MODALS

- obligation
- prohibition
- ability
- permission

WHAT ARE MODAL VERBS?
Modal verbs are special verbs which behave very differently from normal verbs. Here are some important differences:
1. Modal verbs do not take "-s" in the third person.
   - He can speak Chinese.
   - She should be here by 9:00.
2. You use "not" to make modal verbs negative, even in Simple Present and Simple Past.
   - He should not be late.
   - They might not come to the party.
3. Many modal verbs cannot be used in the past tenses or the future tenses. Other forms should be used.
   - He will can go with us.
   - Not Correct
   - She musted study very hard.
   - Not Correct

ALL MODALS
- can
- could
- may
- might
- must
- ought to
- shall
- should
- will
- would
- have to: this expression is not a modal but is closely related to modals in meaning and is often interchanged with them

Difference between mustn’t and don’t have to
Mustn’t means it’s not allowed, or it’s a bad idea.
- You mustn’t eat so much chocolate, you’ll be sick.
Don’t have to means you don’t need to do something, but it’s fine if you want to do it. There’s no obligation at all, no need to do it.
- I don’t have to get up early at the weekend (I can stay in bed as long as I want).
**MUST (1)**

We can use must to show that we are certain something is true. We are making a logical deduction based upon some clear evidence or reason.

a) There's no heating on. You must be freezing.
b) You must be worried that she is so late coming home.
c) I can't remember what I did with it. I must be getting old.
d) It must be nice to live in Florida.
e) You must be thirsty after all that running.
f) It must be John. He said he would come at three o'clock.

**MUST (2)**

We also use must to express a strong obligation. This usually means that some personal circumstance makes the obligation necessary (and the speaker almost certainly agrees with the obligation or the obligation comes from the speaker himself/herself).

a) I must go to bed earlier.
b) They must do something about it.
c) You must come and see us some time.
d) I must say, I don't think you were very nice to him.
e) I must stop smoking.
f) You must have a permit to enter the park.

**MUST (3)**

Must is used to express a strong recommendation. It can be substituted for by should to mitigate the strength of the sentence.

a) You simply must see that film.
b) You must take a day off and have some rest.
c) You should take a day off.
d) You should have a rest. = You ought to have a rest.

We use you must or we must for a very polite invitation.

e) You must come round and see us.
f) We must meet again soon.

**HAVE TO (1)**

Have to is used to express obligation (when something is necessary). We can also express a strong obligation. Some external circumstance makes the obligation necessary.

**Positive**

a) I have to work very unsociable hours.
b) She has to wear a uniform.

c) I don't have to work at weekends.
d) John doesn't have to do any work at home.

**Question**

e) Do I have to pay in advance?
f) Does your father have to travel a lot at his job?

**HAVE TO (2)**

In British English, we often use have got to to mean the same as have to.

a) I've got to take this book back to the library or I'll get a fine.
b) We've got to finish now as somebody else needs this room.

will have to is used to talk about strong obligations. Like must, this usually means that that some personal circumstance makes the obligation necessary. (will is often used to show 'willingness'.) 

c) I'll have to speak to him.
d) We'll have to have lunch and catch up on all the gossip.

The differences between the positive/affirmative forms of must and have to are sometimes very small and very subtle. However, there is a huge difference in the negative forms.

We use mustn't to express strong obligations NOT to do something.

a) We mustn't talk about it. It's confidential.
b) I mustn't eat chocolate. It's bad for me.
c) You mustn't phone me at work. We aren't allowed personal calls.
d) They mustn't see us talking or they'll suspect something.
e) Cars must not be parked in front of the bank.
We use don’t have to (or haven’t got to) in British English to state that there is NO obligation or necessity.

a) We don’t have to get there on time. The boss is away today.
b) I don’t have to listen to this. I’m leaving.
c) You don’t have to come if you don’t want to.
d) He doesn’t have to sign anything if he doesn’t want to at this stage.
e) I haven’t got to go. Only if I want to.

Must or mustn’t?

1) You _______ light fires in the forests.
2) You _______ do your homework
3) You _______ have a shower every morning.
4) You _______ drink cold water.
5) You _______ watch TV a lot.
6) You _______ eat in class.
7) You _______ be late for class.
8) You _______ listen to your teacher.
9) You _______ give place to old people.
10) You _______ be polite.
11) You _______ fasten your seat belt.

have to, has to, don’t have to, or doesn’t have to?

1. When you make pizza, you _______ have some pizza sauce.
2. You also _______ have some cheese on top of the pizza.
3. You _______ have peppers on your pizza, but you can if you want to.
4. A good pizza _______ taste good.
5. So, you _______ choose the pizza toppings that you like best.
6. Personally, I love tomatoes, so I always _______ have tomatoes on my pizza!
7. You _______ make your own pizza, you can buy a pizza from a pizza shop if you want to.
8. Pizza tastes best when it’s hot, but you _______ eat hot pizza. You can eat it cold too.

mustn’t or don’t have to?

1) It is forbidden. You _______ do that.
2) You _______ ask my permission. You can do what you want.
3) You _______ speak to the driver when the bus is moving. It’s dangerous.
4) Help yourself to anything you want. You _______ ask.
5) You _______ park here. There is a double yellow line.
6) Pay me back when you can. You _______ do it immediately.
7) It’s optional. We _______ to go if you don’t want to.
8) I’ll tell you a secret. You _______ tell anybody else. Promise?
mustn’t or don’t have to?
1) Be on time. You ______ be late or we will leave without you.
2) He’s a millionaire. He ______ work but he does because he enjoys it.
3) I like Saturdays because I ______ go to work.
4) This is very important. You ______ forget what I said.
5) It’s very informal here. You ______ wear a tie unless you want to.
6) The train is direct. You ______ change trains.
7) In boxing, you ______ hit your opponent below the belt.
8) In athletics, you ______ start before the gun is fired.
9) In bridge, you ______ look at other people’s cards.

6) You ______ pass a test to ride a bicycle.
   a) mustn’t
   b) don’t have to
7) You ______ live in Canada to study at the University of Victoria. You can take a course by Internet.
   a) don’t have to
   b) mustn’t
8) In Canada, employers ______ discriminate against women or minorities. It’s against the law.
   a) don’t have to
   b) mustn’t
9) You ______ unplug the computer while it is turned on.
   a) mustn’t
   b) don’t have to
10) You ______ smoke in a gas station.
    a) mustn’t
    b) don’t have to

mustn’t or don’t have to?
1) Canadians ______ get a visa to travel to the US.
   a) don’t have to
   b) mustn’t
2) This bus is free! You ______ buy a ticket.
   a) mustn’t
   b) don’t have to
3) Shops ______ sell cigarettes to children.
   a) mustn’t
   b) don’t have to
4) You ______ be late for class, or the teacher will be angry.
   a) mustn’t
   b) don’t have to
5) You ______ buy the textbook for this course, you can borrow mine.
   a) mustn’t
   b) don’t have to
6) You ______ pass a test to ride a bicycle.
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MODALS OF ABILITY
Ability can mean two things.
1) general ability: this is something that once you have learned you can do any time you want, like being able to read or swim or speak a language, for example.
2) specific ability: this means something that you can or can’t do in one particular situation. For example, being able to lift something heavy, or find somewhere you are looking for.

There are three modal verbs used to show ability:
Can
Could
Be Able To

PRESENT

can / can’t (for both general and specific ability)
   a) I can play the piano.
   b) She can speak English.
   c) He can’t drive, he’s too tired.
   d) We can’t come now.

could / couldn’t (for general ability)
   a) I could read when I was four.
   b) She could speak French when she was a child, but now she has forgotten it.

was able to / couldn’t (for specific ability) when someone actually succeeded in doing something.
   a) When the computer crashed yesterday, I was able to fix it. (not ‘I could fix it’)
   b) She was able to pass the exam, even though she hadn’t studied much. (not ‘she could pass’)
   c) He called us because he couldn’t find the house.
   d) I couldn’t open the window.

PAST (1)

could / couldn’t (for general ability)
   a) I could read when I was four.
   b) She could speak French when she was a child, but now she has forgotten it.

was able to / couldn’t (for specific ability) when someone actually succeeded in doing something.
   a) When the computer crashed yesterday, I was able to fix it. (not ‘I could fix it’)
   b) She was able to pass the exam, even though she hadn’t studied much. (not ‘she could pass’)
   c) He called us because he couldn’t find the house.
   d) I couldn’t open the window.
PAST (2)
There is an exception with the verbs of sense perception (see, hear, smell, taste, feel) and some verbs of thinking (understand, remember, decide, believe, guess). When we form sentences that express ability in particular past situations, we must always use the modals could or couldn’t. Was / were able to or wasn’t / weren’t able to are never used with these verbs.

a) When I came into the kitchen, I could smell something burning.
b) When I looked out of the window, I could see a man walking down the street.
c) The woman spoke only French, therefore I couldn’t understand what she said.
d) I couldn’t decide whether to ask her out or not.

PAST (3)
could + have + past participle (an ability someone had in the past, but didn’t use).
We use could have to say that someone had the ability/opportunity to do something, but did not do it:

a) I could have played the piano well but I didn’t practise enough.
b) We could have come earlier.
c) She could have studied law, but she preferred to become a secretary.

FUTURE
will / won’t be able to (general ability)
a) At the end of the course, you will be able to make your own website.
b) He won’t be able to speak Japanese in a week! It will take months.

can / can’t (specific ability)
c) I can help you tomorrow.
d) I can’t come to the party.

MANAGE TO
If we want to emphasize that the action is difficult we can use manage to in the present or past.
a) I usually manage to visit 20 countries every year.
b) I managed to finish the book but it was very boring.

In the negative we can use couldn’t, wasn’t able to, and didn’t manage to for a specific action.
c) I couldn’t book the tickets.
d) I wasn’t able to book the tickets.
e) I didn’t manage to book the tickets.

MODALS: ASKING FOR PERMISSION
We use can to ask for permission to do something:
a) Can I ask a question, please?
b) Can we go home now.

could is more formal and polite than can:
c) Could I ask a question please?
d) Could we go home now?

may is another more formal and polite way of asking for permission:
e) May I ask a question please?
f) May we go home now?

MODALS: GIVING PERMISSION
We use can to give permission:
a) You can go home now if you like.
b) You can borrow my pen if you like.
may is a more formal and polite way of giving permission:
c) You may go home now, if you like.

We use can to say that someone has permission to do something:
d) We can go out whenever we want.
e) Students can travel free.
may is another more formal and polite way of saying that someone has permission:
f) Students may travel free.
can, could or be able to?

1) Last week we _______ swimming, this week we can’t. (can/to go)
2) Maybe the Smiths _________ a new house next year. (can/to build)
3) If you try hard, you ____________ your examinations. (can/to pass)
4) Dennis _________ the trumpet after four months. (can/to play)
5) Luke has passed his driving test, now he _________ a car. (can/to drive)
6) I _________ to him on the phone for three weeks last month. (not/can/to speak)
7) Alex _________ his homework when his desk is in such a mess. (not/can/to do)
8) They were so busy, they _________ me a text message. (not/can/to write)
9) Lisa _________ her dress. She can wear it again. (can/to clean)

can, can’t, could, couldn’t, or be able to ?

1) I searched for your house for ages. Luckily I _________ find it in the end.
2) She’s seven years old, but she _________ read yet. Her parents are getting her extra lessons.
3) I read the book three times, but I _________ understand it.
4) James _________ speak Japanese when he lived in Japan, but he’s forgotten most of it now.
5) I _________ understand the chapter we had to read for homework. It was so difficult.
6) I _________ lift this box - it’s too heavy! Would you help me?
7) I _________ open this window! I think it’s stuck.

can, could or be able to?

1. I’m sorry, I _________ take you to the airport in the morning because I’ve got a business meeting at 9 o’clock.
2. I think I _________ pass my driving test before my 50th birthday.
3. One day in the future I think we _________ live on the moon.
4. If we left now, we _________ arrive before the shops close.
5. I’m not working this weekend so we _________ go cycling on Sunday.
6. I _________ meet you for coffee at 11, but I’ll only have fifteen minutes.
7. I’ll do the washing and the ironing, but I _________ do the shopping.
8. If we worked together, we _________ finish it before the film starts.
9. She was bad after the accident, but I think she _________ go back to work next week.
10. It’s not possible yet, but I think computers _________ do the housework for us in a few years.
11. I _________ go for a run this evening. My parents are coming to visit and I won’t have time.
12. I _________ do your job. It’s so complicated and stressful.
could, couldn’t or managed to?

1. I ______ play the piano when I was four.
2. They ______ to get to the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro, but it took them six days.
3. Eventually Luis ______ convince me that there’s no future in teaching English.
4. Mark wanted to see the final of the European Cup, but he ______ get tickets.
5. Henry was so advanced for his age that he ______ burn music CD’s when he was 8 months old.

6. Val and John were amazed that they ______ to drive over the Pyrenees in such an old car.
7. I spoke to her for more than an hour, bought her a drink, and finally ______________ get her phone number.
8. Carlos ______ speak English when he was six years old. His parents are from Liverpool.
9. Cathy grew up near the beach in South Africa. She ______ swim, sail and dive when she was very young.
10. Danny lost his job at the clock factory because he ______ get up on time in the mornings.

Complete the sentences using could or couldn’t where possible (the context should tell you which). Where this is not possible use a suitable form of (not) be able to.

1. She ______ ride a pony almost before she walk.
2. Luckily we ______ get tickets for the show.
3. We went to the sales and ______ find lots of bargains.
4. We ______ find a restaurant open anywhere.
5. Jenny wasn’t at home but I ______ contact her on her mobile.
6. They ______ hear footsteps behind them in the dark.
7. I ______ ski until I was in my twenties, when I took lessons.
8. Hay ______ distinctly remember asking for black coffee, not white.
9. She didn’t want to come, but finally I ______ persuade her.
10. Even as a small child, David ______ play the piano really well.

Complete the sentences using the word in brackets and a word from the box in a suitable form. You may also have to add a word or two.

1. We ______ up a real bargain in the sales. (manage)
2. They only ______ the problem worse. (succeed)
3. He used to ______ like Fred Astaire, (table)
4. I ______ that attachment you sent me. (manage)
5. She always ______ she did. (succeed)
6. He was busy and wasn’t ______ me at the station. (able)
7. We’ve finally ______ just the right present for her. (manage)
8. It was so embarrassing, I could ______ his name. (never)
9. I never ______ the theory of relativity. (could)
10. Great news! She’s ______ into Oxford after all. (succeed)

TEST

1. I don’t have enough money to buy lunch. ______ you lend me a couple of dollars?
   a) May
   b) Could
   2. That ice is dangerously thin now. You ______ go ice-skating today.
   a) mustn’t
   b) have to not
   3. It’s way past my bedtime and I ______ go to bed.
   a) should
   b) ought
   4. He ______ have committed this crime. He wasn’t even in the city that night.
   a) shouldn’t
   b) couldn’t
   5. John is over two hours late already, He ______ missed the bus again.
   a) should have
   b) must have
   6. It’s the law. They ______ have a blood test before they get married.
   a) should have to
   b) have to

Sources

- [http://www.learnenglish.ccc.commnet.edu/modals/modals.html](http://www.learnenglish.ccc.commnet.edu/modals/modals.html)
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