

Modal verbs

an overview

| | | | | |
|-------|-------|--------|-------|------|
| can | will | shall | may | must |
| could | would | should | might | - |

properties

form questions

form negatives

form short answers etc

weak / strong
pronunciation

can be abbreviated

| property | modal verbs | auxiliary verbs | main verbs |
|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| form +ive | ✓ | ✓ not do/does/did | ✓ present and past |
| form -ive | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| form ?ive | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ except subject q's |
| form short answers | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| weak / strong pronunciation | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| abbreviation | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |

followed by
base form (*-to* INF)

no infinitive

defective:

no forms that derive from
infinitive:

base form
gerund
present participle
past participle

never used in combination
with other modals

no conjugation



present / future

can

will

shall

may

must

could

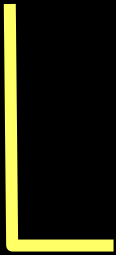
would

should

might

-

| | | | | |
|-------|-------|--------|-------|------|
| can | will | shall | may | must |
| could | would | should | might | - |



past / conditional / subjunctive

| property | modal verbs | auxiliary verbs | main verbs |
|--|-------------|--|------------------|
| followed by | base form | base form present participle past participle | to INF gerund |
| infinitive | x | ✓ | ✓ |
| base form gerund pres./past participle | x | ✓ | ✓ |
| used with (other) modals | x | ✓ | ✓ |
| conjugated | x | ✓ | ✓ |

characteristics

modal verbs are
SAXON

modal verbs are

SAXON



very different
from grammar
with Latin
origins

concepts:

offers

ability

requests

possibility

obligation

probability

permission

willingness

modals are for
interpersonal
interaction

big contrast with
the indicative

“We do not normally use modal verbs to say that situations definitely exist or that particular events definitely happened. We use them, for example, to talk about things which we expect, which are not possible, which we think are necessary, which we want to happen, which we are not sure about, which tend to happen, or which have not happened.”

Michael Swan
Practical English Usage
OUP

modal

all
Saxon

personal

indicative

(mostly)
Latin

factual

modal

all
different

personal

indicative

(mostly)
familiar

factual



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