

MODAL VERBS: CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic 1: The form is the same for all persons

<i>I</i>	→	<i>can</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>must</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>should</i>	<i>could</i>
<i>you</i>	→	<i>can</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>must</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>should</i>	<i>could</i>
<i>he</i>	→	<i>can</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>must</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>should</i>	<i>could</i>
<i>we</i>	→	<i>can</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>must</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>should</i>	<i>could</i>
<i>you</i>	→	<i>can</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>must</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>should</i>	<i>could</i>
<i>they</i>	→	<i>can</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>might</i>	<i>must</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>should</i>	<i>could</i>

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)	

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)

	(+)		(-)
Present:	can	/	cannot
Future:	can	/	cannot
Past:	could	/	couldn't

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)

	(+)		(-)
Present:	must	/	don't have to needn't
Future:	must	/	won't have to won't need to
Past:	had to needed to	/	didn't have to didn't need to

Substitute verbs: to have to
need to

Examples: Tomorrow we must wake up early.
Yesterday we had to wake up early.

!!! mustn't = nicht dürfen !!!
!!! 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 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. (Er kann es nicht sein. Das ist sicher.)
 Look at his face. It must be him. (Er muss es sein. Da bin ich mir sicher.)
 He has no alibi. He must have killed her. (Er muss es gewesen sein.)
 He has an alibi. He can't have killed her. (Er kann es sicher nicht gewesen sein.)

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.
 (Es kann sein dass er es nicht ist. Ich bin mir nicht sicher.)

Look at his face. It may be him.
 (Vielleicht ist er es. Ich bin mir unsicher.)

He has no alibi. He could have killed her.
 (Er könnte es gewesen sein. Ich bin mir aber nicht sicher.)

He has an alibi. He may have killed her.
 (Vielleicht hat er sie getötet.)

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")