MODAL VERBS: CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic 1: The form is the same for all persons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>can</th>
<th>may</th>
<th>might</th>
<th>must</th>
<th>will</th>
<th>should</th>
<th>could</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>can</td>
<td>may</td>
<td>might</td>
<td>must</td>
<td>will</td>
<td>should</td>
<td>could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>can</td>
<td>may</td>
<td>might</td>
<td>must</td>
<td>will</td>
<td>should</td>
<td>could</td>
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<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>can</td>
<td>may</td>
<td>might</td>
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<td>should</td>
<td>could</td>
</tr>
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<td>we</td>
<td>can</td>
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<td>should</td>
<td>could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>can</td>
<td>may</td>
<td>might</td>
<td>must</td>
<td>will</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Characteristic 2: There is no "to" in the infinitive

Infinitives → can may might must will should could

Characteristic 3: A verb that follows a modal is put into the infinitive form

I can play. He may leave. It could rain.

Characteristic 4: Depending on the context some modals can have several meanings

When I was five years old I could play the piano. (konnte)
Sheila could play the piano at our wedding next week. (könnte)
We may bring the dictionaries for the class paper. (dürfen)
The weather man said that it may rain tomorrow. (könnte)

Characteristic 5: Modal verbs cannot be used in perfect or continuous tenses

I have musted I am maying She has could

Characteristic 6: Some modal verbs cannot be used in certain tenses. If that is the case we need to use adequate substitute verbs. Substitute verbs are not modal verbs and can be used in all tenses.

Incorrect: Yesterday I musted go to the doctor.
Correct: Yesterday I had to go to the doctor.

STUDY CHECK:
List the six characteristics of modal verbs.
Give an example for each characteristic.
MODAL VERBS: GERMAN MEANING

Positive statements: (Present)

- can  (kann / Fähigkeit / ability)
- may  (darf / Erlaubnis / permission)
- may  (vielleicht / Möglichkeit / possibility)
- might (vielleicht / Möglichkeit / possibility)

She  must (muss / Verpflichtung / obligation) run away.

will  (wird / Vorhaben / intention)
should (sollte / Ratschlag / advice)
could  (könnte / Möglichkeit / possibility)
could  (konnte / Fähigkeit Vergangenheit / ability past)

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Negative statements: (Present)

- cannot  (kann nicht / Fähigkeit)
- may not  (darf nicht / Erlaubnis)
- may not  (vielleicht nicht / Möglichkeit)
- might not (vielleicht nicht / Möglichkeit)

She  mustn't (darf nicht / Verpflichtung) run away.

won't  (wird nicht / Vorhaben)
shouldn't (sollte nicht / Ratschlag)
couldn't  (könnte nicht / Möglichkeit)
couldn't  (konnte nicht / Fähigkeit Vergangenheit)

STUDY CHECK:
Do the same for the example below. See if you know what each sentence means.
I ______________ stay up until 9 o'clock.
## MODAL VERBS: CATEGORIES

### EXPRESSING ABILITY (Fähigkeit / capacité)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(+)</th>
<th>(-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present:</td>
<td>can / cannot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future:</td>
<td>can / cannot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past:</td>
<td>could / couldn't</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Substitute verb:** to be able to

**Examples:**
- She can run very fast.
- She has been able to run fast since 1999.

### EXPRESSING OBLIGATION (Verpflichtung / obligation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(+)</th>
<th>(-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present:</td>
<td>must / don't have to / doesn't have to needn't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future:</td>
<td>must / won't have to / won't need to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past:</td>
<td>had to / didn't have to / didn't need to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Substitute verbs:** to have to / need to

**Examples:**
- Tomorrow we must wake up early.  
  !!! mustn't = nicht dürfen !!!
- Yesterday we had to wake up early.  
  !!! mustn't = nicht dürfen !!!

**NOTE:** In positive statements there is a difference in meaning between must and to have to. We use must for internal obligations. (Based on emotions. You decide it is necessary.) We use to have to for external obligations. (Based on laws and rules. You cannot decide.)
### EXPRESSING PERMISSION (Erlaubnis / permission)

<table>
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<th>(-)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td>cannot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>may</td>
<td>may not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mustn't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td>cannot</td>
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<tr>
<td>may</td>
<td>may not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mustn't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>could</td>
<td>couldn't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to be allowed to</td>
<td>not to be allowed to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Substitute verb:** to be allowed to

**Examples:**

- You may go to the party tomorrow.
- You mustn't go to the party tomorrow.
- She could go out when she was 16.
- We haven't been allowed to enter the building yet.

### EXPRESSING ADVICE or EXPECTATION (Ratschlag / suggestion / expectation)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should</td>
<td>shouldn't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should</td>
<td>shouldn't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should have + past participle</td>
<td>shouldn't have + past participle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(regret / criticism)</td>
<td>(regret / criticism)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Examples:**

- You should see a doctor.
- Now it's too late. You should have seen a doctor ages ago.

**NOTE:** The past participle is: infinitive + -ed for regular verbs

3rd column for irregular verbs
EXPRESSING CERTAINTY (certitude)

Present:  
can't  
must

Future:  
can't  
must

Past:  
can't have + past participle  
must have + past participle  
(mit absoluter Sicherheit)

Examples:  
He has green hair so it can't be him.  
Look at his face. It must be him.  
He has no alibi. He must have killed her.  
He has an alibi. He can't have killed her.

EXPRESSING UNCERTAINTY (incertitude)

(+)

Present:  
may  /  may not  
might  /  might not  
could  /  couldn't

Future:  
may  /  may not  
might  /  might not  
could  /  couldn't

Past:  
may have + past participle  /  may not have + past participle  
might have + past participle/  /  might not have + past participle  
could have + past participle /  /  couldn't have + past participle  
(Hypothese / Zweifel)  /  (Hypothese / Zweifel)

Examples:  
He has green hair so it might not be him.  
Look at his face. It may be him.  
He has no alibi. He could have killed her.  
He has an alibi. He may have killed her.
REQUESTS

Only in the present/future:

Can you open the window, please?  (not formal)

Could you open the window, please?  (formal)

Would you open the window, please?

OFFERS

Only in the present/future:

Should I cook for us?

Can I cook for us?

Shall I cook for us?  (shall: only when the subject is "I" or "we")