

MODAL VERBS

are used to express:

A. OBLIGATION / NECESSITY

1. **MUST** is used to express the obligation which comes from the person speaking or writing

*We **must ask** them to dinner when they're over here.*

2. **HAVE TO** or **HAVE GOT TO** (more informal) is used to show that the obligation comes from another person or institution, not the speaker

*You **have to renew** your residence permit after three months. (This is the law.)*

3. **NEED TO** is used to express needs or necessities, rather than strict obligations.

*If we're going to work together I **need to know** about your background and experience.*

4. NEGATIVES

- ⇒ **MUSTN'T** expresses prohibition (negative rules and laws or strong advice)

*Drivers **must not exceed** the speed limit.*

*You **mustn't blame** yourself. It's not your fault.*

- ⇒ **DO NOT HAVE TO / HAVE NOT GOT TO** express lack of obligation or necessity

*You **don't have to wait** for your order. You can collect it now.*

- ⇒ **DO NOT NEED TO / NEEDN'T DO** are similar in meaning to **do not have to**.

*There are no lessons tomorrow, so I **don't need to get** up early.*

*You **needn't tell** me your phone number if you don't want to.*

5. PAST FORMS

- ⇒ **MUST DO -> HAD TO DO / DIDN'T HAVE TO DO**

- ⇒ **HAVE TO DO -> HAD TO DO / DIDN'T HAVE TO DO**

*I **had to go** to a meeting in Georgia last week; it was a really interesting trip.*

*Luckily, the train wasn't full. He **didn't need to stand**.*

- ⇒ **NEED TO DO -> NEEDED TO DO / DIDN'T NEED TO DO**

*Mark **didn't need to hurry**. He had lots of time.*

B. GENERAL ABILITY / POSSIBILITY / PERMISSION / DEDUCTION

1. CAN / COULD

⇒ to express present or past ability:

*I **could swim** five hundred metres when I was five, but **can't** now.*

⇒ to express possibility or general truths

*This PC **can crash** without warning.*

*Taking out a loan **can be** a risky business.*

2. MAY / MIGHT

⇒ to express speculations, talking about the actual chances of something happening

*We **may go** this month or next, I'm not sure.*

*It **might be** sunny when we're in Manchester next week.*

3. CAN / COULD / MAY

⇒ to ask if we can do something

***Can / Could / May I change** my ticket?*

4. MAY / MIGHT / COULD

⇒ to make deductions about the present

*Who's at the door? It **may / might / could be** the postman.
(I'm expecting a delivery.)*

5. CAN'T

⇒ to express prohibition

*In Spain you **can't leave** school until the age of 16.*

C. ADVICE

1. **SHOULD / SHOULDN'T or OUGHT TO / OUGHTN'T TO** is used to give or ask for advice, make indirect invitations or suggestions.

*You **should** always **learn** something about a country before visiting it.
Should I invite our agents out to dinner after the meeting?
Your uncle was very kind to me. You **ought to write** him a letter of thanks.*