

Modals: present and future

Explanations

Don't have to and
must not

- *Don't have to* refers to an absence of obligation.
*You **don't have to** work tomorrow.*
- *Must not* refers to an obligation not to do something.
*You **must not** leave the room before the end of the test.*

Should

Where **should* appears, *ought to* can also be used.

- Expectation
*This film ***should** be really good.*
- Recommendation
*I think you ***should** talk it over with your parents.*
In writing, *should* can be used to express a strong obligation politely.
*Guests **should** vacate their rooms by midday.*
- Criticism of an action
*You ***shouldn't** eat so much late at night.*
- Uncertainty
***Should** I leave these papers on your desk?*
- *Should* and verbs of thinking
Should is often used with verbs of thinking, to make an opinion less direct.
***I should think** that model would sell quite well.*
- With *be* and adjectives describing chance
This group of adjectives includes *odd*, *strange*, *funny (=odd)* and the expression *What a coincidence*.
*It's strange that you **should** be staying in the same hotel!*
- After *in case* to emphasise unlikelihood
*I'm taking an umbrella **in case it should** rain.*
See Grammar 8 for similar uses in conditional sentences.
- *Could* is used to express possibility or uncertainty.
*This **could** be the house.*
- *Could* is used with comparative adjectives to express possibility or impossibility.
*The situation **couldn't** be worse.*
*It **could** be better.*

Could

- *Could* is used to make suggestions.

*We **could** go to that new restaurant opposite the cinema.*

- *Could* is used to express unwillingness.

*I **couldn't** possibly leave Tim here on his own.*

Can

- *Can* with *be* is used to make criticisms.

*You **can be** really annoying, you know!*

- *Can* is also used with *be* to refer to capability.

*Winter here **can be** really cold.*

Must and can't

These refer to present time only. (See *bound to*). In expressing certainty, they are opposites.

*This **must** be our stop. (I'm sure it is.)*

*This **can't** be our stop. (I'm sure it isn't.)*

May and might

- *May* can be used to express *although* clauses:

*She **may** be the boss, **but** that is no excuse for shouting like that.*

See also Grammar 14 Emphasis.

- *May/might as well*

This describes the only thing left to do, something which the speaker is not enthusiastic about.

*Nobody else is going to turn up now for the lesson, so you **may as well** go home.*

- *May* and *might* both express possibility or uncertainty. *May* is more common in formal language.

*The peace conference **may** find a solution to the problem.*

- There is an idiomatic expression with *try*, using *may* for present reference, and *might* for past reference.

***Try as I might**, I could not pass my driving test.*

(This means although I tried hard, I could not pass my driving test.)

Shall

- *Shall* can be used with all persons to emphasise something which the speaker feels is certain to happen or wants to happen.

*I **shall** definitely give up smoking this year.*

*We **shall** win! (*shall* is stressed in this sentence)*

- Similarly, *shall* is used in formal rules and regulations.

*No player **shall** knowingly pick up or move the ball of another player.*

Will

- *Will* can be used to express an assumption.

A: The phone's ringing. B: That'll be for me.

- *Will/won't* can be used emphatically to tell someone of the speaker's intention, or to forbid an action, in response to a *will* expression.

I'll take the money anyway, so there!

*You **won't**!*

*I **will**!*

Similarly *I won't* can mean *I refuse*, and *I will* can mean *I insist*.

*A: I **won't** do it! B: Yes, you **will**!*

Would

Would is often used in situations where a conditional sense is understood but not stated.

*Nobody **would** agree with that idea.* (if we asked them)

*Life **wouldn't** be worth living without you.* (if you weren't there)

*I think Jim **would** be the best candidate.* (if he was under consideration for the job)

*Sue **wouldn't** do that, surely!* (if you think she's capable of doing that).

Need

- *Need to* is a modal auxiliary, and behaves like a normal verb.

*Do you **need to** use the photocopier?*

- *Need* is a modal auxiliary, but mainly in question and negative forms.

***Need you** make so much noise?*

See Grammar 7 for *need doing*

Related

non-modal
expressions

- *Had better*

This is a recommendation and refers only to the present or future.

*You'd **better** not phone her again.*

- *Be bound to*

This makes a future prediction of certainty.

*It's **bound to** rain tomorrow.*

Practice

1 Underline the correct word or phrase in each sentence.

- a) I don't think you could/should tell anyone yet.
- b) I couldn't/shouldn't possibly leave without paying.
- c) That mustn't/can't be the hotel Jane told us about.
- d) There are times when the traffic here can/could be really heavy.
- e) We are enjoying our holiday, though the weather could/must be better.
- f) You couldn't/shouldn't really be sitting here.
- g) You could/may be older than me, but that doesn't mean you're cleverer.
- h) You might/should like to look over these papers if you have time.
- i) I'm afraid that nobody should/would help me in that kind of situation.
- j) No member of the association must/shall remove official documents from these premises without written permission.

2 Put one suitable word in each space. Contractions (can't) count as one word.

- Bill: This (1) must be the house, I suppose, number 16 Elland Way.
 Jane: I pictured it as being much bigger, from the estate agent's description.
 Bill: Well, we'd (2) go inside.
 Jane: We (3) as well. Wait a minute. I (4) to just find my glasses. I (5) see a thing without them.
 Bill: I don't think much of it from the outside, to be honest.
 Jane: Yes, it (6) certainly do with a coat of paint or two.
 Bill: Rather you than me! I (7) like to have to paint it all! And the gutters (8) replacing.
 Jane: I (9) think they haven't been replaced since the house was built.
 Bill: They (10) really be replaced every four years ideally.
 Jane: And I don't like that big ivy plant growing up the side. Ivy (11) get in the brickwork and cause all sorts of damage.
 Bill: I wonder if there's a lock on that big downstairs window? It looks very easy to break in to.
 Jane: There's (12) to be one, surely.
 Bill: Well, (13) we go inside?
 Jane: Do we (14) to? I think I've seen enough already. I (15) possibly live here.

3 Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given.

- a) I couldn't be happier at the moment.
could
 I am as *happy as could be* at the moment.
- b) Although I tried hard, I couldn't lift the suitcase.
might
 Try , I couldn't lift the suitcase.
- c) I'm sure that Peter won't be late.
bound
 Peter on time.
- d) Fancy you and I having the same surname!
should
 It's odd the same surname!
- e) I think you should take up jogging.
were
 If I take up jogging.
- f) It's possible that this kind of snake is poisonous.
could
 This snake the poisonous kinds.
- g) You can't borrow my car!
won't
 I borrow my car!
- h) I'm sure this isn't how you get to Norwich!
can't
 This way to Norwich!
- i) It makes no difference to me if we call it off.
may
 We call it off.
- j) Although it's summer, the temperature is more like winter.
may
 It the temperature is more like winter.

4 Choose the sentence A or B that is closest in meaning to the sentence given.

- a) It's possible that we'll know the answers tomorrow. A.....
 A We may know the answers tomorrow.
 B We should know the answers tomorrow.
- b) I don't think you should ring him now. It's rather late.
 A You might not ring him now. It's rather late.
 B You'd better not ring him now. It's rather late.
- c) You needn't come if you don't want to.
 A You won't come if you don't want to.
 B You don't have to come if you don't want to.
- d) I think it's wrong for you to work so hard.
 A You don't have to work so hard.
 B You shouldn't work so hard.
- e) Perhaps these are the keys.
 A These might be the keys.
 B These must be the keys.
- f) It would be wrong for us to lock the cat in the house for a week.
 A We'd better not lock the cat in the house for a week.
 B We can't lock the cat in the house for a week.
- g) It's possible that the decision will be announced next week.
 A The decision might be announced next week.
 B The decision will be announced next week.
- h) Although I try hard, I can never solve 'The Times' crossword.
 A Try as I may, I can never solve 'The Times' crossword.
 B Try as I can, I may never solve 'The Times' crossword.
- i) I know. Why don't we go out to eat instead?
 A I know. We must go out to eat instead.
 B I know. We could go out to eat instead.



5 Complete each sentence with one of the phrases from the box.

couldn't be wouldn't be I might ~~don't have to~~ couldn't possibly
must be must like need to may be might as well

- a) The heating comes on automatically. You *don't have to* turn it on.
 b) Of course I'll help! I let you do it on your own.
 c) It's a lovely hotel. And the staff more helpful.
 d) George it there if he has stayed there for so long.
 e) You right, but I'm still not convinced.
 f) We go in this museum. There's nothing else to do.
 g) I love these trees. Without them the garden the same.
 h) There's the phone call I was expecting. It George.
 i) Thanks. And now you just sign on the dotted line.
 j) Try as , I simply couldn't open the lid.

6 In most lines of this text there is an extra word. Write the word, or put a tick if the line is correct.

I may as well be admit it – I'm a secret admirer of all things connected 1 *be*
 with trains! It's not with something you would want to admit to your 2
 friends, but I can't imagine life possibly without my collection of model 3
 trains and train memorabilia. You're probably thinking I must be done 4
 some kind of nerd who stands around on chilly platforms all day 5
 collecting train numbers, and yes, I have to admit for I've done my fair 6
 share of that, but that's only a small part of it. I can just love the feel of 7
 railway stations, and I can cheerfully spend a whole of afternoon in 8
 one, just walking around soaking up to the atmosphere of the place, 9
 looking for things for my collection, and taking photos of new engines. 10
 Call me might a wierdo, but I'd far rather spend a day in a station 11
 than on the beach by sunning myself. I'd be too busy taking the train 12
 down the coast – coastal routes can be an absolutely spectacular. 13
 There's a convention for those railway lovers on the south coast soon 14
 – rest assured that I shall be there. I wouldn't miss it for all the world! 15

→ SEE ALSO

Grammar 7: Passive 2
Grammar 8: Conditionals
Grammar 12: Modals: past
Grammar 14: Emphasis

Explanations

Had to and must have

Had to is the past form of *must* and refers to a past obligation.

*Sorry I'm late, I **had to post** some letters.*

The negative form is *didn't have to* and refers to an absence of obligation.

Must have refers to past certainty. (see below)

Should have and ought to have

Where **should* appears, *ought to* is also possible.

- Expectation

Should have refers to something which was supposed to happen.

*The parcel I sent you ***should have arrived** by now.*

- Criticism of an action

*You ***shouldn't have eaten** so much last night.*

- *Should have* and verbs of thinking

The past form *knew* in the example is an unreal verb form, and the *should have* form is used according to 'sequence of verb forms'. See Grammar 9.

*I **should have thought** you knew.*

- With *be* and adjectives describing chance

*It was strange that you **should have been staying** in the same hotel last year.*

- As a polite expression of thanks on receiving a gift or a favour

*I've done the washing up for you. – Oh, you really **shouldn't have!***

The intonation should be friendly, as this is not a criticism.

Could have

- *Could have* refers to past possibility or uncertainty.

*David **could have won** the race if he had tried. (possibility/ability)*

*It **could have been** Sue, I suppose. (uncertainty)*

- *Couldn't have* is also possible for both meanings.

- *Couldn't have* can be used with comparative adjectives.

*We **couldn't have been happier** in those days.*

- *Could have* can also express unwillingness.

*She **could have gone** to the party with her friends. (but she didn't)*

*We **couldn't have left** the dog on its own. (so we didn't)*

Could

- *Could* refers to past permission or past ability.

*When I was sixteen I **could stay** out till 11.00. (I was allowed to)*

*Mary **could swim** when she was three. (she actually did)*

- Compare:

*Mary **could have swum** when she was three. (but she didn't)*

May have and
might have

- *Might have* refers to past possibility which did not happen.
*You **might have drowned!***
- *Might have* and *may have* refer to uncertainty.
*I suppose I **may have been** rather critical.*
- Both can be used in the negative to express uncertainty.
*They **might not have received** our letter yet.*
- *Might have* is used to express annoyance at someone's failure to do something. There is strong stress on the words underlined.
*You **might have told** me my trousers were split!*
- *I might have known + would* is an idiom by which the speaker expresses ironically that an action was typical of someone else.
*I **might have known** that he **would** be late.*
A: It was Jack who broke the vase. B: I **might have known!**

Must have and
can't have

- These refer to the speaker's certainty about a past action.
*Someone **must have taken** it. (I am sure they did)*
*You **can't have lost** it. (I am sure you didn't)*
- Both can also be used with *surely* in exclamations.
***Surely you can't have** eaten all of it!*
***Surely you must have** noticed it!*

Would not

- This expresses an unwillingness in the past.
*Everyone was angry because Sam **wouldn't turn off** the television.*

Would have

- *Would have* can refer to events in the past which did not actually happen.
*I **would have accepted** this job, but I didn't want to move house.*
- Assumptions about the past are also possible with *would have*.
A: *Someone called after you left but didn't leave a message.*
B: *That **would have been** Cathy, probably.*

Needn't have and
didn't need to

- Needn't have done* refers to an unnecessary action which was actually done.
*You **needn't have paid** all at once. (you did pay)*
Didn't need to refers to an unnecessary action which was not done.
*I **didn't need to go** to the dentist again, luckily.*

Adverbs and
modals

- Adverbs such as *well, easily, obviously, really, just* are often used to emphasise modal expressions, in both present and past time.

*You could **easily** have been killed.*
*I might **well** decide to come.*
*She **obviously** must have left.*
*You couldn't **really** have managed without me.*
*I might **just** take you up on that.*

Practice

1 Underline the correct word or phrase in each sentence.

- a) That can't have been/shouldn't have been Nick that you saw.
 b) You must have given/might have given me a hand!
 c) I caught a later train because I had to see/must have seen a client.
 d) I suppose Bill should have lost/might have lost his way.
 e) I didn't refuse the cake, as it should have been/would have been rude.
 f) I don't know who rang, but it could have been/must have been Jim.
 g) It was odd that you should have bought/would have bought the same car.
 h) I asked them to leave but they might not/wouldn't go.
 i) It's a pity you didn't ask because I can't help/could have helped you.
 j) It's your own fault, you can't have/shouldn't have gone to bed so late.

2 Complete each sentence using one of the phrases from the box.

can't have	must have	shouldn't have	may not have
may have	shouldn't have	can't have	ought to have
didn't need to	shouldn't have		

- a) You and your big mouth! It was supposed to be a secret. You shouldn't have told her!
 b) The plane is late. It landed by now.
 c) You met my brother. I haven't got one!
 d) There is only one explanation. You left your keys on the bus.
 e) You heard me right. I definitely said 204525.
 f) The meat is a bit burnt. You cooked it for so long.
 g) I'm sorry. I accept I been a little bit rude.
 h) You really taken so much trouble over me.
 i) Was it really necessary? You tell the police, you know.
 j) Keep your fingers crossed! The traffic warden noticed the car's parking ticket has run out!

3 Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given.

- a) It wouldn't have been right to leave you to do all the work on your own.
couldn't
 I *couldn't have left you to do* all the work on your own.
- b) Perhaps they didn't notice the tyre was flat.
might
 They the tyre was flat.
- c) All that trouble I went to wasn't necessary in the end.
needn't
 I all that trouble.
- d) Apparently someone has borrowed the cassette player.
have
 Someone the cassette player.
- e) I'm disappointed that you didn't back me up!
might
 You me up!
- f) Our worrying so much was a waste of time.
needn't
 We so much.
- g) It's just not possible for the cat to have opened the fridge.
possibly
 The cat the fridge.
- h) It would have been possible for Helen to take us in her car.
could
 Helen us a lift.
- i) It's possible that the last person to leave didn't lock the door.
might
 The last person the door unlocked.
- j) School uniform wasn't compulsory at my school.
wear
 We school uniform at my school.

4 Complete each sentence by writing one word in each space. Contractions (can't) count as one word.

- a) I could have become a millionaire, but I decided not to.
- b) You have been here when Helen told the boss not to be so lazy! It was great!
- c) Peter wasn't here then, so he have broken your vase.
- d) I have bought that car, but I decided to look at a few others.
- e) If you felt lonely, you have given me a ring.
- f) Don't take a risk like that again! We have lost because of you.
- g) It's been more than a week! You have had some news by now!
- h) We were glad to help. We have just stood by and done nothing.
- i) You really have gone to so much trouble!
- j) I have thought that it was rather difficult.

5 Correct any errors in these sentences. Some sentences are correct.

- a) Surely you mustn't have forgotten already! can't
- b) Even Paul couldn't have foreseen what was coming next.
- c) Frances might not have understood what you said.
- d) It was funny that she should have remembered me.
- e) Harry may have won the match with a bit more effort.
- f) You must have told me you had already eaten.
- g) Look, there's £30 in my wallet. I shouldn't have gone to the bank after all.
- h) You mustn't have been so unkind!
- i) I couldn't have managed without you.
- j) I have no idea who it was, but I suppose it would have been Ann.

6 Underline the most suitable adverb for each space.

- a) Someone obviously/currently/fortunately must have picked it up by mistake.
- b) He could really/cheerfully/easily have stolen the painting without anyone knowing.
- c) I may surely/well/clearly have made a mistake.
- d) You really/clearly/needlessly shouldn't have spent so much on my present.
- e) Bill rarely/simply/certainly wouldn't listen to anything we said.
- f) I couldn't just/yet/already have left without saying a word.
- g) Certainly/Rarely/Surely you can't seriously believe that I am guilty!
- h) I opened the window, I greatly/surely/simply had to get some fresh air.
- i) I still/unfortunately/surely couldn't have come to your party.
- j) How dangerous! You could still/strongly/well have been injured!

7 Complete each space in the text with an appropriate modal verb. Some are negative.

Dear Toshie,

Thanks for sending back the book I lent you. You (1) *can't have* read it already! You must be the world's fastest reader! Hope you enjoyed it.

Well, the big news is, I decided not to go to Italy to take up my job offer. Basically, moving there (2) meant a lot of upheaval and frankly I couldn't face the hassle. Maybe I (3) just gone, and been a bit more adventurous, and for sure, I've got mixed feelings about it, as if part of me wanted to go. Who knows, I (4) met the man of my dreams! But I didn't take the decision lightly. I (5) spent several weeks thinking about nothing else. Anyway, what's done is done.

My other news concerns my Dad. You remember I was getting very worried because he'd been having dizzy spells and feeling all light-headed. Well, I (6) worried – he's been diagnosed as suffering from low blood pressure, so he's on medication for that. The doctor said it's possible that his vegetarian diet (7) set it off. It's a pity you weren't here! You (8) been able to help Dad, with your interest in holistic medicine. You (9) given him some of your aromatherapy treatments.

Anyway, hope to see you again before too long. By the way, guess who's getting married in June? Brenda! I (10) known it would be her! It's typical; that girl has all the luck!

Bye!

Love from, Sue

→ SEE ALSO

Grammar 9: Unreal time
Grammar 11: Modals: present and future
Grammar 15: Consolidation 3