



# Unit 6 Modals

## 6.1 Ability, Obligation

# Modals: Ability, Obligation

There are three modal verbs can show ability in English which are can, could and be able to. **'Can', 'could'** and **'be able to'** is always followed by a base form of verb. It does not matter what the subject is. We say "I can", "she can", "they can", etc.

We use **'can'** to

- describe ability to do something in present or in future.  
He can speak 5 different languages.
- describe what is allowed.  
You can take pictures inside this museum.
- with a future meaning.  
I can come to the party tomorrow.

# Modals: Ability, Obligation

We use **'could'** to describe past ability.

- She **could** 10 kilometers in half an hour.

We use **'be able to'** to describe ability instead of **'can'** and **'could'**. It is used with many other verb tenses.

- They **are able to** speak French.
- I'**ll be able** to swim within this summer.
- He **has been able to** visit many countries.
- She used to **be able to** exercise a lot after work.
- Mike will have **been able to** finish his project by tomorrow.

# Negatives

Negatives are formed by using “**not**” to describe the lack of ability.

- I **cannot (can't)** play football.
- She **could not (couldn't)** finish her homework last night.
- They **couldn't** finish their homework last night.
- I **will not (won't)** be able to go attend the class tomorrow.
- Sam **is not (isn't)** able to go to the party tonight.

## NOTE

**\*\*** The contractions: ‘can’t’, ‘couldn’t’, and ‘won’t be able to’ are very common, particularly in speaking.

# Obligation

'Have to' and 'has to' are not actually modal verbs. They are expressions which function like modals. They are used in all tenses.

We use 'have to' and 'has to' to describe what is necessary, a rule or something you are told to do.

- I have to work tomorrow.
- He has to work tomorrow.
- She will have to go to New York next month.

We use **'must'**

✿ to describe something we think that it's necessary or important to do.  
+ We **must** stop at the red light.

✿ There is a slightly difference between **'must'** and **'have to'**. **'Must'** expresses the speaker's feelings, whereas **'have to'** expresses an impersonal idea

+ You **must** join the party. (I require that you join the party.)

Personal opinion of the speaker

+ You **have to** join the party. (There's a rule requiring you to join.)

An outside opinion or rule for simple present. It usually shows general obligations.

+ Travellers **must** show their passport before boarding a plane.

✿ for formal and written.

+ All students **must** wear uniforms to university.

# Negatives

We use **'must not'** when we think that an action is against the rule.

- I'm sorry, but you **mustn't** make noise in here.

We use **'don't have to'** / **'doesn't have to'** when it's not necessary to do something.

- We **don't have** to submit the homework by today.

**(It's not necessary)**

We **must not** submit the homework by today.

**(It's not allow)**

# Past obligation

We used **'had to'** and **'didn't have to'** to describe past obligation.

- I **had to** read for my exam last night.
- He **didn't have to** pay for the tickets.

We use **'needed to'** to describe something that was necessary.

- He **needed to** stop to make a phone call while he was driving home.

We use **'didn't need to'** to describe something that was not necessary.

- He **didn't need to** call the doctor about this physical checkup.

## NOTE

**'Have to' is less formal than 'must', so it is more common in conversation.**



**Exercise 1** Complete each sentence with can, can't, could or couldn't + verb in brackets. Use a form of be able to if can /can't is not possible.


1. I can't (go) with you tomorrow, I have an appointment.
2. You <sup>are</sup> lucky to have the talent to be able to sing (sing) well.
3. Can you play (play) the piano?
4. I couldn't sell (stay) out later than 9 p.m. when I was in high school. could read
5. They be able to (sell) their house for more than what they paid for it.
6. You can't will (read) it again after this.
7. I spend (spend) could finish another moment in that restaurant. It's too dirty.
8. Do you think you \_\_\_\_\_ (finish) the project by Tuesday? I know you're very busy.
9. He dance (dance) very beautifully because he's been a professional be able to play dancer for many years.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ (play) professional golf, you must be extremely fit.

**Exercise 2** Complete each sentence with **must**, **mustn't**, **don't have to** or **doesn't have to + verb in brackets**.

1. We **must leave** (leave) home very early. We have to catch the flight.
2. I **don't have to** (clean) the kitchen. My brother will do it for me.
3. He ~~can't~~ **doesn't have to cook** (cook) his own lunch. His girlfriend will bring him a lunchbox.
4. You **must wear** (wear) a helmet while driving.
5. We **must not forget** (forget) to bring the presents with us before we leave.
6. She **must see** (see) a doctor. She has had a fever for a week. It's unusual.
7. He **mustn't sleep** (sleep) in every class. He needs to study.
8. You **mustn't step** (step) on the line. It's against the rules.
9. In our country, kids **must study** (study) on weekends.
10. You **must take** (take) an umbrella with you. I'm sure it's going to rain.

**Exercise 3** Complete the text with the verbs in brackets and a form of can or have to.

Rapid population growth (1) can (cause) problems. The government (2) has to provide (provide) more hospitals, schools and jobs, farmers (3) have to produce (produce) more food and all the extra people (4) have to have (have) homes. In a less economically developed country, the economy (5) can't grow (grow) fast enough to deal with the problems. Many countries realize that they (6) have to control (control) population growth. Some countries believe they can encourage family planning through education and publicity. Other countries believe that they have such a serious problem that they (7) have to take (take) special measures to control the number of people. In China, for example, there is a 'one child' policy. Couples (8) have to ask (ask) permission from the government to marry, and women (9) have to be (be) at least 25 years old. The couple then (10) have to ask (ask) permission to have child, and are allowed only one.



# TOEIC TEST

1. You needn't go home early, \_\_\_\_\_?



**do you**



**don't you**



**need you**



**needn't you**

2. Work \_\_\_\_\_ to generate electricity.

 **to be done**

 **it is done**

 **must be done**

 **done by it**

3. If you don't start working harder, you \_\_\_ repeat the course next year.



**have to**



**must**



**will have to**



**mustn't**

4. If you continue to practise so hard, you \_\_\_ beat me before too long!



**can**



**could**



**will be able to**



**able to**



5. What do you want to do? - Well, we \_\_\_ have a picnic, but it looks like rain.



**can**



**could**



**should**



**would**