

Modals and Modal-like Expressions

Modals are helper verbs. Most modals have multiple meanings.

Function	Modal or Modal-like Expression	Time	Example
Advice less strong	<i>could</i> <i>might (not)</i>	present, future	He could do some puzzles to improve his memory. You might try some tips on improving your memory.
stronger	<i>ought to</i> <i>should (not)</i>	present, future	We ought to take a memory class next month. Greg should improve his memory.
	<i>had better (not)</i>	present, future	You'd better pay attention now.
Past Advice, Regret, or Criticism	<i>ought to have</i> <i>should (not) have</i>	past	She ought to have tried harder to improve her memory. You should have made an effort to improve your memory. He shouldn't have taken that difficult class.
Permission	<i>can (not)</i> <i>may (not)</i>	present, future	You can register for the class next week. You may not register after the first class.
	<i>could (not)</i>	past	You could ask questions during the lecture yesterday, but you could not leave the room.
	<i>be (not) allowed to</i> <i>be (not) permitted to</i>	past, present, future	He was not allowed to talk during the test, but he was allowed to use his books. Students will not be permitted to refer to notes during examinations.
Necessity / Obligation	<i>have to</i> <i>need to</i> <i>be required to</i> <i>be supposed to</i>	past, present, future	I have to study tonight. She needs to quit her stressful job. You won't be required to take a test. He is supposed to tell you his decision tomorrow.
	<i>must (not)</i>	present, future	You must have experience for this job.
Obligation not to / Prohibition	<i>must not</i> <i>be not supposed to</i> <i>to</i>	present, future	You must not talk during the exam. Students are not supposed to take their books into the exam room.