

## Modal verbs in English – Cheat Sheet

Modal verb	Example	Use
<b>can</b>	She can swim. She can't swim. This invoice can't be right! You can't go yet. Can we leave early?	ability / opportunity / permission inability impossibility / probability prohibition request
<b>could</b>	She could swim. He could have missed his bus. Could we leave early? We could see a movie.	ability (past) possibility / probability (past) request (polite) suggestion / opportunity (present)
<b>may</b>	She may swim. She may not swim. She may have swum. May we leave early? That may be Kelly at the door.	permission prohibition possibility (past) request (polite) possibility
<b>might</b>	She might swim. She might swim if ... You might try the apple cake. Might we leave early?	possibility conditional suggestion request (UK)
<b>must</b>	She must swim. She must not swim. She must have swum. It must be cold outside. My keys must be here somewhere. When must we leave? You must try the apple cake.	necessity / advice / certainty prohibition high probability (past) probability expectation obligation suggestion (strong)
<b>shall</b> (* UK English)	She shall swim. I shall learn the cello. Shall we leave early?	command / certainty intention (1st person) / future actions suggestion / offer
<b>should</b>	She should swim. That should be Kelly at the door. You should try the apple cake.	advice / obligation expectation suggestion
<b>will</b>	She will swim. I will learn cello. That will be Kelly at the door. They will always be late for dinner. Will you help me?	certainty (future) intention (1st person) probability habit request (favour / information)
<b>would</b>	She would swim if ... She would like to swim. They would often be late for dinner. Would you help me please?	conditional preference habit / repetition (past) request (polite)
<b>have to</b>	She has to swim. My keys have to be here somewhere. You have to try the apple cake.	necessity / obligation / certainty expectation suggestion (strong)