

## Modal Verbs – Can, be able to, must & have to

What do the following sentences have in common?

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

They all use modal verbs

### Useful information about modal verbs:

- Modal verbs are used to modify main verb in sentences.
- Modal verbs come before the main verb in a sentence.
- Modal verbs are usually followed by the infinitive without to
- Most modal verbs can be used in different tenses – *but be careful about the grammar because it changes in different ways for different modal verbs!*
- Modal verbs can be used in negatives and questions.
- Modal verbs can be used with the passive voice.

### Exercise 1

Match the following modal verb purposes with the sentences in the box below:

obligation	possibility	permission	prohibition	speculation
	future plan/intention	advice/guidance		ability

Sentence	Purpose
a) Roxana can speak 3 languages.	
b) Joanne should study Physics if she wants to become an engineer.	
c) Motorcyclists in the Philippines must wear helmets.	
d) You can smoke out there.	
e) Sarah will help you when she gets home.	
f) You must not enter this door.	
g) I might join you later.	
h) He must have bought the new car he was talking about.	

## can/be able to

Form	Function	Example
can/be able to	<i>ability</i>	Paul <b>can</b> <u>juggle</u> . Dilruba <b>can</b> <u>draw</u> pictures and play guitar. Dilruba <b>is able to</b> <u>draw</u> pictures and play guitar. We <b>are able to</b> <u>speak</u> English really well.
can/be able to  - Generally, can is used for permission / prohibition	<i>permission</i>	Students <b>can</b> <u>ask</u> questions in SET English classes. You <b>can</b> <u>smoke</u> in the designated areas outside the building.
	<i>lack of ability</i>  <i>prohibition</i>	Senuli <b>cannot</b> <u>juggle</u> .  You <b>cannot</b> <u>smoke</u> inside this building.
could/was able to	past ability  past permission / prohibition	When Najla was young, she <b>could / was able to</b> <u>ride</u> a bike.  When Najla was 13, she <b>could not</b> <u>drive</u> a car.  When Najla was 13, she <b>could not</b> <u>see</u> her friends every day.
can + passive  be + past participle		Walking on the moon is possible.  <b>Active:</b> Astronauts <b>can</b> <u>walk</u> on the moon.  <b>Passive:</b> Walking on the moon <b>can</b> <u>be done</u> .  Passing your OET <b>can</b> <u>be done</u> .
Can + subject + verb  be + subject + able to + verb		<b>Can</b> humans <u>fly</u> ?  <b>Are</b> humans <b>able to</b> <u>fly</u> ?  <b>Can</b> potatoes <u>be cooked</u> in a variety of ways?  <b>Are</b> potatoes <b>able to</b> <u>be cooked</u> in a variety of ways?

## Exercise 2

### Use ability, permission, prohibition, passive, past

1. I am 7 and my sister is 12. I am not allowed to go out after dinner but my sister is.
2. When I was 4 I didn't know how to ride a bike.
3. Potatoes are very versatile. Chips, crisps, baked potato, mashed potato, boiled potato....
4. Humans have never flown and they never will!
5. This door says 'Staff only'. We don't work here.

## Have to /Must

Form	Function	Example
<b>have to</b>  <b>must</b> - used by authority figures	<i>obligation</i>	Nurses <b>have to</b> <u>wash</u> their hands a lot.  Nurses <b>must / have to</b> <u>wash</u> their hands when they enter another ward.  You <b>must</b> <u>try</u> my dessert.
<b>do not have to</b>	<i>lack of obligation - you have a choice</i>	You <b>do not have to</b> wear a tie if you work at SET English. – I <b>have a choice</b>  Nurses <b>do not have to</b> wear a head cap in the UK.  <b>Alternative:</b> You <b>needn't</b> wear a tie.
<b>must not</b>	<i>prohibition</i>	You <b>must not</b> wear a tie if you work at SET English. – <b>never wear a tie – or you'll have trouble</b>  Nurses <b>must not</b> wear jewellery when they are on shift.
<b>had to / didn't have to</b>	<i>past obligation /lack of obligation</i>	When I was a nurse I <b>did not have to</b> do a lot of paperwork.  - There was no obligation  1) Use do not to introduce negative: Paul likes oranges. Nana does not like oranges. 2) Have to = obligation 3) Not have to = no obligation 4) All verbs are affected by tense



## Answers

Sentence	Purpose
a. Roxana <b>can / is able to</b> speak 4 languages.	ability
b. Joanne <b>should/ought to</b> study Physics if she wants to become an engineer.	advice/guidance/moral obligation
c. Motorcyclists in the Philippines <b>must / have to</b> wear helmets.	obligation
d. You <b>can</b> smoke out there.	permission
e. Sarah <b>will</b> help you when she gets home.	future plan/intention
f. You <b>must not</b> enter this door.	prohibition
g. I <b>might/may</b> join you later.	possibility
h. He <b>must have bought</b> the new car he was talking about.	speculation

## Exercise 2

- I am 7 and my sister is 12. I am not allowed to go out after dinner but my sister is.
  - I cannot go out after dinner but my sister can.
  - My sister is 12 years old and only she can go out after dinner.
- When I was 4 I didn't know how to ride a bike.
  - When I was 4, I could not ride a bike.
  - When I was 4, I was not able to ride a bike.
- Potatoes are very versatile. Chips, crisps, baked potato, mashed potato, boiled potato....
  - Potatoes can be cooked in different ways.
  - Potatoes can be used for varieties of food.
  - Potatoes can be used with everything
  - Potatoes are very versatile, and they can be used in very different ways.
- Humans have never flown and they never will!
  - Humans are not able to fly.
  - Humans cannot fly.
- This door says 'Staff only'. We don't work here.
  - We cannot enter this door.
  - Entry is prohibited for outsiders

### Exercise 3

#### Obligation, lack of obligation, prohibition, passive, annoyance, strong suggestion

1. Babies under 6 months get very sick if they are given this medication.

Babies under 6 months **must not** be given this medication.

2. Paying for school dinners at the canteen is optional.

You **do not have to** pay for school dinners at the canteen.

3. I went to bed before 9pm when I was a child. I had no choice.

When I was a child I **had to** go to bed before 9pm.

4. The spaghetti at the new restaurant in town is absolutely amazing!

You **must** try the spaghetti at the new restaurant in town.

5. Your violin playing is very loud. There are lots of rooms in this house.

**Must** you play your violin in this room /here?

6. In my parents' house, the washing up was my responsibility up to the age of 14.

In my parents' house, I **had to** do the washing up until I was 14.