Section 6  modal verbs

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language notes

By this time, most students should be used to the special grammatical characteristics of modal verbs. However, some students may still make occasional mistakes like

*We must to stop now. or *Do you can speak Russian?

The exact meanings and uses of some of these verbs may also continue to cause problems, especially for students whose languages don’t have an equivalent structure. At this level we focus on the most important points; more subtle uses and distinctions can be left until later.

possible further activities

The cartoons are just intended as (hopefully) amusing examples of the two modals concerned. No activity is necessary.

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possible further activities

Third person -s?  Say a series of verbs, some modal, some not. Students must put them after she, as quickly as possible. Like this:

‘want’ – ‘she wants’  ‘go’ – ‘she goes’  ‘must’ – ‘she must’
‘think’ – ‘she thinks’  ‘can’ – ‘she can’  ‘may’ – ‘she may’
‘start’ – ‘she starts’

Question forms  Do the same, but students make questions with she. Like this:

‘want’ – ‘does she want?’  ‘must’ – ‘must she?’

Infinitives  Do the same, using modals or other verbs that can be followed by infinitives (affirmative or negative). Students reply ‘She … dance’. Like this:

‘want’ – ‘She wants to dance’  ‘must’ – ‘She must dance’
‘can’t’ – ‘she can’t dance’  ‘doesn’t like’ – ‘she doesn’t like to dance’

Useful non-modal verbs for this exercise: want, hope, like, expect, prefer.

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.

Military service  If students can interview somebody who has done military service, they can write the things that he/she had to do, didn’t have to do or couldn’t do.

Boasting and confessing  Students either tell lies about what they can do, or say all the things they can’t do. Who can produce the most impressive piece of boasting or the most miserable confession? (‘I can speak six languages.’ ‘That’s nothing. I can speak twelve languages.’ ‘That’s nothing. I can speak all the languages in the world.’ ‘I can’t sing.’ ‘I can’t sing or dance.’ ‘I can’t remember things.’ ‘I can’t remember my name.’)

Acting  Students (individually or in groups) act inability to do things (e.g. see, hear, drive, play the piano, sing, walk, draw, understand, remember, go to sleep, wake up, stop eating). They can be given the names of the actions on cards. They can use words, but not the word for the action they’re acting. The class have to guess. (‘You can’t sing.’)

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”.

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

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’ component of the e-book.

possible further activities

Rules  Students draw up lists of rules/laws for the class, the school, the country, politicians, parents, the teacher etc, using must and must not. This can be done in groups: which group can draw up the best or funniest set of rules?

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”.

possible further activities

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.’)

Laws  Get students to write down three or more things that people have to do according to the laws of the country. (‘People have to pay taxes.’)

possible further activities

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

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.

possible further activities

Extending Exercise 3  Tell students to make bad drawings of things on paper or on the board. Then they say what they think each other’s drawings are supposed to be.
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 goat, a butterfly, a tractor?
**STUDENTS:** It can’t be a goat or a tractor. It must be a butterfly.

Some more suggestions:
… something that conducts electricity. Wood, copper wire, rubber?
… something that floats. Iron, wood, china?
… something that lives in the sea and breathes air. A shark, a whale, a squirrel?
… something that lives in trees. A butterfly, a shark, a squirrel?
… something that is liquid at room temperature. Mercury, iron, rubber?
… something that has six legs. A spider, a beetle, a goat?
… something that is solid at room temperature. Petrol, steel, oxygen?
… something that is a gas at room temperature. Mercury, rubber, oxygen?
… something that lives in a hole. A goat, a rabbit, 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.

possible further activities

Present possibilities  Ask students what they think some well-known person may be doing just now. Make sure they can manage 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) …’.

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.

possible further activities

*Mime: asking permission*  Without speaking, students ask for permission to do things. The class has to guess what their question is. For example:

Can I go out?  Can I borrow your pen?  Can I open the window?
Can I buy you a drink?  Can I have your phone number?

Students can be given the questions on cards if they don’t have enough ideas.

*Mime: requests*  A similar activity to the above, but students mime requests beginning ‘Could you …?’.
possible further activities

Note that no activity is necessary in connection with the poem on this page. It is simply meant for students to read.

Discussion about holiday Students work in groups to prepare and act a short conversation about plans for a family holiday. They must include as many questions using ‘Shall we …?’ as possible. (‘Where shall we go?’ ‘How long shall we stay?’ ‘Shall we take the dog?’)

possible further activities

Predicting Students complete the sentence ‘One day, people will be able to …’ in as many ways as possible. Help with vocabulary.

language notes

Students often think that used to has a present form:

*I use to play tennis every weekend.

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: irritating habits Everybody knows somebody with an irritating habit. Ask students to write sentences beginning ‘He/She’s a nice person, but he/she will ….’

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”.

possible further activities

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.’)
possible further activities

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

*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.’)