

Modal Verbs – Can / Be able to /Must /Have to

What do the following sentences have in common?

- My friend **can** speak 4 languages.
- Joanne **has to / must / should** study Physics if she wants to become an engineer.
- In the Philippines, helmets **must/have to** be worn when driving.

They all need **modal verbs**!

Useful information about modal verbs:

- Modal verbs are used to modify **main verbs** in sentences.
 - Modal verbs come **before** the main verb in a sentence.
 - Modal verbs are usually followed by the **infinitive without to**
- Common error: **I must ~~to~~ help my brother.**
- Most modal verbs can be used in different tenses – *but the meaning can change in different tenses*
 - Modal verbs can be used in **negatives** and **questions**.
 - Modal verbs can be used with the **passive voice**.

Ability/Permission/Prohibition

Form	Function	Example
can/be able to	<i>ability</i>	I can / am able to <u>juggle</u> with 5 balls. She can / is able to <u>ride</u> a horse very quickly.
can/be able to	<i>permission</i>	I can / am able to <u>stay up</u> late at my house. My parents allow me to do it. I can / am able to <u>park</u> my car outside the office.
cannot / not be able to / unable to	<i>lack of ability</i> <i>prohibition</i>	I cannot / am unable to speak French. I cannot / am unable to <u>park</u> my car outside the office.
could/was able to	<i>past ability</i>	When I was young I could / was able to <u>touch</u> my toes from a standing position.

	<p>past permission</p>	<p>Even when I was young I could not / was not able / unable to touch my toes from a standing position.</p> <p>I could eat as many sweets as I wanted when I was a kid.</p> <p>I could not / was unable to stay up late when I was young.</p>
<p>can + passive</p> <p>be + past participle</p>		<p>Seatbelts can now <u>be unlocked</u>.</p> <p>Drinks cannot be consumed when the train is moving.</p>
<p>questions</p> <p>ASI</p>		<p>Can I <u>go</u> to the bathroom?</p> <p>Am I able to leave the room and go to the bathroom?</p>

Exercise 1

Permission or Ability?

1. I am able to access my emails wherever I am.
2. Are you able to join us at 9pm or is there still a curfew?
3. I can go anywhere in the city using my free bus pass.
4. I can go anywhere I want because my mum trusts me.
5. I am unable to see you tonight. My parents read my school report.
6. Can you speak Greek?

Obligation / Lack of Obligation / Prohibition

Form	Function	Example
have to must - used by authority figures	<i>obligation - personal</i> <i>obligation- authority</i>	I have to <u>visit</u> my mum tonight. You have to <u>wash</u> your hands a lot when you are a nurse. She must <u>wash</u> your hands when you enter a new ward.
do not have to	<i>lack of obligation - you have a choice</i>	You do not have to <u>wear</u> a uniform when you work in this office.
must not	<i>prohibition</i>	You must not <u>smoke</u> in this office. You do not have to smoke in this office.
had to / didn't have to	<i>past obligation /lack of obligation</i>	You musted not wear a uniform at my school. We had to wear a uniform at my school. You did not have to wear a uniform at my school.
passive be + past participle		A uniform has to <u>be worn</u> at my school. A uniform must <u>be worn</u> at my school. A uniform had to be worn at my school.
questions	<i>obligation</i> <i>shows annoyance / aggressive</i>	Do you have to have a license to drive in Mali? Do I have to stay and do the full training session? Do I must to stay for the whole session? Must you <u>speak</u> so loudly? Do you have to wear your shoes in here?
Use of obligation to emphasise	<i>strong suggestion</i>	You must go to that new Italian restaurant next to the train station!

Exercise 2

Can you paraphrase the sentences below by using modals of obligation?

1. There is no choice. You eat all of your dinner or you get no dessert in my house. ‘
2. My bonus is key this year. I really want to go to the Caribbean. I hope I can.
3. If you don't take your medicine you will not get better.
4. A healthcare professional has obligations, relating to quality of care and confidentiality.
5. If I do the washing up I can come and play.
6. Your piano playing is awful and loud. Please go away!
7. I have been reading an amazing book. Don't miss it.
8. Some people don't complete their course of antibiotics. It's dangerous for everybody, in the long term.

Answers

1. I am able to access my emails wherever I am. **ability**
2. Are you able to join us at 9pm or is there still a curfew? **permission**
3. I can go anywhere in the city using my free bus pass. **ability**
4. I can go anywhere I want because my mum trusts me. **permission**
5. I am unable to see you tonight. My parents read my school report. **permission**
6. Can you speak Greek? **ability**

Exercise 2

Can you paraphrase the sentences below by using modals of obligation?

1. There is no choice. You eat all of your dinner or you get no dessert in my house.

If you want some dessert, you must eat all of your dinner.

2. My bonus is key this year. I really want to go to the Caribbean. I hope I can.

I have to get my bonus this year. I want to go to the Caribbean.

3. If you don't take your medicine you will not get better.

You must take your medicine. Otherwise, you will not get better.

You must take your medication (in order) to get better.

4. A healthcare professional has obligations, relating to quality of care and confidentiality.

A healthcare professional has to have standards relating to quality of care and confidentiality.

A healthcare professional must not disclose private information about patients.

The obligations relating to quality of care and confidentiality are a must for every healthcare professional.

5. If I do the washing up I can come and play.

I have to do the washing up before I can come and play.

6. Your piano playing is awful and loud. Please go away!

Must you play here?

There's a room upstairs you **can** play in.

Must your piano playing be so loud?

7. I have been reading an amazing book. Don't miss it.

You **have to/must** read this amazing book!

8. Some people don't complete their course of antibiotics. It's dangerous for everybody, in the long term.

Everybody must complete their antibiotic course. Otherwise antibiotic resistance can grow.