

Unit 27: MODAL VERBS

Modal verbs are auxiliaries (Unit 3). They never change form. They show what we think or feel about the lexical verb (Unit 3) in the sentence. The important modals are:

can could may might will would shall should must

1 With verb formation

Put the modal verb before any other verbs. The next verb is always base form (Unit 14).

a BEFORE ONE-WORD VERB FORMATIONS

MODAL	+	BASE FORM
He can		play the piano very well.
The journey might		be uncomfortable.

NOTICE: Modals do not have an –s form and we never use an –s form for the next verb.

We say: He **might** come NOT *mights come* or *might comes*

b BEFORE CONTINUOUS FORMATION (UNIT 17)

MODAL		be -ing FORM
I will		be arriving tomorrow.
She must		be learning Arabic.

NOTICE: Always use **be** after a modal NOT *am, is, are, was* or *were*.

c BEFORE PERFECT SIMPLE FORMATIONS (UNIT 24.1)

MODAL		have PAST PARTICIPLE
He may		have got lost.
They should		have arrived by now.

d BEFORE PERFECT CONTINUOUS FORMATIONS (UNIT 24.2)

MODAL		have been -ing FORM
She could		have been watching .
She might		have been playing .

NOTICE: Always use **have**, NOT *has* or *had*, after a modal.

2 As auxiliary verbs

Modals are the same as other auxiliaries for making:

a QUESTIONS (Unit 9) – the modal goes before the subject:

EXAMPLES: **Can you** help me please?
 How many days **will you** be staying?

b NEGATIVE SENTENCES (Unit 5) – the modal goes before not:

EXAMPLES: He **couldn't** fight his way out of a paper bag.
 You **might not** have succeeded without his help.

NOTICE: We write negative **can** as one word: **cannot** (we usually say **can't**)

NOTICE: In speaking, **won't** (= will not); **shan't** (= shall not).

c SHORT ANSWERS (Unit 11) – use the modal:

EXAMPLES: **Should** we tell her about it? Yes, we **should**.

d TAG QUESTIONS (Unit 12) – use only the modal in the tag:

EXAMPLES: We **wouldn't** have got there on time, **would** we?

3 Meaning

The important meanings of each modal verb are in the next units (28-33). Generally, modals say something about:

a HOW TRUE (OR NOT TRUE) SOMETHING IS:

EXAMPLES: After that work, you **must** be tired. = I am sure you are tired.
 He **may** have got lost. = Perhaps he has got lost.

b HOW GOOD (OR BAD) SOMETHING IS:

EXAMPLES: You **must** work harder. I think it is good to work hard.
 They **should** not do that. I think it is bad to do that.

BE CAREFUL! The meaning of a modal verb in an affirmative sentence is not always the same as its meaning in a question or a negative sentence. The next units (28-33) will tell you the exact meanings for each verb.