Section 5  modal verbs

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language notes
While all languages have ways of talking about certainty, obligation etc, they do not necessarily use special verbs to do so. And in languages which do have roughly equivalent verbs, these may not have special grammatical characteristics, as the English modals do.

Note also that the exact meanings and uses of the English modals can be quite difficult for students to grasp. The differences are not always systematic or clear-cut, and in many cases more than one modal can be used.

possible further activities
Finding more quotations  The quotations are simply intended for students to read; no exercise is necessary. However, if you wish you could ask them to look on internet quotation sites for more examples of interesting quotations – say, three or more with different modal verbs.

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possible further activities
Frequency of modal verbs  Ask students to look at a page of a newspaper or magazine. How many modal verbs can they find? Are there more of these than other auxiliary verbs? Which is the most common? Do some kinds of text (e.g. reports, readers’ letters, fashion articles) have more modals than others?

pages 60–61

language notes
Note that the pronunciation of can depends on whether it is stressed (/kæn/) or not (/kən/): this point is practised in the ‘Pronunciation for grammar’ component of the e-book.

The equivalent of could can be used in some languages to say that something was actually achieved – like managed to or succeeded in. This can lead to mistakes:

*After a couple of tries I could open it.

The use of can with see and hear, explained on page 61, is more common in British than in American English. Compare:

I can see a parking space. (typical BrE)  I see a parking space. (typical AmE)

possible further activities
Can see etc  Tell students to go to a market, or some other busy place. They write down some of the things that they can see, hear and smell. Or, working later from memory, they write what they could see/hear/smell.

Achievements  Students see if they can complete one or more of these sentences, using managed to or succeeded in …ing:

In 1911, Roald Amundsen …
In 1953, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay …
In 1932, Amelia Earhart …
In 1859, Charles Blondin …

An asterisk (*) indicates an incorrect form or use.

➔ Section 5 continues
(Amundsen reached the South Pole, Hillary and Tenzing made the first ascent of Everest, Earhart flew solo across the Atlantic, Blondin crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope.)

Internet Get students to find interesting predictions on the internet beginning “One day everybody will be able to” or “One day nobody will have to”.

page 62

language notes

Past permission: as when talking about past ability, could is generally avoided when talking about actual past events (see language note for page 60).

The use of could in requests is covered on page 289.

Note that the pronunciation of can depends on whether it is stressed (/kæn/) or not (/kən/): this point is practised in the ‘Pronunciation for grammar’ component of the e-book.

possible further activities

Extending Exercise 1 Put students in pairs. Each pair chooses roles (e.g. parent and child, shopkeeper and customer, tourist and person in the street, President and cleaning lady …). Then they prepare a short conversation in which one of the two asks permission for something: either too politely or not politely enough. They perform their conversations (telling the class what their roles are); the class decide whether they’re being too polite or not polite enough, and suggest improvements.

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language notes

The small distinction between must and have (got) to is a tendency rather than a hard-and-fast rule, and not of very great importance for students.

German-speaking students may sometimes misuse must not: German muss nicht means ‘don’t have to / don’t need to’.

Note that the pronunciation of must depends on whether it is stressed (/mʌst/) or not (/məst/): this point is practised in the ‘Pronunciation for grammar’ exercises.

possible further activities

Rules and laws Students draw up lists of rules/laws for the class, the school, the country, politicians, parents, the teacher etc, using must and must not. Or they invent the laws used to govern a strange country called Fantasia, where everything is different. This can be done in groups: which group can draw up the best or funniest set of rules?

A nice new law Tell students: You are the dictator of the world. Announce a new law including the words ‘do not have to …’.

 Implausible excuses Students invent ridiculous excuses for refusing an invitation, beginning: ‘I’m sorry I can’t come out tonight. I’ve got to …’ Who can think of the least plausible excuse? (e.g. ‘I’ve got to help my grandmother build her helicopter.’)

 Resolutions Ask students to write three resolutions for themselves beginning ‘I must …’ and three beginning ‘I must not …’ (‘I must exercise more. I must not interrupt people.’)

 Past obligation Students say or write what they had to do, or didn’t have to do, when they were small children. Help with vocabulary. They may also want to mention things that they were not allowed to do: couldn’t will do for this. Alternatively, get them to interview an
older person about things they had to do or didn’t have to do (perhaps in a place or at a
time when life was difficult), and report back.

**Internet** Students look for surprising rules on the internet beginning “Students must”,
“Students must not”, “Visitors must”, “Visitors must not”, “Employees must” or “Employees
must not”.

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**language notes**

Students’ languages may not make a clear distinction similar to that between *should* and
*must*.

**possible further activities**

**Advice for tourists** Students list some suggestions for people visiting their country, region
or home town. (‘You should spend a day or two on the West Coast.’ ‘You should try our
famous fish soup.’ ‘You shouldn’t go out alone at night.’)

**Internet** Get students to find interesting sentences on the internet including the words
“rich countries should”, “teachers should”, “parents should”, “drivers should” or “everybody
should”.

**Poem** Give out or display the text of the following poem and get students’ reactions.
Depending on the students’ background, it may be necessary to help them to understand
the point – irony does not always travel well across cultural frontiers. (The person who is
briefly asked for the ‘woman’s point of view’ so patronisingly is of course far more genuinely
concerned with ‘social dynamics’ than her academic questioner.)

**THE WOMAN’S POINT OF VIEW**

‘And now
could you give us
the woman’s point of view
Amelia?’
‘Yes.
I think people should have
food and shelter
warmth and clothing
love and justice.
I think people
should have a place
where they can be
what they are.
I think people should be free from fear.’
‘Thank you, Amelia.
Returning now
to the question
of social dynamics
in the post-modern world …’

**page 65**

**possible further activities**

**Vocabulary expansion** Preteach the vocabulary that will be used in this activity. Then give
students cues for written or spoken sentences beginning ‘It can’t be …’ and ‘It must be …’.
Like this:

**YOU:** I'm thinking of something that can fly. A bison, a swallow, a tractor?

**STUDENTS:** It can't be a bison or a tractor. It must be a swallow.

Some more suggestions:

... something that conducts electricity. Concrete, copper wire, lemon rind?
... something that floats. Lead, concrete, wood?
... something that lives in the sea and breathes air. A shark, a whale, a squirrel?
... something that lives in trees. A swallow, a shark, a squirrel?
... something that is liquid at room temperature. Mercury, lead, lemon rind?
... something that has six legs. A spider, a beetle, a bison?
... something that is solid at room temperature. Mercury, lead, oxygen?
... something that is a gas at room temperature. Mercury, lead, oxygen?
... something that lives in a hole. A bison, a mole, a whale?

Make sure students give complete answers using *can't be* and *must be*.

They could follow up the exercise by making similar questions for each other.

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**pages 66–67**

**language notes**

There is no obvious reason for the restrictions on the use of *can* (not used to talk about probability) and *may* (not used in questions about probability) – the language just happens to have developed in this way. Students may find these points difficult to grasp at first.

**possible further activities**

**Present possibilities** Ask students what they think some well-known person may be doing just now. Make sure they use the progressive infinitive. (‘He may be travelling.’ ‘She may be relaxing.’ ‘He may be playing golf.’)

**Future hopes or fears** Students write sentences beginning ‘One day I may /might (not) …’.

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**pages 68–70**

**language notes**

These structures may still be difficult for some advanced students to handle easily. Look out for occasional mistakes like:

*May have go  *Should gone  *Might had called

**possible further activities**

**Personalisation: mistakes** Students write one or more sentences about mistakes they have made, beginning ‘I should have …’ and ‘I should never have …’.

**Countries' mistakes** Ask students to find sentences on the internet beginning “Britain should never have” or “America/France/Japan … should never have”. Or ask for their own opinions of this kind.

**Personalisation: 'could have'** Ask students to write sentences about things that they could have done/been/studied, but that did not happen.

**Personalisation: speculating about ancestors** What ideas do students have about their ancestors? Ask them to write sentences about their guesses. (‘My family may have come from a cold country, because I like cold weather.’ ‘I’m very dark. My ancestors may have come from Africa.’)

An asterisk (*) indicates an incorrect form or use. → Section 5 continues
language notes

Had best is occasionally used with the same meaning as had better, but this is unusual in modern standard English.

possible further activities

Advice Tell the students that you have various problems; ask them to give you advice (spoken or written) beginning ‘You’d better’. For example:

I’ve got a headache. (‘You'd better take an aspirin.’)
I’m cold. I’m too hot. I’m hungry. I’m thirsty.
I’m tired. I haven’t got any money. I’m feeling ill.
My phone has been cut off. I’ve got holes in all my clothes.
My car’s running badly. I get out of breath when I walk upstairs.
My wife/husband/boyfriend/girlfriend is angry with me.

Speculating with ‘supposed to’ Get students to mime animals or machines, but not very well. The class speculate. (‘Are you supposed to be a cat?’ ‘I think you’re supposed to be a sports car.’) Another approach to this is to get students to make rather bad drawings; other students guess what they are supposed to be (remembering to use the structure ‘supposed to’).

language notes

Note the pronunciation of use in this structure: /juːs/, not /juːz/. Some people write used instead of use after did (e.g. I didn’t used to like coffee.). This is incorrect, but quite common – it happens because there is no difference of pronunciation between use to and used to.

possible further activities

Mime Students mime things that they used to be/have/do etc. The class has to guess what is being mimed. (‘You used to play the guitar.’ ‘You used to have long hair.’)

possible further activities

Personalisation: ‘needn’t have’ / ‘didn’t need to’ Ask students to mention one thing that they needn’t have brought to the classroom (but did), and one thing that they didn’t need to bring (and didn’t). (‘I needn’t have brought a calculator; I didn’t need to bring my raincoat.’)

The quotations Students might like to discuss their reactions to the quotations. Which do they find funny? Which are they most in sympathy with? Do they dislike or disagree with any of them?