



Modals

In English, the degree of certainty with which a verb is expressed is very important and **modals** can be used to give more information about the verb. Modal verbs (**must, will, would, should, may, can, could, might, must**) precede another verb and are unusual in that they do not change their form, take an infinitive or participle, or have subject-verb agreement.

Modals can be used in several contexts

Logical possibility: express a degree of probability

This is the quickest route to school.

This **might** be the quickest route to school.

Ability: shows capability

Riding the bus lets you avoid traffic.

Riding the bus **can** let you avoid traffic.

Necessity: express directness in attitude

Feed the dog before leaving for work.

You **must** feed the dog before leaving for work.

Permission: shows politeness

I'm coming over for dinner.

May I come over for dinner?

The nine modal verbs are listed under each of the functions they can perform and are ordered from strongest to weakest for each function. Notice that the same modal can have different strengths when it's used for different functions (e.g., may or can).

	<i>Logical Possibility</i>	<i>Ability</i>	<i>Necessity</i>	<i>Permission</i>
STRONGEST	must	can	must	may
↓	will/would	could	should	could
↓	should			can
↓	may			
weakest	can/could/might			