Use of Modals verbs

G.P. RAGINI
Senior Assistant Professor
School of Humanities and Sciences
SASTRA University
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1. Use of Modals verbs

Auxiliary verbs are divided into 2 categories

(a) Primary auxiliaries
(b) Modal auxiliaries

Primary auxiliaries are the forms of the verbs **to be, to have, to do**. Modal Auxiliaries are **shall, should, will, would, can, could, may, might, dare, need, ought to, used to**.

Modals are followed by principal/main verbs. They express the **mode** or **manner** of happening of an action or event. They are used to give an expression to ideas of **ability, probability, possibility, permission, obligation, duty, threat, determination**, etc.

- Modals do not change according to the number or person of the subject. The modal does not go alone. It always goes with a full verb.
  - Rama can run. They can run.
- **Can/could, may/might, will/would, shall/should** and **must** are followed by infinitive without ‘to’.
  - Sita must go to hospital.
  - Santhosh will help you.
  - She should keep up her word.
  - He might leave India shortly.
- **Ought** and **used** are followed by the infinitive with ‘to’.
  - You ought to keep up your promise.
  - He used to teach French.
- The negative is formed by putting ‘**not**’ after the auxiliary.
  - Students must not wear heavy Jewellery with uniform.
  - She couldn’t walk as she fell down recently.

**Can** is used to express

(a) **Ability** – I can speak English fluently.
(b) **Permission** – can I smoke in the campus? You can go home now.
(c) **Possibility** – malaria can be dangerous.

**Could** is the past tense of cab. It is used to express:

(a) Ability in the past – I could easily run fast those days.
(b) A polite request in the present; in the form of a question – Could I see the manager for a minute?

**May** is used for all persons in the present and future. It is followed by the infinitive without ‘to’. May is used to
(a) Seek or grant permission – May I go home in the afternoon?
(b) Express possibility – It may rain in the afternoon.
(c) Express a wish or prayer – May God bless you.
(d) Express a purpose – He goes to gym so that he may be trim.

*Might* is the past tense of *May*. It is used to express

(a) A doubtful possibility – He might go to a movie.
(b) Permission in the present tense – Might I ask a doubt?
(c) To show permission – He told me I might use his car.
(d) Purpose – He left office early so that he might go for a function.
(e) Suggestion – you might visit the big temple which is on your way to college.

Notice the difference between *May* and *Might*.

You may put the lights on. (Giving permission)

You might put the lights on. (Suggesting)

*Might* is used as the past tense of *May*.

My mother said, “You may go to movie at three.

My mother told me that I might go to the movie at three-o-clock.

**Shall** is used to express the future when the subject is I or We.

I shall be sixteen next year.

Shall is used to express:

(a) Certainty– If you sing well, you shall be the winner.
(b) Assurance – Take the medicine regularly and you shall be well.
(c) Promise – If you win the match, you shall have a holiday.
(d) Threat – If you do not pass in the exam, you shall be retained in the same class.
(e) Command – All students shall reach the prayer hall by 4.00p.m.

When shall is used in questions, it asks the will or the desire of the person addressed.

Shall I go with you for the movie?
Shall we go to the market?

**Should** is the past tense of shall. Should is used to express:

(a) Duty or moral obligation
   - We should take care of our parents during old age.
(b) Advice or instruction or opinion.
   - You should lock the door when you leave home.
(c) High degree probability
   - The team should win the trophy for all the efforts taken.

Should is used as the past tense of shall. Should have expresses a past unfulfilled duty or a sensible action which was not performed. You should have worn a grand dress for the party.

**Must** refers to the present or the future tense. It is used to express:

(a) Obligation or necessity – We must obey our parents.
(b) Compulsion – You must finish your assignment by tomorrow.
(c) Possibility – She should have reached home by now.

**Ought** is used nearly in the same sense as **should**. It is followed by the infinitive ‘to’. It is

(a) Used to express duty or moral binding – You ought to send money to your parents.
(b) An inference – The train ought to be arriving late, hence the platform is crowded.
(c) Possibility – He has done well in the interview. He ought to get the job.

### 1.1 Tips to understand the functioning of Modals:

Modals are usually used in statements to express the following:

- Ability – can, could
- Advice – had better, ought to, should certainly or
- Intention – shall, will, would
- Necessity – must, need to
- Obligation – ought to, should
• Permission – can, may
• Possibility – could, may, might
• Willingness – shall, will, would

Modals are used in questions for various purposes, such as the following:

• To find out about a person’s ability – can/can’t/could/couldn’t (for the past)
• To get suggestions or advice – shall/should/shouldn’t/ought to/ought not to
• To find if something is the right thing to do – must/mustn’t/should/shouldn’t /ought to/ought not to
• To offer help – can/can’t/could/couldn’t/may/shall/will/won’t/would
• To get an opinion – will/would/won’t/wouldn’t
• To express uncertainty – could/might/should

May is normally used with the subjects I and we in questions. The modal shan’t is not used in questions.