

### Understand Modals

This chart is a combination of Azar (1989, pp. 94-100), McArthur (1998), and *Collin's Cobuild Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Harper Collins, 2003, pp. 382-383).

Modal	Expressing	Past Form	Example
<b>can</b>	ability permission appeal for help emphasis	<b>could</b>	I <b>can</b> speak French now, but last year I <b>couldn't</b> . <b>Can</b> I watch TV? <b>Can</b> you please open the door for me? You <b>can</b> imagine what it felt like!
<b>could</b>	ability possibility permission appeal for help emphasis		He <b>couldn't</b> come because of the heavy rain. He <b>could</b> be late if the traffic is bad. <b>Could</b> I please borrow your guitar? <b>Could</b> you please open the door for me? She <b>could</b> have eaten the whole lot!
<b>may</b>	possibility permission	<b>might</b>	It <b>may</b> rain after lunch; at least she told me it <b>might</b> . You <b>may</b> watch TV now.
<b>might</b>	possibility advice emphasis		She <b>might</b> join us for dinner. You <b>might</b> try the other shop. You <b>might</b> have told me.
<b>ought to</b>	advice obligation		You <b>ought to</b> increase your fluid intake. I <b>ought to</b> get back to work.
<b>must</b>	necessity emphasis		You <b>must</b> hand in your paper today! I <b>must</b> admit, you are often late.
<b>shall</b>	offer of help intention obligation necessity	<b>should</b>	<b>Shall</b> I close the door? We <b>shall</b> know more tomorrow. I <b>should</b> have taken my shoes off before entering. You <b>shall</b> obey all the rules.
<b>should</b>	advice emphasis obligation conditionality		You <b>should</b> drink more water. You <b>should</b> have seen his face! You <b>should</b> take your shoes off before entering. <b>Should</b> you get lost, call this number.
<b>will *</b>	appeal for help possibility	<b>would</b>	<b>Will</b> you come with me to the dentist? I <b>would</b> have come with you if I could have.
<b>would</b>	advice desire appeal for help		I <b>would</b> phone her and say you are sorry. She <b>would</b> like a dog. <b>Would</b> you come with me?

\* *Will* is also used to express the future. (e.g. She **will eat** lunch later.)

## References

- Azar, B. S. (1989). *Understanding and using English grammar*. (2nd ed.). New Prentice Hall Regents.
- Harper Collins. (2003). *Collins cobuild advanced learner's English dictionary*. (4th ed.). Author.
- McArthur, T. (1998). *The concise Oxford companion to the English language*. Oxford University Press.