



Modals review

Make predictions about your partner's week, career or life, indicating how sure you are about your prediction each time. Do they agree with you?

What forms did you use above to talk about probability/ possibility? Do those forms have any other meanings?

Which of the sentences below are modals of probability/ possibility, and which have modals with other meanings?

- a) "I'm sorry, I really must get going. I have a meeting in ten minutes."
- b) "There's no answer. He must be in a meeting."
- c) "The price of solar panels might go up due to the action against China."
- d) "Might I have your attention for just a moment?"
- e) "My colleague may have the information you are looking for."
- f) "May I use your office for a meeting?"
- g) "Could you possibly give me his mobile number?"
- h) "It could take up to a year."
- i) "I can't hear you very well."
- j) "500 dollars?? He can't be serious!"

Expressing probability/ possibility

What are the five modals of probability/ possibility above? What are the differences between the five?

Why isn't the positive form of "can" in the list?

How can we change the level of probability/ possibility by pronouncing the modals differently? Which modals is that most common with?

What other expressions can we use to fill in the levels of probability/ possibility that are not covered by modals?

Put these into order of how strong the possibility is:

Must
Almost certainly won't
Certainly/ Definitely won't
Almost certainly will
Probably will
Can't
May/ Might
Certainly/ definitely will
Could possibly
Probably won't
Could

What are the differences between "must be" and "is/ are" or "will be"?



Past and present modals review

Change these sentences to be about the present or future:

- A) "He must have lost his job."
- B) "I really had to go the dentist."
- C) "I could use the old versions of Windows, but the new versions..."
- D) "You could have got a better price."
- E) "He can't have got the job!"
- F) "He couldn't get on with his subordinates."
- G) "He said that he would pick me up from the airport."
- H) "I would have helped, but..."
- I) "It might have been better to have the sales conference nearer here."
- J) "It may have been an earthquake."
- K) "You should have phoned him straightaway."

What are the past forms of each of the modals in the present/ future sentences? When there are two different past forms with the same modal, why do they both exist?

Why couldn't the other examples have a different form?

Have conversations including the sentences above, then switch partners and do the same with the present sentences.

Convert the sentences from the beginning of the lesson into the past.

Other meanings of modals

What meanings do the modals have in these sentences?

"Shall I phone back later?"

"Shall we take a break?"

"We ought to recruit more staff."

"Can you move the microphone?"

"Will you all please stand up?"

"May I come in?"

"I need to update the software on your computer."

"Oh, you shouldn't have!"

"Must you smoke at your desk?"

"I needn't have taken a taxi." (different from "I didn't need to take a taxi.")

"You'd better call him on his mobile." (different from "You should call him on his mobile.")

What sentences with modals can you use in these situations?

Ending a conversation

Insisting (e.g. in a negotiation)

Softening position (e.g. in a negotiation)

Interrupting

Starting meetings/ Getting down to business

Telephoning



Modals review Suggested answers

- a) "I'm sorry, I really must get going. I have a meeting in ten minutes." – obligation
- b) "There's no answer. He must be in a meeting." – probability/ possibility
- c) "The price of solar panels might go up due to the action against China." – probability/ possibility
- d) "Might I have your attention for just a moment?" – request/ polite order
- e) "My colleague may have the information you are looking for." – probability/ possibility
- f) "May I use your office for a meeting?" – polite request/ asking for permission
- g) "Could you possibly give me his mobile number?" – polite request
- h) "It could take up to a year." – possibility/ probability
- i) "I can't hear you very well." – ability
- j) "500 dollars?? He can't be serious!" – possibility/ probability

The modals of probability/ possibility are "must", "might", "may", "could" and "can't", in approximate order. "Can't" is the opposite of "must", so there is no need for "can".

You can make something more certain by stressing "must" or "can't" or less certain by stretching out "might", "may" or (most commonly) "could", or by using extreme intonation.

The most useful non-modal expressions for probability/ possibility are "certainly", "definitely", "probably", "maybe" and "possibly".

In order of certainty:

Certainly/ definitely will
Must
Almost certainly will
Probably will
May/ Might
Could
Could possibly
Probably won't
Almost certainly won't
Can't
Certainly/ Definitely won't

Although "will" and "must" are both showing certainty, it is of a different kind. "Will" is seen as a future fact, whereas "must" is a strong supposition and so therefore still my opinion.

Past and present modals review

- A) "He must have lost his job." – He must lose his job
- B) "I really had to go the dentist." – I really have to/ must go to the dentist
- C) "I could use the old versions of Windows, but the new versions..." – I can use the old versions of Windows, but the new versions...
- D) "You could have got a better price." – You could get a better price
- E) "He can't have got the job!" – He can't get the job!
- F) "He couldn't get on with his subordinates." - He can't get on with his subordinates

- G) "He said that he would pick me up from the airport." – He says/ said that he will pick me up from the airport
- H) "I would have helped, but..." – I would help, but...
- I) "It might have been better to have the sales conference nearer here." – It might be better to have the sales conference nearer here
- J) "It may have been an earthquake." – It may be an earthquake
- K) "You should have phoned him straightaway." – You should phone him straightaway

The past forms are:

must – must have + PP/ had to

can – could

can't – couldn't/ can't have + PP

could – could have + PP

will – would

would – would have + PP

might – might have + PP

may – may have + PP

should – should have + PP

When there are two past forms, it is because they have different meanings, e.g. "couldn't" for ability and "can't + have + PP" for probability/ possibility.

"Could", "should" and "would" are already past forms, so the verb itself can't change to make it more past. "Might" is theoretically the past of "may" (as seen in super-polite requests), but as they have the same meaning changing from one to the other doesn't actually make the meaning past – and anyway past requests don't exist!

The sentences from the beginning of the lesson in the past are:

- a) "I'm sorry, I really must get going. I have a meeting in ten minutes." – I'm sorry, I really had to get going. (obligation)
- b) "There's no answer. He must be in a meeting." – There was no answer. He must have been in a meeting. (probability/ possibility)
- c) "The price of solar panels might go up due to the action against China." – The price of solar panels might have gone up (probability/ possibility)
- d) "Might I have your attention for just a moment?" - no past form possible
- e) "My colleague may have the information you are looking for." – My colleague may have had the information you were looking for. (probability/ possibility)
- f) "May I use your office for a meeting?" – no past form possible
- g) "Could you possibly give me his mobile number?" – no past form possible
- h) "It could take up to a year." – It could have taken up to a year (possibility/ probability)
- i) "I can't hear you very well." – I couldn't hear you very well (ability)
- j) "500 dollars?? He can't be serious!" – 500 dollars?? He can't have been serious! (possibility/ probability)

Other meanings of modals

“Shall I phone back later?” - offer

“Shall we take a break?” - suggestion

“We ought to recruit more staff.” - advice

“Can you move the microphone?” - request

“Will you all please stand up?” – polite command

“May I come in?” – asking for permission

“I need to update the software on your computer.” - request

“Oh, you shouldn’t have!” - thanking

“Must you smoke at your desk?” - complaint

“I needn’t have taken a taxi.” (different from “I didn’t need to take a taxi.”) - regret

“You’d better call him on his mobile.” (different from “You should call him on his mobile.”) – strong advice

Ending a conversation – I really have to get going

Insisting (e.g. in a negotiation) – I really must insist

Softening position (e.g. in a negotiation) – I can... if you...

Interrupting – Can I just come in here?

Starting meetings/ Getting down to business – Shall we make a start?

Telephoning – Can I speak to Mr Jones, please? Can I take a message? Can I leave a message? I’ll pass your message onto him.