

## COURSE 08 :

# Modal Verbs (Can, must, have to...)

## How are modal verbs used in sentences?

Modal verbs are used along with a main verb to indicate ability, obligation, possibility, and permission. In sentences containing modal verbs, the main verb typically takes the infinitive form. Modal verbs come before main verbs and never change form.

**Examples:** How to use modal verbs

I **might** walk to work today.

You **may** have as many cookies as you'd like.

Lina **must** order tickets in advance if she wants to go to the theater.

**Modals are different from normal verbs:**

1: They don't use an 's' for the third person singular.

2: They make questions by inversion ('she can go' becomes 'can she go?').

3: They are followed directly by the infinitive of another verb (without 'to').

**Look at these examples to see how *can*, *can't*, *must*, *mustn't*, *have to* and *don't have to* are used.**

*You can put your shoes and coat over there.*

*You can't leave your bike there.*

*I must call the electrician and get that light fixed.*

*You mustn't worry about me. I'll be fine.*

*You have to have a licence to drive a car.*

*You don't have to have a licence to cycle on the roads.*

We often use verbs with modal meanings to talk about permission and obligation.

### Permission

*can*

We often use *can* to ask for and give permission.

*Can I sit here?*

*You can use my car if you like.*

*Can I make a suggestion?*

*could*

We also use *could* to ask for permission (but not to give it). *Could* is more formal and polite than *can*.

*Could I ask you something?*

*Could I interrupt?*

*Could I borrow your pen for a moment, please?*

*may*

*May* is the most formal way to ask for and give permission.

*May I see your passport, please?*  
*Customers may request a refund within a period of 30 days.*  
*These pages may be photocopied for classroom use.*

### **Prohibition**

We use *can't* and *mustn't* to show that something is prohibited – it is not allowed.

*can't*

We use *can't* to talk about something that is against the rules, particularly when we didn't make the rules.

*What does this sign say? Oh, we can't park here.*  
*You can't take photos in the museum. They're really strict about it.*  
*Sorry, we can't sell knives to under-18s.*

*must not/mustn't*

We use *must not* to talk about what is not permitted. It is common on public signs and notices informing people of rules and laws.

*Visitors must not park in the staff car park.*  
*Baggage must not be left unattended.*  
*Guests must not make noise after 10 p.m.*

We use *mustn't* particularly when the prohibition comes from the speaker.

(Parent to child) *You mustn't say things like that to your sister.*  
(Teacher to student) *You mustn't be late to class.*  
*I mustn't let that happen again.*

### **Obligation**

We use *have to* and *must* to express obligation. There is a slight difference between the way we use them.

*have to*

*Have to* shows us that the obligation comes from outside the speaker.

*We have to wear a uniform when we're working in reception.*  
(Student to teacher) *When do we have to hand in our homework?*  
*Al has to work tomorrow so he can't come.*

We sometimes call this 'external obligation'.

*must*

*Must* expresses a strong obligation or necessity. It often shows us that the obligation comes from the speaker (or the authority that wrote the sentence).

*I must phone my dad. It's his birthday today.*  
(Teacher to student) *You must hand in your homework on Tuesday or you will lose ten per cent of your mark.*  
(Sign on a plane) *Seat belts must be worn by all passengers.*

Note that we don't use *must* to express obligation in the past. We use *have to* instead.

*I had to pay £85 to renew my passport last week.*

## **No obligation**

*don't have to*

We use *don't have to* to show that there is no obligation. You can do something if you want to but it's not compulsory.

*You don't have to wear a tie in our office but some people like to dress more formally.*

*You don't have to go to the bank to do a transfer. You can do it online.*

*You don't have to come with me, honestly. I'll be fine!*

## **EXERCISE :**

**Do this exercise to test your comprehension again.**

\_\_\_\_\_ go to the party? I'm really tired.

**Do we have to.**

Can we.

Can't we.

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(Parent to child) You \_\_\_\_\_ do your homework before watching television.

**Must.**

Can.

Could.

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I'll \_\_\_\_\_ wear the black dress tonight. The invitation said formal clothes.

Can.

**Have to.**

Mustn't.

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You \_\_\_\_\_ rent a car without a credit card.

don't have to.

Mustn't.

**Can't.**

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I \_\_\_\_\_ forget to take my library books back on the way home.

**mustn't**

don't have to.

Have to.

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In the UK you can leave a tip in the pub if you want, but you \_\_\_\_\_.

mustn't

couldn't.

**Don't have to.**

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(Notice on a train) Quiet carriage. Passengers \_\_\_\_\_ play music or talk on the phone in this part of the train.

can't

**must not**

don't have to.

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You \_\_\_\_\_ be a member to buy a ticket. It's open to everyone.

have to.

**Don't have to.**

Can.