

Modal Verbs

Function		Modal	Example	Opposite	Example
Obligation	External	HAVE TO	You have to drive on the left in Britain.	MUSTN'T	You mustn't smoke in hospitals or schools.
	Self-imposed	MUST	I must remember to call my parents.	MUSTN'T	I mustn't forget her birthday.
Advice	Normal	SHOULD / OUGHT TO	You should work harder.	SHOULDN'T	You shouldn't use bad language.
	Strong	<u>MUST</u> *	You must see this film.	<u>MUSTN'T</u> *	You mustn't miss this concert.
Logical Deduction		MUST	I hear thunder, it must be a storm.	CAN'T	You're too young; you can't be a mother.
Lack of Obligation		DON'T HAVE TO	We don't have to wear a uniform.	NEED TO	You need to wait for five more minutes.
Possibility	Real	CAN	I know they can win the match.	CAN'T	You cannot win unless there's a miracle.
	Probable	COULD	He could probably tell the truth.	COULDN'T	We couldn't be more tired.
	Written	MAY	We may travel abroad next year.	MAY NOT	We may not have another chance.
	Spoken	MIGHT	She might be at work or gone fishing.	MIGHT NOT	They might not be able to help you.
Permission	Informal	CAN	You can now use the toilet.	CAN'T / CANNOT	You can't talk until you're asked.
	Formal	MAY	We're done! You may leave now.	MAY NOT	Pencils may not be used during the test.
Function		Modal	Example		
Past ability		COULD	He could play the piano at a very young age.		
Past obligation		HAD TO	I had to observe some silly guidelines at work.		
Reported future		WOULD	She said she would drop by tomorrow.		
Regrets		SHOULD HAVE	I should've probably bought an umbrella.		
Excuses		WOULD HAVE	I would've given you a ride to the airport if I could.		
Conjecture about the past		MUST HAVE	There must have been many wars in ancient times.		
Past possibility		COULD HAVE	They could've taken the chance but didn't dare.		
Conjecture about the present		MIGHT HAVE	This film might have become the greatest blockbuster.		