

## English 6

### Sequence N°: 07

#### Title: Modals

#### Objectives:

Students will distinguish between the ordinary verbs and the auxiliary's one, and knowing the function of each – when and how to use.

#### Introduction:

Modal verbs are used to change the meaning of other verbs. They can express meanings such as certainty, ability, or obligation. The main modal verbs are will, would, can, could, may, might, shall, should, must and ought. A modal verb only has finite forms and has no suffixes. Here some characteristics of those verbs:

#### Characteristics of Modal Verbs:

- They do not change their form regardless of the subject;
- They are always followed by the base form (infinitive) of the main verb;
- They do not take "s" in the third person singular (he, she, it) in the present tense;
- They do not have a past tense form.

#### Modals:

Modals include modal verbs, semi-modal verbs (also called marginal modals) and other modal expressions. They combine with main verbs and modify their meanings. A modal may have several different meanings, while similar meanings may be expressed by using different modals.

Eg: He *can't* be at home; I've just met him. (*deduction*)

Unless you finish your homework, you *can't* go to the cinema. (*prohibition*)

Can I help you? (*offer*)

May I help you? (*offer*)

## **Modal verbs:**

The modal verbs (or modal auxiliary verbs) are: *can, could, may, might, will, shall, would, should* and *must*.

- **Modal verbs always come first in a verb phrase and are followed by a bare infinitive.**

**When used with a perfect infinitive, modal verbs usually refer to past time:**

Eg : *I could hear the dog barking outside.* (modal + simple bare infinitive)

*You must be joking.* (modal + continuous bare infinitive)

*He may have caught the train.* (modal + perfect bare infinitive)

*You must have been waiting for hours.* (modal + perfect continuous bare infinitive)

- **Contracted forms of *will* and *would* are often used in spoken and in informal written language ('ll and 'd):**

Eg: *I'd tell you if I knew.*

*They'll be here soon.*

- **Modal verbs take no -s in the third person singular:**

Eg : *He might be at the office.*

- **Modal verbs form their negative and interrogative like other auxiliaries and not with *do*:**

Eg: *I can't swim.*

*Can you swim?*

- ✓ The following contracted negative forms are often used in spoken and in informal written language:

Eg: cannot » *can't*

could not » *couldn't*

might not » *mightn't*

will not » *won't*

shall not » *shan't*

would not » *wouldn't*

should not » *shouldn't*

must not » *mustn't*

- **Modal verbs have no proper past tense; however, *could, would, might* and *should* may be used to refer to past time:**

Eg: I *could swim* when I was five.

- **Modal verbs have no infinitive, *-ing* or past participle forms and cannot be followed by other modal verbs. When necessary, modal idioms or other expressions are used instead of them:**

Eg: If you want to be a sailor, you must can swim.

If you want to be a sailor, you must *be able to* swim.

I have canned swim since the age of five.

I *have been able to* swim since the age of five.

### **Semi-modal verbs:**

The semi-modal verbs (or marginal modals) are: dare, need, used to and ought to. They behave similarly to modal verbs but also share some characteristics with main verbs:

- **As a modal verb, the interrogative formed without do:** How dare she criticise us?
- **As a main verb, followed by a to-infinitive and the negative formed with do:** He didn't dare to look back.
- **As a modal verb, the interrogative formed without do:** Need you make so much noise?
- **As a modal verb, the perfect infinitive used to refer to past time.**
- **As a main verb, followed by a to-infinitive and the interrogative formed with do:**  
You needn't have been so rude. Do you need to use the hairdryer?
- **Unlike a modal verb, followed by a to-infinitive:** They used to live by the sea.
- **Unlike a modal verb, followed by a to-infinitive:** You ought to know that by now.

### **Other modal expressions:**

Besides modal verbs and semi-modal verbs, there are other expressions which can express modal meanings. Some of these are formed with be:

be able to  
be allowed to  
be about to  
be bound to  
be going to  
be likely to  
be obliged to  
be supposed to  
etc.

Other expressions that carry modal meanings are: be to, had better, have (got) to, would rather