

Appendix 4

Modal verbs (can/could/will/would etc.)

This appendix is a summary of modal verbs. For more information, see Units 21–41.

5.1

4.1 Compare can/could etc. for actions:

can	<input type="checkbox"/> I can go out tonight. (= there is nothing to stop me)
	<input type="checkbox"/> I can't go out tonight.
could	<input type="checkbox"/> I could go out tonight, but I'm not very keen.
	<input type="checkbox"/> I couldn't go out last night. (= I wasn't able)
can or may	<input type="checkbox"/> Can } I go out tonight? (= do you allow me)
	<input type="checkbox"/> May }
will/won't	<input type="checkbox"/> I think I'll go out tonight.
	<input type="checkbox"/> I promise I won't go out.
would	<input type="checkbox"/> I would go out tonight, but I have too much to do.
	<input type="checkbox"/> I promised I wouldn't go out.
shall	<input type="checkbox"/> Shall I go out tonight? (do you think it is a good idea?)
should or ought to	<input type="checkbox"/> I { should } go out tonight. (= it would be a good thing to do)
	<input type="checkbox"/> { ought to }
must	<input type="checkbox"/> I must go out tonight. (= it is necessary)
	<input type="checkbox"/> I mustn't go out tonight. (= it is necessary that I do <i>not</i> go out)
needn't	<input type="checkbox"/> I needn't go out tonight. (= it is not necessary)

5.2

Compare could have ... / would have ... etc. :

could	<input type="checkbox"/> I could have gone out last night, but I decided to stay at home.
would	<input type="checkbox"/> I would have gone out last night, but I had too much to do.
should or ought to	<input type="checkbox"/> I { should } have gone out last night. I'm sorry I didn't.
	<input type="checkbox"/> { ought to }
needn't	<input type="checkbox"/> I needn't have gone out last night. (= I went out, but it was not necessary)

4.2 We use will/would/may etc. to say whether something is possible, impossible, probable, certain etc. Compare:

will	<input type="checkbox"/> 'What time will she be here?' 'She'll be here soon.'
would	<input type="checkbox"/> She would be here now, but she's been delayed.
should or ought to	<input type="checkbox"/> She { should } be here soon. (= I expect she will be here soon)
	<input type="checkbox"/> { ought to }
may or might or could	<input type="checkbox"/> She { may } be here now. I'm not sure. (= it's possible that she is here)
	<input type="checkbox"/> { might }
	<input type="checkbox"/> { could }
must	<input type="checkbox"/> She must be here. I saw her come in.
can't	<input type="checkbox"/> She can't possibly be here. I know for certain that she's away on holiday.

5.3

Compare would have ... / should have ... etc. :

will	<input type="checkbox"/> She will have arrived by now. (= before now)
would	<input type="checkbox"/> She would have arrived earlier, but she was delayed.
should or ought to	<input type="checkbox"/> I wonder where she is. She { should } have arrived by now.
	<input type="checkbox"/> { ought to }
may or might or could	<input type="checkbox"/> She { may } have arrived. I'm not sure. (= it's possible that she has arrived)
	<input type="checkbox"/> { might }
	<input type="checkbox"/> { could }
must	<input type="checkbox"/> She must have arrived by now. (= I'm sure – there is no other possibility)
can't	<input type="checkbox"/> She can't possibly have arrived yet. It's much too early. (= it's impossible)