

How to use English Modal Verbs

MODALS IN ENGLISH

What is a modal verb?

English modal verbs are special verbs that are very different from normal verbs. These are auxiliary verbs, which means that they are directly followed by another verb, without 'to'.

They are used to express points of view, such as to ask for permission (with 'can' or 'could'), to express a future or present possibility (with 'may' or 'might'), or a necessity or obligation ('must')....

Here are four things to know absolutely about English modals:

1 - Modal verbs do not take "-s" in the third person

- *He can speak Spanish.*
- *She should be here by 10:00.*

2 - It is necessary to use 'not' with English modal verbs to make the negative form, even in the simple present tense or in the simple past tense.

- *He should not be late.*
- *They might not come to the party.*

3 - Many English modal verbs cannot be used in the past or future tense.

- *He will can go with us. = WRONG*
- *She musted study very hard. = WRONG*

4 - To make a question with a modal, it must be reversed with the main verb

- *She can go => Can she go ?*
- *You should drive. => Should you drive ?*

Some common English modal verbs:

- **Can**
- **Could**
- **May**
- **Might**
- **Must**
- **Ought to** (rarely used)
- **Shall** (rarely used, rather in England)
- **Should**
- **Will**
- **Would**

Some expressions that are not modal verbs are used as such: "had better", "have to", and "have got to".

These expressions are very close to modal verbs in their meaning and can often be interchanged with them.