

Meaning		Modal	Pres.	Future	Past	Expression	Examples
Obligation	unavoidable	must	TRUE	TRUE	had to	need to have to	We must pay our taxes by the 15th of April.  You must be at school and at your desk before the bell rings.
	necessity	must	TRUE	TRUE	had to	need to have to	We had to drink brackish water in order to survive.  The crops must have water or they will die.
	prohibition	must not	TRUE	TRUE	it was prohibited	be forbidden to	You must not smoke in the arsenal.  You must not play in the streets.
	no obligation	not have to	TRUE	TRUE	didn't have to		She doesn't have to be at home before 10:00 p.m.  They don't have to come to class.
	avoidable obligation	should	TRUE	TRUE	should have	be supposed to	You should do your homework every day.
ought to		TRUE	TRUE	ought to have	We should return these books to the library today.		
Advisability		should	TRUE	TRUE	should have		You look terrible, you should see a doctor.
		ought to	TRUE	TRUE	ought to have		You ought to have knocked before entering.
	obligation with implied consequences	had better	TRUE	TRUE	had better have		You had better pay me back before I leave.  She'd better watch her language.
	strong advisability, recommendation	must not	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	should not	You mustn't go out alone. It's dangerous.  She mustn't drive so fast. She'll have an accident.
Preference		would rather	TRUE	TRUE	would rather have	would prefer, would sooner	I'd rather do it myself.  He'd rather have read the book.
Ability	ability	can	TRUE	TRUE	could	be able to, know how to	I can speak Russian.  He couldn't understand a word.
	former ability	could	FALSE	FALSE	could	used to be able to	He could run a 4-minute mile in those days.  I couldn't express myself then.

Meaning		Modal	Pres.	Future	Past	Expression	Examples
Possibility	theoretical and/or factual	can	TRUE	TRUE	can have	it is possible, maybe, perhaps	Any citizen can become a senator.
		could	TRUE	TRUE	could have		Could man have descended from apes?
		may	TRUE	TRUE	may have		We could go to the movies tonight.
		might	TRUE	TRUE	might have		The road may be blocked He may buy a new car next year. He might have taken another road home.
Probability	expectation	should	TRUE	TRUE	should have	expect	He should be here any minute now.
		ought to	TRUE	TRUE	ought to have		They ought to have finished now.
	inference	must	TRUE	FALSE	must have	have to, have got to	It's very muddy; it must have rained a lot.
		can't	TRUE	FALSE	can't have	it is not possible	She can't be hungry, she just ate.
		couldn't	TRUE	FALSE	couldn't have		He couldn't have flown a plane; he died in 1512.
Willingness		will	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	not mind	Stay there, I'll do the dishes.
Invitation	you	could	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	would like, can, will	Could you go to the dance with me?
		would	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE		Would you come to the dance tonight?
Request	he, she, we, they, I	may	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	can, might	May I leave the room?
		could	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE		Could Johnny stay overnight?
	you	would	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	can, will	Would you open the window?
		could	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE		Could you please lower your voice?
Permission		may	TRUE	TRUE	was allowed to	be allowed to	You may leave the room.
		can	TRUE	TRUE	was permitted to	be permitted to	She may marry whomever she likes. Johnny can't stay over.