

*Tikrit University*

*College of Nursing*

*Basic Nursing Sciences*



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**English**

**( Modal Verbs: Part 1)**

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## Modal Verbs: Part 1

A modal is a type of **auxiliary (helping) verb** that is used to express: ability, possibility, permission or obligation. Modal phrases (or semi-modals) are used to express the same things as modals, but are a combination of auxiliary verbs and the preposition to. The modals and semi-modals in English are:

1. Can/could/be able to
2. May/might
3. Shall/should
4. Must/have to
5. Will/would

### Can, Could, Be able to

Can, could and be able to are used to express a variety of ideas in English:

#### Ability/Lack of Ability

#### Present and Future:

can/can't + base form of the verb

1. Tom **can write** poetry very well.
2. I **can help** you with that next week.
3. Lisa can't speak French.

am / is / are / will be + able to + base form of the verb  
am not/ isn't / aren't/ won't  
be + able to + base form of the verb

1. Mike **is able to solve** complicated math equations
2. The support team **will be able to help** you in about ten minutes.
3. I **won't be able to visit** you next summer.

#### Past:

could / couldn't + base form of the verb

1. When I was a child I **could climb** trees.

was / were + able to + base form of the verb wasn't / weren't + able to + base form of the verb  
hasn't / haven't + been able to + base form of the verb

1. I **wasn't able to visit** her in the hospital.
2. He **hasn't been able to get** in touch with the client yet.

Note: Can and could do not take an infinitive (to verb) and do not take the future auxiliary will.

- Incorrect: I can to help you this afternoon.
- Correct: I **can help** you this afternoon.
- Correct: I **will (I'll) be able to help** you this afternoon.

### **Possibility / Impossibility**

can / can't + base form of the verb

1. You can catch that train at 10:43.
2. He can't see you right now. He's in surgery.

could + base form of the verb

1. I **could fly** via Amsterdam if I leave the day before.

### **Ask Permission / Give Permission**

Can + Subject + base form of the verb (informal)

1. **Can** you **lend** me ten dollars?

Can + base form of the verb (informal)

1. You **can borrow** my car.

Could + subject + base form of the verb (polite)

1. **Could I have** your number?
2. **Could I talk** to your supervisor please?

## Make a suggestion - To make a suggestion use:

Could + base form of the verb (informal)

1. You **could take** the tour of the castle tomorrow.

## Exercises: Can, Could, Be able to

Fill in the correct form of can, could or be able to as in the examples.

1. Sameer could not help his little brother with his homework yesterday.
2. Can I call you later tonight?
  
1. \_\_\_\_\_ Tony run long distances when he was a boy?
2. \_\_\_\_\_ you please call a tow truck for me? My car broke down. (polite)
3. The students \_\_\_\_\_ to buy their textbooks today. The bookstore is all out of them.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ you teach me how to fix my computer? You're so good at it.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ you \_\_\_\_\_ reach the customer if you call him at 4:00 his time?

## Answers:

1. Could
2. Could
3. aren't able
4. Can
5. Will/be able to

## May, Might

### Formal Permission / Formal Prohibition

may / may not + base form of the verb

1. You **may start** your exam now.
2. You **may not wear** sandals to work.

### Polite Request

May + subject + base form of the verb

1. **May I help** you?

### **Possibility / Negative Possibility**

may/ might + base form of the verb

1. We **may go out** for dinner tonight. Do you want to join us?
2. Our company **might get** the order if the client agrees to the price.

may not / might not + base form of the verb

1. Adam and Sue **may not buy** that house. It's very expensive.
2. They **might not buy** a house at all.

### **To Make a Suggestion (when there is no better alternative)**

may as well / might as well + base form of the verb

1. You **may as well come** inside. John will be home soon.
2. We **might as well take** Friday off. There's no work to be done anyway.

### **Polite Suggestion**

might + base form of the verb

1. You **might like to try** the salmon fillet. It's our special today.

### **Exercises: May / Might**

Fill in the correct form of may or might as in the example.

1. May I sit here?
  1. They \_\_\_\_\_ finish the project on time. The main engineer is ill.
  2. You \_\_\_\_\_ want to stop by the museum gift shop on your way out.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ I have your autograph?
  4. He \_\_\_\_\_ visit the Louvre. He's in Paris anyway.
  5. You \_\_\_\_\_ park your car here. It's reserved for guests of the hotel only.

### **Answers:**

1. might not

2. might
3. May
4. may as well
5. may not