Modals

- Modals are helping verbs
- Used with the base form of the verb, modals create verbal phrases.
- Modals do not change form.
- Modals never end in “s” even in 3rd person singular
- Use “not” to make modal verbs negative.
- Don’t use double modals.
- Modals lack past tense forms, except **could** and **would** which serve as the past of **can** and **will**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modals</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| **Can** | present ability – I *can* ride a bike.  
opportunity – She *can* help you learn to ride a bike, when she is finished studying.  
permission – *Can* I try to ride the bike now?  
possibility and conditional – Anyone *can* learn to ride a bike, *if* they are not afraid to try.  
request – *Can* you teach me to ride a bike?  
willingness – *I can* teach you. |
| **Could** | past ability – I *could* ride a bike when I was younger.  
conditional – He *could* learn to ride a two wheeler, *if* his father removes the training wheels.  
possibility – Bill *could* be the best bike rider with some more practice.  
suggestion – Mark *could* ride his bike to campus, instead of driving his car.  
request – *Could* I use your bike? |
| **May** | polite request or permission – *May* I borrow your bike?  
possibility – He *may* be able to help you assemble the bike tomorrow. |
| **Might** | possibility, but not certainty – *I might* be able to let you borrow the bike, *after* I put air in the tires.  
conditional – *This bike might* be a good choice for cross country riding, *if* the seat is comfortable.  
suggestion – *You might* want to lower the seat, so that your legs reach the pedals. |
| **Must** | strong obligation – *You must* return the bike, if you use it.  
necessity – *I must* ride my bike to get my exercise.  
- Substitute must with “have to” – *You have to* return the bike, if you use it. |
| **Shall** | formal invitation and future action. – *Shall* we go bike riding together tomorrow?  
- British English |
| **Should** | mild obligation, recommendation, advice – *You should* wear a helmet when you ride a bike.  
expectation – *He should* finish the race around noon.  
- Substitute should with “ought to” – *You ought to* wear a helmet when you ride a bike. |
| **Will** | future intent – I *will* go riding on Saturday.  
promise – *We will* definitely make time to ride together next weekend.  
prediction – The weatherman, however, reports that the winds *will* be strong.  
voluntary action – I *will* go anyway. |
| **Would** | conditional – I *would* ride the bike at night, *if* it had a light.  
past of will – *He would* ride his bike before he hurt his knee. |
Use the base form of the word with the modal. Modals do not change form.

- He could ride for long distances. (correct)  He could rode for long distances. (incorrect)

Modals never end in “s” even in the third person singular.

- She should peddle slower. (correct)  She shoulds peddles slower. (incorrect)

Combine the base form of the verb with the modals – not with the infinitive “to.”

- He should ride with traffic. (correct)  He should to ride with traffic. (incorrect)

Use “not” to make modal verbs negative.

- I cannot ride a bike.
- I could not ride a bike because I was afraid of falling.
- I may not be riding next weekend because I have to work extra hours.
- She might not wear a helmet, but she is careful when she rides.
- Bike riders under 17 years of age must not ride without helmets in Pennsylvania.
- Riders shall not break the traffic rules that apply to cars.
- When using hand signals to indicate turning, riders should not use their right arm.
- He will not go riding when it rains.
- The bike club would not participate in the race because they objected to the high entrance fee.

To form questions:

- Can I teach you how to ride a bike?
- Should we ask your mother first?
- Might it help if I let her know that you’ll be wearing a helmet?
- Will you let me take the training wheels off?

Do not use double modals.

- He could can fix the flat tire.
- I will might enter the bicycle challenge marathon.

Practice: Circle the best modal.

- He can/ would ride his bike when his car broke down.
- Bob should not/ may not ride down the middle of the busy road.
- Might you/ could you repair my broken wheel?
- My mother always said, “You could/ought to wear a helmet to protect your head.”
- May/ can I borrow your bike?
- Can you/ will you go riding in the park with us on Sunday?
- I have to/ can return the bike to the rental shop by 5 o’clock this evening.
- Shall/ should we take a tire patch kit with us to make repairs?