

Unit 27: MODAL VERBS

Modal verbs are auxiliaries (Unit 3). They never change form. They show what we think or feel about the lexical verb (Unit 3) in the sentence. The important modals are:

can could may might will would shall should must

1 With verb formation

Put the modal verb before any other verbs. The next verb is always base form (Unit 14).

a BEFORE ONE-WORD VERB FORMATIONS

MODAL	+	BASE FORM
He can		sell shoes very well.
The sales might		be difficult.

NOTICE: Modals do not have an –s form and we never use an –s form for the next verb.

We say: **He might come** NOT *mights come* or *might comes*

b BEFORE CONTINUOUS FORMATION (UNIT 17)

MODAL	be -ing FORM
I will	be working tomorrow.
She must	be buying those pants.

NOTICE: Always use **be** after a modal NOT *am, is, are, was* or *were*.

c BEFORE PERFECT SIMPLE FORMATIONS (UNIT 24)

MODAL	have PAST PARTICIPLE
He may	have worked too many hours this week.
They should	have received their drink order by now.

d BEFORE PERFECT CONTINUOUS FORMATIONS (UNIT 24)

MODAL	have been -ing FORM
She could	have been taking inventory.
She might	have been returning merchandise.

NOTICE: Always use **have**, NOT *has* or *had*, after a modal.

2 As auxiliary verbs

Modals are the same as other auxiliaries for making:

a QUESTIONS (Unit 9) – the modal goes before the subject:

EXAMPLES: **Can** you help me please?
How many days **will** you be staying?

b NEGATIVE SENTENCES (Unit 5) – the modal goes before not:

EXAMPLES: He **couldn't** return his broken cell phone.
You **might** not hire another sales assistant.

NOTICE: We write negative **can** as one word: **cannot** (we usually say **can't**)

NOTICE: In speaking, **won't** (= will not); **shan't** (= shall not).

c SHORT ANSWERS (Unit 11) – use the modal:

EXAMPLES: **Should** we hire another sales assistant? Yes, we **should**.

d TAG QUESTIONS (Unit 12) – use only the modal in the tag:

EXAMPLES: We **wouldn't** have to work so often then, **would** we?

3 Meaning

The important meanings of each modal verb are in the next units (28-33). Generally, modals say something about:

a HOW TRUE (OR NOT TRUE) SOMETHING IS:

EXAMPLES:	After that work, you must be tired.	= I am sure you are tired.
	He may have bought a sweater.	= Perhaps he has bought a sweater.

b HOW GOOD (OR BAD) SOMETHING IS:

EXAMPLES:	You must work harder.	I think it is good to work hard.
	They should not do that.	I think it is bad to do that.

BE CAREFUL! The meaning of a modal verb in an affirmative sentence is not always the same as its meaning in a question or a negative sentence. The next units (28-33) will tell you the exact meanings for each verb.