Modals and Auxiliaries ~ entries from the *Oxford Companion to the English Language*

MODALITY [17c: from Latin *modalitas* the quality relating to manners, forms, and limits, from *modus* form, manner, limit: see MODE, MOOD]. In syntactic and semantic analysis, a term chiefly used to refer to the way in which the meaning of a sentence or clause may be modified through the use of a modal auxiliary, such as *may, can, will, must.* In a wider sense, the term is used to cover linguistic expression of these concepts other than through the modal auxiliaries: 'It will *possibly* rain later this evening'; '/ *am sure* that the plane has landed by now'; ' *You have my permission* to smoke now'; '/ *am obliged to go.'* Adverbs such *as possibly, perhaps, probably, certainly* have been called *modal adverbs,* and such adjectives as *possible* have been called *modal adjectives.* The term is also extended to include the subjunctive mood and the past verb forms used to express hypothetical meaning (that is, that the situation is unlikely to occur or has not occurred): 'I wish I *knew* her'; 'If I *saw* him, I *would recognize* him'; 'If you *had said* that, I *would* not *have minded.'* In case grammar, *modality* refers to one of the two underlying constituents of sentence structure (the other being *proposition).* The modality includes those features that relate to the sentence as a whole, such as tense and negation.

MODAL VERB, also **modal auxiliary, modal.** A verb, normally an auxiliary such as English *must* and *should,* used to express *modality* (see entry). In English, such verbs have largely replaced the subjunctive mood, and three kinds of modality can be distinguished for them: (i) *Epistemic modality,* which expresses a judgement about the truth of a proposition (whether it is possible, probable, or necessarily true): *John may be in his office.* (2) *Deontic modality,* which involves the giving of directives (in terms of such notions as permission and obligation): *You must leave immediately.* (3) *Dynamic modality,* which ascribes such properties as ability and volition to the subject of the sentence: / *can come.* Often the same modal verb is used for more than one kind of modality: *may* for possibility *(ft may rain tomorrow)* and permission (*You may smoke now); must* for necessity *(The plane must have landed by now)* and obligation *(I must go).*

Central and marginal modals. The central modal verbs are *can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would.* The marginal modal verbs, sometimes called *semi-modal verbs,* are *dare, need, ought to, used to.* All share the following characteristics: (i) They are auxiliary verbs. (2) They have no third-person *-s* form: *She may go, They may go* (contrast *She goes, They go).* (3) They have no non-finite forms (no infinitive, *-ing* participle, or *-ed* participle), and therefore in standard English can appear only in initial position in the verb phrase, and cannot occur with each other (although 'double modal' forms such as *might could go* occur in some non-standard varieties, such as Southern US English). (4) All except *ought* and *used* are followed by the bare infinitive without *to.* (5) They have idiosyncratic semantic and formal features, affecting particularly their use in the past tense and in negation.

Kinds of modals. (i) Epistemic modals: *may (He may be at home), might (It might get too hot), must (It must be your sister on the phone), ought to (They ought to have heard by now), should (The show should be over soon), will (That will be the doctor), would (Who would have guessed he was so young?).* (2) Deontic modals: *can (You can leave now), could (Could I go now please?), may (You may smoke), might (Might we have another one?), must (You must be patient), need (You needn't say anything), ought to (I ought to write more often), shall (You shall have my resignation letter tomorrow:* a promise or a threat), *should (You should write more legibly).* (3) Dynamic modals: *can (Neil can drive a car), could (He couldn't drive at that time), dare (I daren't tell/ don't dare tell my parents), shall (We shall allow no obstacle to impede our programme), will (I will stay as long as I wish).*

Future expressions, (i) *Shall* (with first-person subjects only, particularly in Southern England) and *will* (often contracted to '//) express future time and are often said to comprise the future tense: / *shall be back next week; He will be here soon.* Other ways of expressing the future include the semi-auxiliaries (see below) *be going to (Ifs going to rain)* and *be to (She is to be married tomorrow),* the present continuous *(Fm leaving for New York next week),* and the simple present *(Theplane leaves at noon).*

Marginal modals **and** semi-auxiliaries. *Dare, need, ought to,* and *used to* share most of the characteristics of modal verbs but are marginal for various reasons. Unlike the central modals, *ought* and *used* are followed by *to* and despite prescriptive objections often combine with *do* in negative and interrogative constructions, like a full verb: especially in England, *They didn't ought to say that* alongside the more traditionally acceptable *They oughtn't to say that', Did he used to play the violin?,* alongside the rare *Used he to play the violin? Used to* also differs semantically from central modals,

since it conveys aspect (habitual situation) and not modality. In negative and interrogative contexts, *dare* and *need* may be either modals (/ *daren't object', Need I say more?)* or full verbs with preceding *do* and following fo-infinitive (/ *don't dare to object* or the blend without the *to, I don't dare object', Do I need to say more?).* Elsewhere, they are full verbs: / *dare/dared to object', I need/needed to say more.* There are a number of semi-auxiliaries that express modal or aspectual meanings, such as *be able to, be about to, be bound to, be going to, have to, have got to.* They can be used as non-finite forms and are therefore convenient substitutes for modals in non-finite positions: for example, the use of *You may be able to see me tomorrow* instead of the impossible * *You may can see me tomorrow.*

Negation. When a verb phrase containing a modal is negated, the negation applies in some instances to the modal and in other instances to the proposition: for example, the modal is negated in *You may not leave* (You are not allowed to leave), whereas the proposition is negated in *I may not be on time* (It is possible that I won't be on time). The difference may affect the choice of the auxiliary: for example, epistemic *must (It must be your sister on the phone)* usually forms its negative equivalent through *may not* for negating the proposition *(It may not be your sister on the phone:* It is possible that it is not your sister on the phone) and *can't* for modal negation *(It can't be your sister on the phone:* It is not possible that it is your sister on the phone).

Past tense. *Can, may, shall, will* have the past-tense forms *could, might, should, would.* These forms are chiefly used to express tentativeness or conditionality rather than past time, so that there is no time difference between / *may see you later* and / *might see you later,* or between *Can you pass the salt?* and *Could you pass the salt?* The past forms, however, are used for past time in indirect speech *(I may see you later* is reported as *She said that she might see me later).* There are no past forms for *must, dare, need, ought to.* The epistemic modals indicate the past time of the proposition by using *have: Andrew may/ might have been in his office', You must have seen them', They will/would have landed by now.* The deontic modals *ought to have* and *should have* express past obligation, usually with the implication that it was not fulfilled: *You ought to have phoned* (but you didn't); *They should have come in.* Dynamic *could* (was able to) and *would* (was willing to) are used for past time in negative contexts *(He couldn't type; They wouldn't help us).*

Would is commonly used in the main clause of a sentence expressing a hypothetical condition: *If I were you, I would buy if, If you had seen them, you would have been shocked.* Sometimes, in BrE, *should* is used with a first-person subject in place of *would: If I had seen them, I should have reported it. Would* and *should* appear in other hypothetical contexts: / *was at the demonstration, but it would take too long to tell you what happened. Should may* also appear after evaluative expressions *(It's odd that he should say that;* also *It's odd that he says that)* and expressions of necessity, intention, and the like *(We insisted that he should stay).*

AUXILIARY VERB [18c: from Latin *auxiliarius* helping, and verb]Also **helping verb.** A category of verbs that regularly accompany full verbs such as *write, run, shoot: is* in *is writing, has* in *has run, may be* in *may be shooting.* In English, auxiliary verbs are customarily divided into: (i) The primary auxiliaries *be, have, do. (2)* The modal auxiliaries or modal verbs *can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must.* The marginal modal auxiliaries, also called *semi-modals,* are *dare, need, ought to, used to.* They are marginal because they do not share all the properties of the others or do not do so regularly. Auxiliaries have four properties: (i) They are used with the negative *not* to make a sentence negative: *Frank may buy me a sweater/may not buy me a sweater.* Most have reduced negative forms: *isn't, hasn't, doesn't, can't, won't,* but not usually **mayn't.* (2) They form questions by changing positions with the subject: *Wendy has invited me I Has Wendy invited me?* (3) To avoid repetition, they can occur without a full verb: *Has Jonathan written to you yet?— Yes, he has.* (4) They can emphasize the positive, in which case they carry the accent: *David may not be there.—His mother told me he WILL be there.* The same properties apply to *be* as a full verb *(Jonathan isn't tired)* and particularly in BrE as an alternative to *have* as a full verb (/ *haven't a headache).* In the absence of any other auxiliary, *do* is introduced for these functions: *Leslie didn't tell Doreen; Did Leslie tell Doreen?', Yes, he did; He DID tell her.*

The auxiliary *be* is used to form, with a following *-ing* participle, the progressive *(is employing, may have been proving)* and with a following *-ed* participle the passive *(is employed, may have been proved).* The auxiliary *have* is used with a following *-ed* participle to form the perfect *(has employed, may have proved).* The modal auxxiliaries convey notions such as possibility, obligation, and permission. They are the only verbs not to have a distinctive third-person form in the present: *He can/They can* contrasts with *He is/They are, He has/They have, He sees/They see.* Like auxiliary *do,* they are always the first verb in the verb phrase *(should have apologized, could be making, did tell)* and are followed by the bare infinitive. In standard English, two modal auxiliaries cannot co-occur, but they can in some non-standard varieties, such as Appalachian English *They might could come.*