

English A2 · Modal verbs

Elementary English for Chinese speakers; classroom examples, not official exam items.

The remote controls

Modals are remote controls: the verb does the action; the modal chooses the channel — ability, permission, duty or possibility.

The family table

Modal	Channel	Example
can / can't	ability, informal permission	I can swim. You can't park here.
could	polite requests, past ability	Could you open the window?
may / might	formal permission / possibility	May I come in? It might rain.
must	strong duty, rules	You must wear a uniform.
should / would	advice / polite offers	You should sleep more. Would you like tea?

Your turn: the ladder

Your turn

The most polite way to ask a teacher to leave early:

- A. Can I leave early?
- B. Could I leave early?
- C. May I leave early?
- D. I must leave early.

The dangerous pair

mustn't — forbidden

You mustn't smoke here.

Do NOT do it. The door is locked.

don't have to — not necessary

You don't have to come early.

Your choice. The door is open; nobody cares.

Your turn: forbidden or free

Your turn

You ____ come early; the doors open at nine anyway.

- A. mustn't
- B. don't have to
- C. shouldn't
- D. can't

must or have to

must — your own strong feeling

I must go. — my decision, my urgency.

have to — duty from outside

I have to go. — the rules, the parents,
the timetable.

The modal workshop rules

The trap

must to go

she shoulds sleep

Do you must go?

I will can swim

The fix

must go — modal + base verb only

she should sleep — no -s, ever

Must you go? — the modal flips, no do

I will be able to swim — one channel per remote

Say it aloud

Three rules: You must do your homework. You mustn't eat in the lab.



The kind one: You don't have to enjoy it.



Two pieces of advice: You should drink more water. You shouldn't read in the dark.



One polite request: Could you lend me a pen?

Check yourself

- You mustn't smoke here. — forbidden, the locked door.
- You don't have to come early. — your choice, the open door.
- Could you lend me a pen? — one rung up the politeness ladder.
- She could swim at five. — past ability takes could.