



Università degli Studi del Sannio
Centro Linguistico di Ateneo

LESSON 7

Level A1/A2

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Video realizzato



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Modal verbs (1)

The verbs **must, can, could, may, might, will, would, shall, should** and **ought to** are modal verbs

They **express** meanings such as **obligation, necessity, ability, possibility, lack of necessity, offer, suggestion, request, logical assumption, permission, prohibition** and **advice**.

Modal verbs (2)

Modal verbs:

- do not take **-s**, **-ing** or **-ed**. **Ex.** She **must see** a doctor. (NOT: She *musts see* a doctor.)
- are followed by a **bare infinitive**, except for **ought** which is followed by a **to-infinitive**.
Ex. He **can't do** it. (NOT: He *can't to do* it.)
She **ought to listen** to you.
- go before the subject in questions and are followed by **not** in negations. **Ex.** **Can I** go out for a moment? **He couldn't** play the piano when he was 3.
- do not usually have tenses. They refer to the present or future.
Ex. You **can** go now. (present) You **can** call tomorrow. (future)

Must

Obligation – necessity – duty

must = it is your duty to do sth/you are obliged to do sth

Ex. *You must fasten your seatbelt when you drive.*

Strong advice

must = I strongly advise you to do sth

Ex. *You must see a doctor to see what's wrong with you.*

Prohibition

mustn't/can't = it is forbidden to do sth/you are not allowed to do sth/it is against the rules/law)

Ex. *You mustn't (must not) smoke in class.*

Remember!

MUST si usa solo al presente. A tutti gli altri tempi si usa **HAVE TO**.

present simple: **must/have to** - past simple: **had to**

present perfect: **have/has had to** - future simple: **must/will have to**

Must – Have to

Obligation – necessity – duty

Must/have to = it is necessary to do sth

- We use **must** when the speaker decides that something is necessary.

Ex. I am exhausted. I must go to bed now.

- We use **have to** when somebody else other than the speaker has made the decision.

Ex. Doctors have to wear gloves in hospitals.

Do you have to read all those books for the exam?

Remember!

MUST e **HAVE TO** alla forma affermativa hanno un senso molto simile e sono spesso intercambiabili. L'uso dell'uno o dell'altro dipende soprattutto dal senso che si vuole dare alla frase.

Mustn't – Don't have to/Needn't

Prohibition

mustn't = it is forbidden/you are not allowed to do sth

Ex. *Drivers mustn't talk on their mobiles while driving.*

Lack of necessity

needn't/don't have to = it isn't necessary to do sth

Ex. *We don't have to/needn't wear a uniform at work.*

You don't have to wash the dishes. (but you can if you want!)

Remember!

MUST e **HAVE TO** alla forma negativa hanno un senso molto diverso e NON sono intercambiabili. **MUSTN'T** esprime il divieto, mentre **DON'T HAVE TO** esprime che qualcosa non è necessario.

Should – Ought to

Giving advice

should/ought to = I advise you to/you had better do sth

Ex. *You should go to the dentist for regular check-ups.*

You shouldn't smoke so many cigarettes!

Compare:

- *You **should** talk to your lawyer.* (It would be a good idea to ...)
- *You **must** talk to your lawyer.* (I strongly advise you to ...)

Remember!

SHOULD e **OUGHT TO** hanno un senso molto simile e sono intercambiabili. **OUGHT TO** è più formale di **SHOULD** e si usa meno spesso.

Can – Could (ability)

ability in the present

can = I am able to

Ex. *She can play the guitar very well.*

He can't speak Spanish or German.

ability in the past

could = used to be able to — past repeated action

We use **could** to express general ability in the past.

Ex. *He could speak three languages when he was 4.*

Could – Was able to (past ability)

Was/were able to

We use **was/were able to** (= managed to) to express what someone managed to do in a specific situation in the past (past single action).

Ex. *They **were able to** book their holiday last minute.* (they managed to).

Could

We use **could** to show that someone had the ability to do something repeatedly in the past (past repeated action).

Ex. *He **could** play tennis very well at the age of 10.*

•(He had the ability to do this repeatedly in the past.)

•We use the **negative** form **couldn't** for both cases.

Ex. *I **couldn't** read when I was two.* (past repeated action)

*I tried, but I **couldn't** open the door.* (past single action)

Can – Could – May – Might (permission)

Asking for permission

Can/Could/May/Might I ...? = Do you/Would you mind if ...?

Could and **may** are more polite than **can**. **Might** is very formal and not used in everyday situations.

Ex. *Can I use your telephone? (informal)*

Could I use your telephone? (more polite)

May (might) I have a look at those documents? (formal)

Giving/refusing permission

Can/May (more formal) = you are allowed to do sth

Cannot (can't)/May not (more formal) = you are not allowed to do sth

Ex. – *I'm afraid you can't pay by cheque.*

– *You may not smoke in here (formal, on a notice)*

Could – May – Might (possibility/probability)

Possibility

• **could + present infinitive** = it is possible

Ex. *We could buy the computer in this store.*

Probability

(could)/may/might + present infinitive = it is possible/it is likely/perhaps

It is used to show that something is likely to happen in a specific situation in the present or future.

Ex. *We may go to John's party, but we're not sure yet.*

They might decide to buy the company next year.

could/might + perfect infinitive = it was possible but it didn't happen

Ex. *The driver could have been killed.* (Luckily, he wasn't.)

Must/Can't (logical assumptions)

For positive logical assumptions we use **must**.

Must = I'm sure/certain that sth is true/real.

Ex. *Look! That must be Harry's new girlfriend!*

You must be joking!

For negative logical assumptions we use **can't**.

Can't = I'm sure/certain that sth isn't true/real.

Ex. *He can't be really in love with her...!*

You can't be serious!