

MPC English & Study Skills Center

Modals (Helping Verbs)

NINE MODALS	USES	PRESENT/FUTURE	PAST
can	ability	I <u>can speak</u> French.	I <u>could speak</u> Latin.
	possibility	I <u>can go</u> .	I <u>could have gone</u> .
	permission-informal.	You <u>can have</u> my car.	You <u>could have had</u> my car.
	request-informal	<u>Can</u> I <u>have</u> some gum?	
	impossibility	That <u>can't be</u> wrong!	That <u>couldn't have been</u> wrong!
could	past ability		I <u>could speak</u> Latin.
	suggestion	You <u>could hire</u> a plumber.	You <u>could have hired</u> a plumber.
	request	<u>Could</u> I <u>have</u> some milk?	<u>Could</u> I <u>have had</u> some milk?
	possibility (less than 50% certainty)	Susan <u>could pass</u> the test.	She <u>could have passed</u> the test.
	impossibility	You <u>couldn't be</u> right!	You <u>couldn't have been</u> right!
shall	offer in question form	<u>Shall</u> I <u>open</u> the door?	
	future with <i>I</i> and <i>we</i> . (British English)	I <u>shall speak</u> with her.	
	emphatic form	I <u>shall do</u> it.	
should	advisability	You <u>should study</u> more.	You <u>should have studied</u> more.
	certainty (future, about 90%)	You <u>should do</u> well tonight.	You <u>should have done</u> well tonight.
will	certainty (future)	He <u>will marry</u> me!	He <u>would have married</u> me.
	willingness	I <u>will help</u> you with that.	I <u>would have helped</u> you with that.
	promise	I <u>will</u> never <u>lie</u> to you.	I <u>would</u> never <u>have lied</u> to you.
	polite request	<u>Will</u> you <u>help</u> me?	

Table Continued:

NINE MODALS	USES	PRESENT/FUTURE	PAST
would	polite request	<u>Would</u> you please <u>help</u> me?	
	preference	I <u>would</u> rather <u>work</u> in my garden than study.	I <u>would have</u> rather <u>worked</u> in my garden than study.
	repeated action (past only)		When I was young, I <u>would play</u> with my toys for hours.
	reported speech ("I will go.")		She said she <u>would go</u> .
may	polite request	<u>May</u> I <u>borrow</u> a pencil?	
	formal permission	You <u>may borrow</u> it.	You <u>might have borrowed</u> it.
	possibility (less than 50% certainty)	Mary <u>may be</u> at the library.	Mary <u>may/ might have been</u> at the library.
might	possibility (less than 50% certainty)	Sara <u>might arrive</u> tonight.	She <u>might have arrived</u> tonight.
must	strong necessity	I <u>must study</u> !	I <u>had to study</u> !
	strong certainty (95%)	That <u>must be</u> the wind.	That <u>must have been</u> the wind.
	prohibition (negative)	You <u>must</u> not <u>smoke</u> !	