

## Unit 5: MODAL AND RELATED VERBS

Modal verbs are a special group of verbs in English, because they can function as auxiliary verbs, but they also have meaning, such as *obligation, certainty, possibility, ability* and *permission*.

### MODAL VERBS

#### Form:

1. There's no -s in the third person singular.
2. There is no *do / does / don't / doesn't* in questions and negatives.
3. Except *ought to*, all modal verbs are followed by an infinitive without to.
4. They have no infinitives or -ing forms.
5. They don't have past forms. (Except *could*, which is used with a past meaning to talk about general ability)

### OBLIGATIONS: *should, ought to* and *must*

*Should* and *ought to* express mild obligation, suggestions or advice, whereas *must* (and *have to*) express strong obligation.

- You're always asking me for money. I think you should spend less.
- You ought to be more careful with your money.
- All visitors must show proper ID.

We use *have to* and *must* to express **strong obligation**. They are often both possible.

*Have to* expresses a general obligation, based on a law or rule. The obligation can also be based on the authority of another person. It can also be a repeated obligation. *Have to* doesn't express the opinion of the speaker. *Must* usually expresses the speaker's personal opinion and is associated with a written, more formal style.

- You *have to* work hard if you want to succeed.
- Children *have to* go to school until they are 16.
- I always *have to* tell my parents where I am going.
- The doctor says I *have to* lose weight.
- I must get my hair cut.

*Have to* has all tense forms, while *must* doesn't.

- I *had to* work last night. (Past)
- You'll *have to* study hard. (Future)

In British English, you can use *have got to* instead of *have to*. *Have got to* is more informal.

- We've *got to* get up early tomorrow.

Have got to expresses an obligation now, or in the near future.

- I've got to leave for work now. Bye!

However, in the negative form, *do(es)n't have to* expresses **absence of obligation**, while *mustn't* expresses **negative obligation**.

- You don't have to put a photo on your profile.
- You mustn't steal other people's things.

Another verb that can be used in a similar way as *have to* (and falls into the category of related verbs) is *need to*.

- She needs to work long hours at the moment.

### PERMISSION: can, be allowed to

- You *can* borrow my bike, but you *can't* have the car. I need it.
- You're *allowed to* get married when you're 18.

### ABILITY: can, could, be able to

Can is used to express ability in the present. Could is used to express general ability in the past.

- I *can* swim.
- I *could* swim when I was six.
- I *was able to* swim when I was six.

### POSSIBILITY: all verbs

All modal verbs can be used to express different degrees of possibility.

- I must post this letter. (= obligation)
- You must be tired. (= deduction, possibility)
- Could you help me? (=request)
- We could go to Spain for our holiday. (=possibility)
- You may go home now. (=permission)
- A: Where's Anna? B: I'm not sure. She may be at work. (=possibility)

### EXERCISES

- [Ability](#)
- [Obligation](#)
- [Probability](#)