

Functions and Forms of Modals

<i>Modal</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Form in Present/Future</i>	<i>Form in Past</i>
Can	To show ability	I <u>can run</u> 10 miles.	I <u>could run</u> 10 miles when I was in high school.
	To suggest a possibility or to give an option	Students <u>can pre-enroll</u> in classes or sign up at in-person registration.	
	To ask for or to give permission	<u>Can I call</u> you? You <u>can leave</u> when you have finished your exam.	
	To show impossibility	It <u>cannot be</u> Jim standing over there. He went away for the weekend.	
Could	To show past ability		I <u>could run</u> 10 miles when I was in high school.
	To ask a polite question	<u>Could</u> I call you?	
	To show possibility	Why isn't Maria here? She <u>could be</u> busy.	Why wasn't Maria at the party last night? She <u>could have been</u> busy.
	To show impossibility	He <u>could not be</u> here at the party. He is out of town.	He <u>could not have been</u> at the party last night. He was out of town.
	To show a past opportunity that was not realized		I <u>could have asked</u> for help on the math problem set, but I wanted to do it myself.
May	To ask for or to give permission (formal)	<u>May I call</u> you? You <u>may leave</u> when you have finished your exam.	
	To show possibility	The instructor <u>may come</u> to class late today.	The instructor <u>may have come</u> to class late yesterday.
Might	To show possibility	The instructor <u>might come</u> to class late today.	The instructor <u>might have come</u> to class late yesterday.

Should	To show advisability	You <u>should try</u> that new restaurant downtown.	
	To show advisability after the fact		We <u>should have tried</u> that new restaurant downtown. (But we did not.)
	To show obligation	I <u>should renew</u> my driver's license. It expires next month.	You <u>should not have said</u> that to Tom. (But you did.)
	To show an obligation that was not carried out		I <u>should have renewed</u> my driver's license. (But I forgot to do so.)
	To show expectation	You <u>should receive</u> my letter in two days.	
Ought to	To show an expectation that was not realized		You <u>should have received</u> my letter two days ago. (But you did not.)
	To show advisability	Everyone <u>ought to</u> exercise regularly.	
	To show advisability after the fact		Francis <u>ought to have exercised</u> before his backpacking trip. (But he did not.)
	To show obligation	I <u>ought to register</u> to vote if I want to vote in the next election.	
	To show an obligation that was not carried out		I <u>ought to have registered</u> to vote by October 5. (But I did not register.)
Had better	To show expectation	You <u>ought to receive</u> my letter in two days.	
	To show an expectation that was not realized		You <u>ought to have received</u> my letter two days ago. (But you did not.)
	To show advisability	We <u>had better leave</u> . It is getting late.	
Have to	To show necessity	Mike <u>has to make up</u> the physics lab he missed.	Mike <u>had to make up</u> the physics lab he missed.
	To show lack of necessity	I am glad that I <u>don't have to cook</u> tonight.	I <u>did not have to cook</u> last night.

Must	To show probability or to make a logical assumption	Janice <u>must be</u> out this evening. She does not answer her telephone.	Janice <u>must have been</u> out last night. She did not answer her phone.
	To show necessity	I <u>must call</u> my parents tonight. I have not talked to them in a long time.	I was late for the meeting because I <u>had to call</u> my parents last night.
	To show prohibition	You <u>must not smoke</u> in the classroom at any time.	
Will	To indicate future time	We <u>will leave</u> for the airport at 7:00 AM tomorrow.	
	To make a promise or to show willingness	The federal government <u>will provide</u> assistance to the hurricane victims.	
	To state a general truth	The new car they have developed <u>will run</u> on either gasoline or ethanol. (Note: time = present)	
	To ask a polite question	Mike, <u>will</u> you <u>help</u> me with these heavy boxes? I cannot lift them myself. (Note: time = right now)	
Would	To ask a polite question	<u>Would</u> you please <u>call</u> me later tonight?	
	To indicate a repeated action in the past		When I lived in Los Angeles, I <u>would go</u> to the beach every weekend.
	To indicate future time in a sentence that is in the past		Mark promised that he <u>would help</u> me with my math homework.
Would rather	To show a preference	I <u>would rather go</u> to summer school than graduate late.	
Would like	To express a desire	I <u>would like to go</u> to medical school.	
	To express a desire that was not realized		I <u>would have liked</u> to have gone (OR to go) to medical school. (But I did not.)

--	--	--	--