

37. MODAL VERBS (*can, might, should, must, have to...*)

Notice the two verbs in these sentences:

1. *The City Council has to improve security in schools.*
2. *The City Council should improve security in schools.*
 - The **first verb** in each sentence is a **helping verb**, and the **second verb** is the **main verb**.
 - In the second sentence, the helping verb (*should*) not only tells the time, but it also has a meaning (giving advice).
 - **Modal verbs** are **helping verbs that express a wide range of meanings**, such as permission, possibility, ability, etc.

Here are the different meanings that modal verbs can express.

MEANING	EXAMPLES
Probability/Possibility	<i>The Senate <u>could/might/may</u> pass an immigration reform bill next month.</i>
Ability	<i>A crocodile <u>can</u> stay underwater for up to two hours.</i>
Obligation or Necessity	<i>You <u>must</u> fill out the application form before coming for the interview. Before being admitted, applicants <u>have to</u> take the college placement exam.</i>
Not Necessary	<i>A person <u>does not have to</u> speak fluent English to get a driver's license.</i>
Prohibition (not allowed)	<i>Liquor store owners <u>must not</u> sell alcohol to minors.</i>
Opinion, Suggestion, Advice	<i>Parents <u>should</u> limit the amount of time their children spend watching T.V. Children <u>should not</u> chat with strangers online.</i>

Here is how to form a modal verb + a main verb correctly.

FORM	EXAMPLES
USE a modal verb + the simple form of a verb	<i>With a warrant, a police officer <u>can search</u> a suspect's home.</i>
DO NOT USE any other verb form after the modal verb.	<i>With a warrant, a police officer <u>can search</u> / can searched / to search a suspect's home.</i>
DO NOT ADD -s after the modal or the main verb.	<i>With a warrant, a police officer <u>can</u> search / <u>can search</u> a suspect's home.</i>