

Modal Verbs Table

Modal	USES	Present / Future	PAST
be supposed to	expectation	We are supposed to meet them here.	We were supposed to meet here.
be to	strong expectation	We are to meet them here.	We were to meet them here.
can / could <u>Can - Can't</u> <u>Could</u>	ability / possibility informal permission informal polite request impossibility (negative only)	I can learn modal verbs online. You can use my car tomorrow. Can I borrow your book? Cats can't swim.	I could jump high a few years ago but now I can't . That can't have been true!
have to	necessity lack of necessity (negative)	I have to go to class today. I don't have to go to class today.	I had to go to class yesterday. I didn't have to go to class yesterday.
have got to	necessity	I have got to go to class today	I had to go to class yesterday.
had better	strongly advised	You had better be on time.	(past form uncommon)
may	polite request formal permission less than 50% certainty	May I borrow your book? You may leave the room. He may be at the school.	He may have been at school.
Might	less than 50% certainty	He might be at school.	He might have been at school.
must	strong necessity	I must go to class today.	I had to go to class yesterday.

	prohibition 95% certainty	You must not open that door. Mary isn't in class. She must be sick.(present only)	Mary must have been sick yesterday.
ought to	advisability 80% certainty	I ought to study tonight. She ought to be at school	I ought to have studied last night. She ought to have done well on the test.
shall	ask another person's opinion (only used with I or we)	Shall I invite them too? Shall we dance?	
should	advisability 80% certainty	I should study tonight He should be at school	You should have paid your bills. He should have done well on the test.

Another Reference for Modals

Legal Obligation / Official	MUST	Police officer: 'You must wear a seatbelt.'
Logical Conclusion	MUST	The teacher's absent. She must be sick.
Reporting a Rule	BE SUPPOSED TO	We are supposed to turn our cell phones off in movie theaters.
Personal Necessity / Obligation	HAVE TO / HAVE GOT TO	I have to call the doctor today.
Possibility	CAN	I can meet with you on Friday.

Ability	CAN / BE ABLE TO	I can play the piano. I am able to speak English.
Permission	CAN / BE ALLOWED TO	I can have a dog in my apartment. I am allowed to have pets in my room.
Past Ability	COULD / WAS ABLE TO	When I was a kid, I could run for hours. <u>could vs was were able to</u>
Past Permission	WAS ALLOWED / PERMITTED TO	I wasn't allowed to go out at nights.
Advice	SHOULD	You should call your mother on her birthday.
Warning	HAD BETTER	You'd better study before the test.
A Choice / Not required	DON'T HAVE TO	I don't have to wear a suit to work.
Possibility / Uncertainty about the future *adverb MAYBE	MAY / MIGHT	It might / may rain this evening. May be it will rain this evening.
Polite request	WOULD / COULD	Would you open the door, please?
Permission	MAY / CAN / COULD	May I borrow your pen?
To express what you want	WOULD LIKE	I would like to learn English free.
Preference	WOULD RATHER	I would rather walk than drive.