marriage function.
 (b) The problem was how he *would* reach there.

(ii) To express past habit

- e.g. (a) He *would* drink a cup of coffee in the morning.
 (b) My father *would* get up early in the morning.

(iii) For request

- e.g. (a) *Would* you please give me your bike?
 (b) *Would* you like to spend this evening with me?

(iv) To express wish

- e.g. (a) I wish she *would* be healthy.
 (b) You *would* be an engineer.

(v) To express an imaginary condition

- e.g. I *would* have a big house if I earned ₹10 crore every year.

• **Negative Form of Would : Would not / Wouldn't**

- e.g. She *would not* get up early in the morning.

Shall

(i) To ask for suggestion, request, advice with the first person (I, We) in the interrogative sentence

- e.g. (a) *Shall* we start the class? (*advice*)
 (b) *Shall* I have a cup of coffee from your shop? (*request*)
 (c) *Shall* we open a new shop? (*suggestion*)

(ii) In the second and third person to indicate threat, warning, command, promise, assurance and determination

- e.g. (a) If you sit with bad boys, you *shall* be punished. (*threat*)
 (b) You *shall* go now. (*command*)
 (c) She *shall* get a bicycle. (*promise*)

• **Negative Form of Shall : Shall not/ Shan't**

- e.g. (a) She *shall not* sing tomorrow.
 (b) They *shall not* win the match.
 (c) My friend *shan't* be dismissed.

Should (Past form of 'shall')

(i) To express duty or obligation

- e.g. (a) I *should* help my friends. (*duty*)
 (b) You *should* not be lazy. (*obligation*)
 (c) You *should* respect your elders. (*duty*)

(ii) To express opinion

- e.g. They *should* be on the way to Jaipur.

(iii) To give or take advice or suggestion

- e.g. (a) We *should* go to the temple.
 (b) We *should* obey our elders.

(iv) After 'lest' when someone expresses fear

- e.g. (a) Walk carefully *lest* you should fall down.
 (b) They started early *lest* they should miss the train.

• **Negative Form of Should : Should not /Shouldn't**

- e.g. (a) You *should not* come to me daily.
 (b) You *shouldn't* make a noise here.
 (c) They *shouldn't* tease others.
 (d) We *should not* waste our time.

Can

(i) To express an ability, capability, capacity or power

- e.g. (a) I *can* lift 60 kg. (*Ability*)
 (b) She *can* pass the MBA examination. (*Capability*)
 (c) *Can* you understand English language? (*Capacity*)
 (d) I *can* grant you leave. (*Power*)
 (e) She *can* swim across the river. (*Ability*)

(ii) To show possibility

- e.g. (a) She *can* fall on the road. (b) I *can* go there.

(iii) To take or give permission

- e.g. (a) *Can* I sit here?
 (b) You *can* park your scooter here.

• **Negative Form of Can : Cannot /Can't**

- e.g. (a) They *cannot* climb the mountain.
 (b) She *can't* run fast.
 (c) I *cannot* speak against you.

Could (Past form of 'can')

(i) To express ability/talent in the past

- e.g. (a) They *could* win the game last month.
 (b) She *could* sing beautifully.

(ii) To express polite request

- e.g. (a) *Could* I have your pen?
 (b) *Could* I ride on your bike?

• **Negative Form of Could : Could not/ Couldn't**

- e.g. (a) Could you not smoke outside the house?
 (b) She *couldn't* cook delicious food.

May

(i) To show possibility or probability

- e.g. (a) The inspector *may* attend the school today.
 (b) She *may* win the match.

(ii) To give or take permission

- e.g. (a) *May* I come in ?
(b) Yes, you *may* come in.

(iii) To wish or pray

- e.g. (a) *May* you get well soon!
(b) *May* God bless you with a child!

(iv) To show a purpose

- e.g. (a) My friend is joining a new company so that he *may* achieve his target.
(b) He is working hard so that he *may* win.

• Negative Form of May : May not/ Mayn't

- e.g. (a) It *may not* rain today.
(b) She *mayn't* attend the meeting.

Might (Past form of 'may')

(i) To express less possibility

- e.g. (a) He *might* help us.
(b) She *might* be a winner in the competition.

(ii) For permission

- e.g. (a) *Might* I begin to reveal the truth?
(b) *Might* this be the Key?

(iii) To express a guess

- e.g. That *might* be Rohit.

• Negative Form of Might : Might not/ Mightn't

- e.g. (a) It *might not* rain.
(b) She *mightn't* talk to me this evening.

▲ **TIP** 'May' and 'might' can be used interchangeably to express possibility. However, we usually use 'might' when something is less likely and 'may' when it is more likely.

Must

(i) To express necessity or obligation

- e.g. (a) You *must* take part in the competition.
(b) We *must* love our motherland.

(ii) To indicate assumption or conclusion

- e.g. (a) She *must* be here in the evening.
(b) Mr AK Gupta *must* be a good teacher.

(iii) In case of prohibition

- e.g. You *must not* bunk school.

• Negative Form of Must : Must not/ Mustn't

- e.g. (a) You *must not* play in sunlight.
(b) You *must not* write your name on the walls.
(c) You *mustn't* make a fuss over this.

Have to/ Has to/ Had to

(i) To express obligation or compulsion (While talking about rules, laws)

- e.g. (a) I *have to* reach school early.
(b) She *has to* work late in the office.
(c) They *had to* follow the instructions.

• Negative Form of Have to : Don't have to

- e.g. (a) I *don't have to* cook the food at home.
(b) She *doesn't have to* work till late in the office.

Ought to

(i) To express moral obligation or duty

- e.g. (a) You *ought to* respect your parents.
(b) You *ought to* serve the nation.
(c) We *ought to* help our relatives.
(d) We *ought to* speak the truth.

(ii) To give advice

- e.g. You *ought to* study hard to achieve success.

• Negative Form of Ought to : Ought not to/ Oughtn't to

- e.g. (a) You *ought not to* hate your neighbours.
(b) You *oughtn't to* insult your elders.

Use of 'Need', 'Need to', 'Dare' and 'Used to'

Need and dare are considered semi-modals because they can be used either as modal auxiliaries or as main verbs.

Need/Need to

As a modal auxiliary verb in negative terms, it indicates absence of obligation. It expresses the speaker's authority or advice and is used for the present and the future. e.g. You **needn't** type this letter.

(i) The interrogative is formed by inversion.

- e.g. *Need* I speak to him?

(ii) Its past is **needed** to in the affirmative sentence, **need not have** in the negative and **need have** in the interrogative.

- e.g. (a) *Need* I have gone to him? (Interrogative in the past)
(b) I *needed* to go to him. (Affirmative in the past)
(c) You *needn't* have gone to meet him. (Negative in the past)
(d) You *need to* go to the barber — your hair are too long. (Affirmative in the future)

Dare

As a modal auxiliary, dare refers to being bold and courageous. The negative is formed by **dare not** and the interrogative by inversion.

- e.g. (a) *Dare* we talk to them? (b) I *dare not* disturb them.

Used to

(i) A discontinued habit or a past situation which is no more in the present.

- e.g. He *used to* drink daily. (Now he does not drink)

(ii) Something existing in the past.

- e.g. This *used to* be a dense jungle before.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

I. Fill in the blanks with suitable modals

A. 1. Usha run a hundred yards in ten seconds.

2. his soul rest in peace!

3. The baby is crying, he be hungry.

4. you tell me the way to the post office, please?

5. You keep your scooter locked.

6. I bring you a cup of coffee.

7. When I was a boy, I walk forty miles in a day.

8. I have come to ask if Geeta use your bicycle tomorrow.

9. you have another piece of cake?

10. All of us die.

B. 1. You have watered the flowers, for it is going to rain.

2. If we had taken the other road, we have arrived earlier.

3. The bank closes at 2 PM, but the manager allow you to get in.

4. you please send me an application form?

5. As Rahul was the last one to leave, it be he who left the door open.

6. You read his latest book.

7. She speak three languages when she was twelve.

8. I see quite clearly what the children are doing in the garden.

9. He be at least sixty.

10. Your job be very demanding, but at least it isn't boring.

II. Fill in the blanks with suitable modals

A. 1. It's not very important. You not do it now. You do it tomorrow.

2. I have no time. I leave now or I miss the bus.

3. we go out tonight, please? Yes, but you be late

4. I haven't decided where I go in my next holidays. I think I go to Paris.

5. you water my plants while I am away? If they don't get enough water they certainly die.

6. I buy the tickets for the concert? I see you're too busy.

7. you speak German? No, I

8. Jayati not play the violin when she was five but now she play it very well.

9. You not be so nervous. I think it be very easy.

10. He had been working for more than eleven hours. He be tired after such hard work. He prefer to get some rest.

B. 1. I speak Arabic fluently when I was a child. But now, I say just a few things in the language.

2. The teacher said we read this book for our own pleasure. But we read if we don't want to.

3. You not leave small objects lying around. Such objects be swallowed by children.

4. Those whose names are called come for practice. The rest of you come.

5. They have returned last night. I check to see if they are back.

6. How you speak so rudely to me! You be punished.

7. The boy be very hardworking, but now he is very lazy. He pull up his socks.

8. I not ask for his permission in case he says 'no'. I wish he were as lenient as he be.

9. How you say such a thing! You be ashamed of yourself. You never be so rude before.

10. He said that it be alright for you to enter, but I think you wait until he gets here.

III. Complete the following conversation by filling appropriate modals.

- A. Naresh: Raghav, I (1) get my watch repaired. (2) you get it done for me if you are going to the market?
 Raghav: I (3) surely get your work done but I am not going to the market today. I (4) go tomorrow.
 Naresh: Then you (5) take my watch tomorrow.
 Raghav: You (6) give it to me right now if you like. In that case I (7) come back all the way to your house tomorrow.
 Naresh: Thanks a lot.
 Raghav: There is no need to be thankful. I (8) go to the market in any case.
- B. Ajay: (1) I come in, Sir?
 Teacher: No, don't you know that you (2) reach the class in time.
 Ajay: Sorry, Sir, I (3) not repeat it again.
 Teacher: You (4) go to the principal's office and get his permission.

Ajay: (5) you please excuse me for one day?

Teacher: No, you (6) go.

Ajay: I (7) meet him, sir. He (8) even suspend me.

IV. Fill in the blanks with suitable modals to complete the passage.

- A. The Electricity Board Office has warned that they (1) cut the electricity connection if I don't pay the bill by today. So I (2) go to the Electricity Board office to pay the bill. I (3) have paid the amount yesterday but the office was closed. I (4) finish my work immediately and rush to the office so that I (5) pay the bill before 2 PM. I (6) be late, perhaps.
- B. Accidents (1) happen anywhere and (2) result in injuries. Correct first aid at the earlier stage (3) mean a difference between life and death. It (4) prevent fatal loss. A knowledge of what (5) be done in such cases till the doctor arrives (6) always be helpful to the common man.

Answers

- I. A. 1. can
 3. must
 5. should
 7. could
 9. Will
 B. 1. need not
 3. might
 5. might
 7. could
 9. must
 II. A. 1. need, can
 3. May, must not
 5. Could, will
 7. Can, cannot
 9. should, will
 B. 1. could, can
 3. should, may
 5. might, May

2. May
 4. Will
 6. Shall
 8. may
 10. will
 2. would
 4. Would
 6. should
 8. can
 10. may
 2. must, will
 4. will, might
 6. Shall, can
 8. could, can
 10. must, may
 2. can, need not
 4. must, need not
 6. dare, ought to

7. used to, ought to
 8. dare, used to
 9. dare, ought to, used to
 10. would, should

- III. A. 1. have to
 3. will
 5. can
 7. need not
 B. 1. May
 3. shall
 5. Would
 7. dare not
 2. would
 4. may
 6. should
 8. have to
 2. cannot
 4. should
 6. have to
 8. may
 2. have to
 4. will
 6. may
 2. may
 4. might
 6. can

- IV. A. 1. will
 3. would
 5. can
 B. 1. can
 3. could
 5. should