

# MODAL VERBS

1° Bachillerato

Modal verbs are a special group of auxiliary verbs. They don't express facts, we use them before other verbs to express attitudes, opinions and judgements of events: *permission, ability, possibility, request, obligation ...*

## 1) Correct the following sentences.

1. She cans play the piano.
2. You don't must open the book.
3. Can you to sing?
4. Last year I must work on Saturdays.
5. My sister couldn't her homework.
6. I would like to can play the violin.



They are different from most other verbs in four ways:

1. They are always followed by an **infinitive without "to"**: \* *I may go out tonight.*
2. They have **no -s** on the third person singular: \* *John should study harder.*
3. They **don't need auxiliary** in negatives and questions: \* *Can you help me? - No, I can't*
4. They **don't have tenses, infinitives or participles**: \* *Being able to speak English is very useful nowadays.*

## ABILITY



**CAN** --- Present

\* *My boyfriend can play three musical instruments.*

**COULD** --- Past / Conditional

\* *I could talk when I was two.*

**BE ABLE TO** --- Other tenses

\* *One day, people will be able to visit Mars.*

\* *I have never been able to understand grown-ups.*

\* *I'd like to be able to understand men / women.*

\* *Being able to swim is necessary if you want to go sailing.*

## 2) Complete the sentences with *can('t)*, *could(n't)* or the correct form of *(not) be able to*.

1. It was raining hard, so I ..... go out.
2. I'd love to ..... fly.
3. I ..... see because I'm not wearing my glasses.
4. The police ..... catch him, so he escaped.
5. He ..... play football since he broke his leg.
6. I saw the accident - I might ..... help the police.
7. If you don't tell me what your problem is, I  
..... help you.



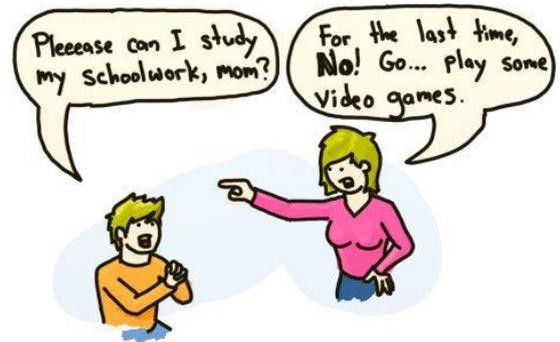
3) Fill in the gaps with *can('t)*, *could(n't)* or the correct form of *(not) be able to*.

Dear Mary,

I'm very pleased you ..... come to stay at the weekend. I'm sorry I ..... talk to you on the phone last night but I ..... leave the baby. I ..... get tickets for the theatre on Saturday - I ..... wait to go. Mum says that when she was young you ..... have a night out for \$2! You certainly ..... now!

We ..... fix the car yet but Mum says we ..... borrow hers. By the way, the baby ..... say three words now! See you on Friday. Love, Jane

## PERMISSION



### Asking for / Giving / Refusing permission

**CAN** --- (informal) \* Can I use your phone? - Of course you can.

**MAY** --- (formal) \* May I speak to you? - Certainly you may.

**COULD** --- (polite) \* Could I borrow your car? - Of course you can.

**MIGHT** --- (more formal) \* Might I see your diving licence, please?

### 4) Fill in with *can, may, could, can't*

Jim: Mum, ..... I go to the library?

Mother: Of course you ....., Jim, but you ..... stay very long.

Jim: ..... I stay until 8.00?

Mother: No, you ....., because dinner starts at 8.30.

(At the library)

Jim: ..... I look at the latest "Time" magazine, please?

Librarian: Yes, you ....., but remember that you ..... take it out of the library.

### Talking about permission

**CAN** --- Present \* Students can use the school swimming pool.

**COULD** --- Past \* I could wear jeans in primary school.

**BE ALLOWED TO** \* Students are allowed to use the school swimming pool.

\* The reporter was allowed to take a photo of the singer.

\* When I turn 18, I'll be allowed to go on holiday with my friends.

\* I have never been allowed to smoke at home.

5) Complete the sentences with the correct form of *(not) be allowed to*.

- I ..... stay out late but only at the weekends.
- That sign says "No smoking". You ..... smoke in here.
- My brother ..... watch the film last night because it was on too late.
- In Britain you ..... drive a car while holding a mobile phone.
- When we were younger, we ..... go to bed late on Friday nights.
- (You) ..... come to the disco on Saturday night?
- (They) ..... wear jewellery to school? - No, they aren't

6) Fill in with *can('t)*, *could(n't)*, *may (not)* or *(not) be allowed to*.

- Daniel: ..... I go to the cinema tonight?  
 Mrs Baynes: You know you ..... go out during the week.  
 Daniel: But I ..... go out last Saturday either. I think Dad is too strict.  
 Mrs Baynes: Don't speak about your father like that. He does what he thinks is best.  
 Daniel: ..... I have some friends over, then?  
 Mrs Baynes: I'm afraid you ..... We're having some friends for dinner.  
 Daniel: ..... I at least watch TV for a while?  
 Mrs Baynes: Yes, you ....., but only after you've done your homework.  
 Daniel: But I haven't got any homework!  
 Mrs Baynes: Oh! Well, in that case, you ..... go out, but you ..... be home late.  
 Daniel: I'll be home by 11 o'clock, I promise.



7) Complete the sentences with the correct verb.

- Present 1. Two of my friends ..... play the saxo. (ability)  
 2. At our school we ..... wear jewellery. (permission)
- Past 3. I ..... walk when I was one. (ability)  
 4. I ..... stay up late until I was twelve (permission).
- Present Perfect 5. I've always ..... swim fast. (ability)  
 6. She's never ..... dye her hair. (permission)
- Future 7. I'm taking skiing lessons, next year I ..... ski. (ability)  
 8. I won't ..... get a job until I am seventeen. (permission)

## POSSIBILITY / DEDUCTION

**MAY** --- It is very possible \* He may be back before noon.

**MIGHT** --- It is possible \* He might pass the exam this time.

**COULD** --- Small possibility \* He could get rich one day.

**MUST** --- It is almost certain; I think. \* They look alike. They must be twins.

**CAN'T** --- It is impossible; I don't think \* It must be a lie. It can't be true.



## 8) Choose the correct option.

1. This *must / might / can* be Joan's file - it's got her name on it.
2. We *can / might / must* go to the beach - we are not sure.
3. I *could / can / may* buy a motorcycle if I wanted to.
4. He never lies so he *can't / mustn't / must* be telling the truth.
5. That woman *can't / mustn't / couldn't* be the head teacher - she's too young.
6. I *mustn't / may / can* phone you tonight if I have time.

## ADVICE



I think you should marry him. He's very sexy!

No I can't!

## SHOULD

\* You *should* stop smoking.

## OUGHT TO

\* You *ought to* treat animals kindly.

## 9) Rewrite these sentences using the modal verbs in brackets.

1. I advise you to see your dentist. (should)
2. I'm sure that New York is an exciting city. (must)
3. It is possible that I'll arrive home late. (may)
4. I'm certain that studying and working at the same time isn't easy. (can't)
5. Do you have the ability to write with your left hand? (can)

## OBLIGATION

### MUST / HAVE TO --- Present

\* We must follow the school rules. (I am obliged)

\* I must see a doctor soon. (I decide, it is necessary)

\* I have to lose some weight. (External obligation. The doctor says so)

\* Do you have to get up early every day?

### HAVE TO --- Other tenses

\* At 7, I had to go to bed before ten.

\* At 30, I'll have to look after my family.

\* Since I was 7, I have always had to make my bed.

\* Having to get up early is annoying.

## PROHIBITION



## MUSTN'T

\* You mustn't smoke at school = You can't smoke at school = You may not smoke at school

# NO OBLIGATION

## DON'T / DOESN'T HAVE TO

\* You don't have to take an umbrella. It isn't raining.

\* My little sister doesn't have to do the washing up.

## NEEDN'T

\* You needn't take an umbrella. It isn't raining.

\* My little sister needn't do the washing up.

10) Fill in the gaps with *must*, *mustn't*, *needn't* or *can't*.



In this school students ..... smoke. They can dress as they like, they ..... wear school uniforms but they ..... wear dirty clothes. Students ..... leave school until 3 p.m. They ..... forget to do their homework. They ..... bring a doctor's note if they are sick, their parents can write one. Students ..... be late for class or talk loudly in lessons. Students ..... follow these rules, but teachers ..... obey them because they have a separate set of rules to follow.

11) Choose the correct meaning for each sentence.

1. *Dogs can't come in here.*

- a) Dogs aren't allowed in here.
- b) It's better if dogs don't come in here.

2. *It can't be John. He's at school.*

- a) It's possible that it's John.
- b) It's impossible that it's John.

3. *It might rain later. Look at those black clouds.*

- a) It definitely won't rain later.
- b) It's possible it will rain later.

4. *Lara ought to change her computer.*

- a) It's necessary for Lara to change her computer.
- b) It's a good idea for Lara to change her computer.

5. *You mustn't take a mobile phone to school.*

- a) It's against the rules to take a mobile phone to school.
- b) You shouldn't take a mobile phone to school, but you can if you want to.

6. *You needn't hurry. We aren't late.*

- a) It isn't a good idea to hurry.
- b) It isn't necessary to hurry.

7. *You have to be seventeen to apply for a driving licence in Britain.*

- a) It's necessary to be seventeen before you can apply for a driving licence.
- b) You can apply for a driving licence before you are 17

12) Rephrase the following sentences so that they mean the same.

1. You can't take photographs in the Reina Sofía Museum. (be allowed to)
2. Perhaps we'll go to a football match at the weekend. (may)
3. It's a good idea for you to listen more carefully. (ought to)
4. I can borrow my parents' car whenever I like. (be allowed to)
5. It is a bad idea to wear a coat in this weather. (shouldn't)
6. When I was three I couldn't ride a bike. (be able to)
7. It's my birthday but it isn't necessary for you to buy a present (needn't)
8. The students can use dictionaries in the English exam. (be allowed to)
9. I'm sure they are exhausted. (must)
10. My grandfather was obliged to do military service when he was 18. (have to)



# PERFECT MODALS

We can use some modal verbs in the perfect form to talk about past events.

## MODAL + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE

### MAY / MIGHT HAVE + Past Participle -- possibility in the past

\* *She hasn't come yet. She may / might have taken the wrong bus.*

### COULD HAVE + Past Participle -- alternative past action

\* *We could have invited her to the party, but we all forgot.*

### MUST HAVE + Past Participle -- Certainty that something was true.

\* *Linda has arrived late. She must have been in a traffic jam.*

### CAN'T HAVE + Past Participle -- Impossibility in the past

\* *She can't have passed the exam - she didn't study at all!*

### SHOULD / SHOULDN'T HAVE -- Criticism after an event

\* *I shouldn't have stayed out so late last night. I feel terrible.*



#### 13) Choose the correct alternative.

1. 'I got 95% in my history exam.' - 'It *might have / can't have* been very difficult!'
2. 'Everywhere is very wet.' - 'It *must have / can't have* rained in the night.'
3. 'I saw your brother in town this morning.' - 'You *might have / can't have* seen him because he's away.'
4. 'I phoned you last night but there was no reply.' - 'I *might have / can't have* been in the bathroom.'
5. 'Have you finished your homework?' - 'No, I *might have / should have* done it but I haven't had time.'
6. 'Angelo was always looking forward to seeing Maria.' - 'He *must have / can't have* really liked her then.'

#### 14) Complete the sentences with the perfect forms of the modals.

1. 'Where's Adela?' - 'She ..... (must / leave) because her car isn't outside.'
2. 'Oliver passed his maths exam.' - 'He ..... (can't / do). He didn't do any work!'
3. 'Where's Elena? She's really late.' - 'She ..... (might / miss) the bus.'
4. 'Poor Maria. She feels sick.' - 'She ..... (could / eat) something bad.'
5. 'My brother is 13 tomorrow.' - 'So he ..... (must / be) born in 1991.'
6. 'Oh no. I've gone the wrong way.' - 'You ..... (should / take) the last turning.'

#### 15) Rewrite the following sentences beginning with the words given.

1. He wasn't able to write until he was eight. He .....
2. Talking is not permitted during the test. You .....
3. It isn't right to speak to your mother like that. You .....
4. I advise you to drive more slowly. You .....
5. It isn't necessary to buy a ticket. You .....
6. It is possible that he will win the race. He .....
7. I'm sure that is John's car. That .....
8. It is obligatory to wear a uniform in this school. You .....
9. I'm sure Jim didn't mention the matter to anyone. Jim .....
10. Perhaps he has gone home. He .....

NEVER EVER  
EVER  
GIVE UP!

