

Modal auxiliaries

will/would/can/could/may	
When asking someone to do something	Will/Would/Can/Could you do me a favour?
When asking for permission or when giving permission	May I use your phone? – Yes, of course you may.
When talking about abilities	She can speak Italian.

must/mustn't/needn't	
When instructing someone to do something or not to do something	You must wear a safety helmet. You mustn't smoke in the office.
When talking about a necessity or duty or when talking about something that is not necessary	I must finish the project by Friday. You needn't pay in advance.

may/might/could/must/will	
When expressing a possibility or probability	It may/might/could/will rain. You must be Mr Jones.
When making a suggestion	We could go to that new Spanish restaurant.

should/ought to/shouldn't/ought not to	
When giving advice	You should/ought to use a dictionary. You shouldn't arrive late for the interview.

Substitutes		
Modal auxiliaries only have a present and/or past tense form. For other tenses substitutes are used.		
Modal auxiliary	Substitutes	Examples
can/could	be able to	He won't be able to lift the piano.
may/mustn't	be allowed to/ not be allowed to	We were allowed to visit the mosque./ We weren't allowed to join the American tourist group.
must/needn't	have to/ not have to	The Millers will have to sell their house./ We didn't have to wait long.