

English Modal Verbs Table

Modal verb	Usage	Example
can	ability	I can do several things at the same time.
	when something is possible	Miracles can happen.
	permission	You can go now.
	informal request	Can you come here for a minute?
could	past form of "can"	She said she could pay for us as well.
	polite requests	Could you move your bag, please?
	possibility	It could be that he missed the train.
may	ask for or give permission (formal)	May I speak?
	possibility	It may rain tomorrow.
might	past form of "may"	He said he might change his mind.
	possibility	This might fail.
must	you have to do it	You must obey the law.
	it's very logical or very likely to happen	They left so early, they must be home by now.
must not / mustn't	you are not allowed to do it.	You mustn't smoke in here.
shall	future for "I" and "we"	I shall see him tomorrow.
	questions and suggestions for "I" and "we"	Let's continue, shall we?

should	the right thing to do	She could call the police.
	advice	What should I do? You should stop thinking about it.
	what is likely or expected to happen	We should be back by midnight.
will	future action or states (not plans)	Prices will go up next summer.
	promises and intentions	It's all right, I'll pick it up.
would	past form of "will" imagined situation	He told me he would come. What would you do if you were him?
	for polite requests, offers and invitations	Would you please sit down? Would you like some tea? We are meeting Tom next Friday, would you like to come along?
	to say what you want to do or have	I would like a piece of cake.
ought to	the right thing to do	You ought to apologize.