

# MODAL VERBS

## 1º Y 2º BACHILLERATO

### THEORY

Un verbo modal es aquel que se usa en combinación con un verbo principal para expresar obligación, prohibición, capacidad o habilidad para realizar alguna tarea, para hacer recomendaciones, etc.

Ex. *Ralph can speak three languages.*

*You know you shouldn't smoke, so why do you do it?*

#### ¡TOMA NOTA!

- Son verbos incompletos, es decir, les faltan tiempos verbales. No tienen participio ni infinitivo. Al faltarles tiempos, utilizan otros verbos para completar su conjugación. Así, "can" se completa con "be able to", "must" con "have to", etc.
- No llevan -s en la tercera persona del singular del presente simple, excepto el verbo "have (got) to" y "be able to".
- Todos van seguidos de un verbo en infinitivo sin "to", excepto "ought to", "have to", "be able to" y "used to".
- Como no necesitan verbo auxiliar, construyen la interrogativa invirtiendo el orden del sujeto y el verbo, y la negativa añadiendo "not".
- Nunca uses "do, does, o did" en las preguntas en las que ya estén otros verbos modales como "can, must, etc..

#### 1. OBLIGACIÓN

- **Must** (deber, tener que):  
*"You must train very hard if you want to be a successful athlete"*
- **Have to** (tener que):  
*"I have to get up at six every morning except Sundays"*

**NOTA:** "must" se utiliza para dar órdenes, mandatos, obligaciones. Si el que habla desea suavizar esta autoridad, se suele usar "have to". "Have to y must" se complementan porque tienen un significado similar. Por ello se utiliza "have to" en todos los tiempos que faltan a "must" (por ejemplo, "had to" es el pasado de "must" y "will have to" sería el futuro de "must").

## 2. PROHIBICIÓN

- **Mustn't** (no deber):  
*"You mustn't make a noise during the exam"*
- **Aren't/weren't allowed to** (no estar permitido/no estaba permitido):  
*"Teachers aren't allowed to smoke inside the school"*
- **Can't/couldn't** (no poder/ no podíamos):  
*"You can't take photos using a flash in this museum"*

NOTA: "Mustn't" es el modal más usual para indicar prohibición.

## 3. NECESIDAD

- **Need** (necesitar):  
*"We need to buy some batteries for the camera"*

## 4. PERMISO (PEDIR Y DAR PERMISO)

- **Can** (poder):  
*"I hate that song! Can I put something different on?" "Yes, you can"*
- **May** (poder):  
*"May I use your computer? Yes, you may"*
- **Could** (podría):  
*"Could I use your computer?"*
- **Are/were allowed to** (permitir):  
*"My sister is allowed to use a dictionary in her translation exams at university. Incredible!"*

NOTA: "Can, could y may" son los modales más comunes para pedir y dar permiso. "Can y could" se utiliza en un contexto informal y "May" se utiliza en un contexto formal.

## 5. AUSENCIA DE OBLIGACIÓN O DE NECESIDAD

- **Needn't** (no necesitar):  
*"You needn't give me back my camera until I go on holiday next month"*
- **Don't have to/didn't have to** (no es necesario que):  
*"Jimmy doesn't have to retake any exams; he passed them all first time"*

En este contexto "have to" necesita el auxiliar "DO" para negar e interrogar (you don't have to...../do you have to ....?)

## 6. RECOMENDACIONES, SUGERENCIAS, CONSEJOS, OPINIONES

- **Should** (debería):  
*"Brian should buy a new computer"*
- **Ought to** (debería):  
*"Bob ought to be more careful when he is driving: he is a real danger to pedestrians"*
- **Could** (podrías):  
*"You could ask your parents to lend you some money if you haven't got enough"*

**NOTA:** "Should" es el modal más común para indicar una recomendación. Es prácticamente idéntico a "ought to", pero este verbo no es tan frecuente como should.

## 7. HABILIDAD, CAPACIDAD Y CONOCIMIENTO (PRESENTE)

- **Can** (saber):  
*"Marty can play the guitar better than anyone I know"*

**NOTA:** El verbo que puede sustituir a "can" en este uso es "know how to" (do you know how to cook good Mexican food?)

## 8. HABILIDAD, CAPACIDAD Y CONOCIMIENTO (PASADO)

- **Could** (sabía):  
*"She was a gifted child and could read when she was only three years old"*
- **was/were able to** (fue capaz de, pudo):  
*"I was abroad on holiday at the time of the general Election but I was able to vote by post"*

**NOTA:** Cuando nos referimos a una habilidad que se tuvo en una ocasión concreta del pasado se utiliza "was able to"

## 9. AUSENCIA DE HABILIDAD O CAPACIDAD EN EL PRESENTE

- **Can't** (no sabe):  
*"My father can't drive but my grandmother can"*

## 10. AUSENCIA DE HABILIDAD O CAPACIDAD EN EL PASADO

- **Couldn't** (no sabía/no podía):  
*"Did you know that Einstein couldn't speak fluently until he was nine?"*
- **Wasn't/weren't able to** (no fue capaz de/no pudo):  
*"Despite playing well, they weren't able to score the goals they needed to qualify"*

## 11. POSIBILIDAD/INCERTIDUMBRE

- Se utiliza **"might, may o could"** + infinitivo para hablar de posibilidad en el futuro o de posibilidad referida a actividades presentes.
- **May:**  
*"Some students may fail the exam"*
- **Might:**  
*"They might go to the opera, but they prefer rock concerts"*
- **Could:**  
*"He could be at a friend's house"*
- Se emplea **may, might o could + be+ Verbo -ing** para hablar de actividades que pueden estar ocurriendo en el momento de hablar:  
*"Joe might be doing his homework or he could be watching the football on TV"*

## 12. DEDUCCIONES

Una deducción consiste en llegar a una conclusión a través de una interpretación lógica que se apoya en algún tipo de evidencia. Algunas veces la conclusión es muy probable (estamos seguros de ella o casi seguros) y otras veces, más que ser una conclusión probable, se trata de una conclusión posible (no estamos muy seguros de ella).

- **Must + Verbo infinitivo (debe):** para referirnos a conclusiones probables expresadas en forma afirmativa de las que estamos seguros o casi seguros. Ex. "Pamela isn't at home and I know she works a lot. She must be at work.
- **Can't + Verbo infinitivo (no puede):** para referirnos a conclusiones probables expresadas en forma negativa de las que estamos seguros o casi seguros. Ex. "Teresa can't like dancing very much. She hardly ever dances when I see her at the disco.

- **Must/can't + be + Verbo -ing:** para expresar conclusiones probables de las que estamos seguros o casi seguros y que se refieren a hechos que están ocurriendo en el momento de hablar. Ex: "Chris is very quiet, isn't he? Yes, he must be thinking about something."

### 13. HACER OFRECIMIENTOS

- **Can:**  
"Can I help you" (¿Te puedo ayudar?) INFORMAL
- **Will:**  
"Never mind, I will pick you up tomorrow morning". (No te preocupes, te recogeré mañana por la mañana). FORMAL
- **Would:**  
"Would you like anything from the shop?" (¿Querrías algo de la tienda?) FORMAL

### 14. PEDIR A OTRA PERSONA QUE HAGA ALGO

- **Can/could:**  
"Can/could you close the door?" INFORMAL
- **Will/would:**  
"Would/will you close the door, please?" FORMAL

### 15. EXPRESAR HÁBITOS Y RUTINAS EN EL PASADO

- **Would:**  
"When I was a child we'd go to Scotland every summer" (Cuando era un niño íbamos a Escocia todos los veranos)
- **Used to:**  
"She used to play with me in the playground when we were at school" (Jugaba conmigo en el patio cuando estábamos en el colegio)

### 16. OFRECERSE UNO MISMO PARA HACER ALGO

- **Shall:**  
"Shall I carry your bags?" (¿Te llevo las bolsas?) FORMAL
- **Can:**  
"Can I carry your bags?" (¿Puedo llevarte las bolsas?) INFORMAL

**NOTA:** Shall se utiliza sólo con la primera persona (I/we)

## MODALES PERFECTOS

Se forman añadiendo al modal un infinitivo perfecto, cuya estructura es "have + Vparticipio -ed, si es regular o la tercera columna de los verbos irregulares. Se usan para referirnos a acciones pasadas.

- **Needn't + have + Verbo participio** (no necesitaba haber/ no tenía que haber...): para señalar que una persona hizo algo, aunque esto no hubiera sido necesario.  
*"She needn't have taken a taxi. I would have picked her up if she had phoned me"*
- **Should/ought to + have + Verbo participio** (debería haber ...): para indicar que una acción fue poco sensata o que no se siguió un consejo en el pasado.  
*"He should have locked the door"*
- **May/might/could + have + Verbo participio** (puede/podría haber ...): para hablar a cerca de hechos que posiblemente ocurrieron en el pasado, pero no tenemos certeza absoluta. Si usamos "might", la suposición es incluso más remota.  
*"She may have made a mistake"*
- **Must + have + Verbo participio** (debe haber...): Para expresar una conclusión probable expresada en forma afirmativa y que se refiere a un hecho del pasado.  
*"Ferry said he woul phone me but he didn't. He must have forgotten"*
- **Can't + have + Verbo participio** (no puede haber...): Para expresar una conclusión probable expresada en forma negativa de la que estamos seguros o casi seguros y que se refiere a un hecho del pasado.  
*"I saw Carolina in the street today. She can't have gone on holiday yet"*

# EXERCISES

## 1. CIRCLE THE CORRECT ANSWER.

- You (**may/must**) eat three nutritious meals a day if you want to be healthy.
- We in France this summer. (**Would/ could**) we spend a few days with you?
- You (**shouldn't/should**) be respectful of the elderly.
- If you want to have dinner at the restaurant, you (**are able to/ ought to**) book a table in advance.
- In order to be accepted to university, you (**might/have to**) have good marks in your exams.

## 2. FILL IN THE CORRECT FORM OF THE MODALS FROM THE LIST BELOW. THERE MAY BE MORE THAN ONE CORRECT ANSWER.

**Should/ought to/ must/ can/ might/ mustn't/ may**

The computer is a wonderful invention, however you \_\_\_\_\_ use it carefully. In order to avoid losing documents, you \_\_\_\_\_ always save everything you type. In addition, you \_\_\_\_\_ print out a copy of all important documents. One of the greatest fears of computer users is a virus. There are certain dates on which you \_\_\_\_\_ turn on your computer for fear of infection. Your computer \_\_\_\_\_ get a virus if you insert used diskettes, so you \_\_\_\_\_ try to avoid doing so. Moreover, you \_\_\_\_\_ want to buy an anti-virus program.

## 3. CHOOSE THE MOST APPROPRIATE SENTENCE.

1. We could have bought the house for less money.  
a. **We really should.**                                      b. **It is a pity we didn't**
2. I advised him to spend more time on his studies. Now he is sorry he didn't listen.  
a. **He should study more.**                                      b. **He should have studied more**
3. David would have booked you a ticket.  
a. **Why didn't you ask him to?**                                      b. **Why don't you ask him to?**
4. I am an only child. I am sorry my parents had no more children.  
a. **My parents should have had more children.**      b. **My parents must have had more children**
5. He didn't come to our meeting yesterday.  
a. **He must have had another meeting**                                      b. **He must have another meeting**

4. TRANSLATE THESE SENTENCES INTO ENGLISH

1. Podríamos haber ido a ver una película.
2. Deben terminar antes de las 6.
3. ¿Qué piensas que debería haber hecho?

5. REWRITE EACH SENTENCE USING A MODAL O MODAL PERFECT.

1. Drinking alcohol while you drive is prohibited by law.  
You...
2. Perhaps I will go to the cinema.  
I...
3. I am not able to get up early in the morning.  
I...
4. I suggest you sleep at least seven hours the night before a big exam.  
You...
5. It is a pity we didn't spend our last holiday in the country.  
We...
6. I don't think I told you all the news.  
I...
7. It was wrong of the manager to employ 13-year-old children.  
The manager....
8. He is late for work again. He probably woke up late.  
He...

6. ERROR CORRECTION.

1. You must to save all the documents on your computer.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. My father might had helped you yesterday if you had asked.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Victor should spent more time studying for yesterday's exam  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Young people today ought be more polite to their parents.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Noemi can have completed the assignment on time if she had tried.  
\_\_\_\_\_



**7. CHOOSE THE CORRECT WORDS.**

1. This is top secret. You **(mustn't/don't have to)** tell anybody.
2. Look at those clouds. I think it **(must/might)** rain soon.
3. Do you have toothache? Don't you think you **(should/have to)** go to the dentist?
4. I would like to talk to you. **(May/Would)** I call you at home?
5. When she was younger, she **(can/could)** run much faster.
6. It was very difficult, but Danny **(might/ was able to)** get a ticket for the football match.

**8. CHOOSE THE MOST APPROPRIATE SENTENCE TO FOLLOW EACH EXAMPLE.**

1. We could have gone to see a film.  
a. **What a pity we didn't go**                      b. **Why don't we go?**
2. I should have studied for the exam.  
a. **I knew all the answers**                      b. **I didn't know any of the answers**
3. They have been looking forward to the party all week, but they aren't here yet.  
a. **They couldn't have forgotten about it**    b. **They couldn't forget about it**
4. He still hasn't arrived.  
a. **He must take the wrong turning**                      b. **He must have taken the wrong turning**
5. You could have helped her when she asked you to.  
a. **Why don't you?**                      b. **Why didn't you?**
6. Believe me, I would have visited her  
a. **I just didn't have the time**                      b. **I just won't have the time**

**9. COMPLETE THE SENTENCES USING MODAL PERFECTS.**

1. **My motorbike has disappeared.**  
Someone \_\_\_\_\_
2. **It is possible she told you a lie.**  
She \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Perhaps he called me, but I was out earlier**  
He \_\_\_\_\_
4. **It was wrong of you not to apologise to her.**  
You \_\_\_\_\_

10. CHOOSE THE CORRECT OPTION.

1. When David was three years old he \_\_\_\_\_ write his own name.  
a) **must**                                      b) **could**                                      c) **is able to**
2. In my opinion, Sheila \_\_\_\_\_ apologise for her rude behaviour.  
a) **should**                                      b) **have to**                                      c) **can**
3. Pupils \_\_\_\_\_ smoke in the school grounds. It is forbidden.  
a) **couldn't**                                      b) **needn't**                                      c) **mustn't**
4. The bus \_\_\_\_\_ be late because of the heavy rain.  
a) **should**                                      b) **might**                                      c) **can**
5. I'm sorry, I \_\_\_\_\_ help you. I don't know anything about cars.  
a) **shouldn't**                                      b) **can't**                                      c) **needn't**

11. CHOOSE THE CORRECT WORDS.

- a. Look at these clouds. I think it **(must/might)** rain soon.
- b. Do you have toothache? Don't you think you **(should/have to)** go to the dentist?
- c. I would like to talk to you. **(May/Would)** I call you at home?
- d. When she was younger, she **(can/could)** run much faster.
- e. It was very difficult, but Danny **(might/was able to)** get a ticket for the football match.

12. WHAT DO YOU USE TO EXPRESS:

- a. Ability in the present and in the past.
- b. Obligation.
- c. A request.
- d. Possibility in the future.
- e. Prohibition.
- f. Advice.

13. CHOOSE THE CORRECT MODAL VERB.

1. My brother could **walk/might** walk before he started talking.
2. You have worked very hard. You could **be /must** be tired.
3. Helen **mustn't do/couldn't** do her homework, because she was ill.
4. The weather forecast says it **may rain/should** rain tomorrow.
5. I'll try to finish, but I **can't have/ might not have** enough time.
6. Jim always goes on holiday to the same place. He **might like/must like** it there.

14. CHOOSE THE CORRECT OPTION.

**Students in modern secondary schools in the UK.**

Sometimes feel that they *have to/should* complain about homework, but life isn't too bad. It is true that they *can't/must* study a lot, but 50 years ago schools were stricter. Students *mustn't/weren't allowed to* speak without permission and *had to/needn't* show teachers a lot of respect. Teachers and head teachers *are able to/could* use corporal punishment if students broke the rules. Also, in many boarding schools and private schools, senior students (older) *need to/were allowed to* hit junior students (younger). Juniors *had to/must* obey the seniors. The seniors could/must tell the juniors to clean their shoes or make their beds. This *might/can't* seem strange to teenagers today, but school authorities thought that juniors *should/must* learn how to serve. Fortunately, young people nowadays *needn't/mustn't* worry about that.

15. CHOOSE THE BEST ANSWER.

1. A policeman stopped Mr West for driving through a red light.

He told Mr West that he *may have/must have /ought to* have stopped at the light.

2. A man is waiting for the results of a driving test.

He thinks he *may have/ought to have/shouldn't have* failed.

3. Sally feels ill.

She *shouldn't have/could have/might have* eaten so much at the party.

4. My friend didn't meet me at the restaurant.

He *must have/might have/could have* called to tell me that he wasn't coming.

5. The Browns are stepping into a new car.

They *may have/must have/should have* bought a new car.

16. FILL IN THE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE FORM OF *SHOULD HAVE*, *MUST HAVE* OR *COULD HAVE* TOGETHER WITH THE VERB IN BRACKETS.

Jim Kelly loves camping. He remembers an early camping experience. "We packed up to leave at 5.00. We \_\_\_\_\_(stay) longer because it was so cold. We picked up all the litter carefully, but we \_\_\_\_\_(pay) more attention to our fire. We \_\_\_\_\_(leave) the forest without checking that the fire was out. We \_\_\_\_\_(notice) that the fire was still burning.

One of the campers looked back and saw leaves burning near the campfire. The wind \_\_\_\_\_(blow) the leaves onto the fire. We rushed back and threw water onto the flames. We were lucky that we saw the burning leaves. It \_\_\_\_\_ (easily cause) a disaster."

17. CHOOSE THE BEST ANSWER.

1. It was wrong of Dan not to warn us about the danger.  
Dan *could have/must have* warned us.
2. There was absolutely no reason for them to come late.  
They *shouldn't have/should have* come on time.
3. I'm sure that I told you what happened.  
I *might have/must have* told you what happened.
4. It's possible that she left her sweater on the bus.  
She *must have/may have* left her sweater on the bus.
5. Someone may have told him the bad news.  
He *ought to have/might have* heard the bad news.
6. They didn't write although they had our new address.  
They *could have/might have* written.

18. REWRITE THESE SENTENCES REPLACING THE UNDERLINED WORDS.

Can/can't/could/couldn't/must/needn't

1. I am not able to get up very early in the morning.  
I \_\_\_\_\_
2. You don't have to shout- I am not deaf.  
You \_\_\_\_\_
3. I have to get a new passport before the summer.  
I \_\_\_\_\_
4. When he was younger, he was able to run much faster.  
When he was younger, he \_\_\_\_\_
5. She is able to help you with your project.  
She \_\_\_\_\_
6. She doesn't have to return the book today.  
She \_\_\_\_\_

7. Drivers have to observe the speed limit.

Drivers \_\_\_\_\_

8. Their parents weren't able to pay for extra lessons.

Their parents \_\_\_\_\_

**19. CHOOSE THE CORRECT ANSWER.**

1. Ron doesn't feel well. He \_\_\_\_\_ see a doctor.

- a. **should**                                  b. **had to**                                  c. **ought to**

2. When the children were young, they \_\_\_\_\_ speak English.  
Unfortunately, they don't remember any of it.

- a. **must**    b. **could**    c. **might**

3. It \_\_\_\_\_ rain tomorrow. Take umbrellas and raincoats with you on your trip.

- a. **can't**    b. **may**    c. **must**

4. I \_\_\_\_\_ speak four languages. My parents taught me all four.

- a. **can**    b. **need**    c. **should**

5. Although I broke my finger, I \_\_\_\_\_ sign my name.

- a. **was able to**                                  b. **have to**                                  c. **couldn't**

6. You \_\_\_\_\_ review the work done in class or you will forget it.

- a. **should**    b. **may**    c. **needn't**

7. You \_\_\_\_\_ eat so quickly. You will get a stomach-ache.

- a. **can't**    b. **doesn't have to**                                  c. **shouldn't**

8. As a child, he \_\_\_\_\_ dance like a professional.

- a. **can**    b. **could**    c. **is able to**

9. They \_\_\_\_\_ travel to London tomorrow.

- a. **can't**    b. **will be able to**                                  c. **couldn't**

10. Yesterday, I \_\_\_\_\_ enter the computer room because I had a special key.

- a. **was able to**                                  b. **could**    c. **can**

21. THESE ARE THE SCHOOL RULES. REWRITE THEM USING *MUSTN'T*, *DON'T HAVE TO*, *MUST*, *NEEDN'T*, *SHOULDN'T*.

1. Pupils are not allowed to leave the school before classes are over.

Pupils \_\_\_\_\_

2. Pupils are not allowed to stay in the classroom during breaks.

Pupils \_\_\_\_\_

3. Pupils are obliged to wear the school uniform every day.

Pupils \_\_\_\_\_

4. Pupils are not obliged to wear closed shoes. They may wear sandals instead.

Pupils \_\_\_\_\_

5. Pupils are obliged to participate in gym classes.

Pupils \_\_\_\_\_

6. Pupils are not obliged to participate in competitive sports games.

Pupils \_\_\_\_\_

7. Pupils are advised not to leave expensive things in the classrooms.

Pupils \_\_\_\_\_

20. COMPLETE THESE SENTENCES USING *TO BE ABLE TO*, *SHOULD*, *OUGHT TO*, *MUST*, *HAVE TO*, *NEED*.

1. You have burnt yourself. You \_\_\_\_\_ be more careful.

2. We \_\_\_\_\_ leave soon. The last bus leaves in 10 minutes.

3. I \_\_\_\_\_ see you tomorrow. I will have some free time then.

4. You \_\_\_\_\_ rush. There is plenty of time. The film only starts in two hours.

5. You \_\_\_\_\_ be quiet in the library. It is forbidden to make a noise.

6. We \_\_\_\_\_ walk home because we missed the last bus last night.

7. The police \_\_\_\_\_ catch the thief as he was climbing out of a window.

8. Parents \_\_\_\_\_ keep medicines away from children. Cleaning fluids are also dangerous.

9. Paul \_\_\_\_\_ drive the car because his mother has broken her hand.

10. You \_\_\_\_\_ worry. I will take care of the children.

21. FILL IN THE BLANKS WITH *MUST*, *MUSTN'T*, *HAD TO*, *NEEDN'T*.

1. You \_\_\_\_\_ throw things out of the car window.
2. You \_\_\_\_\_ hurry; we have got plenty of time
3. The doctor says she \_\_\_\_\_ stop smoking
4. He forgot his hat, so he \_\_\_\_\_ run back home to get it.
5. You \_\_\_\_\_ go shopping right now; You can go later.
6. The matter is very important; you \_\_\_\_\_ allow me to see the manager right away.
7. She \_\_\_\_\_ do her homework last night because she didn't have time during the day.
8. After her illness last year, she \_\_\_\_\_ be very careful not to catch a cold.
9. Everyone \_\_\_\_\_ carry some form of identification with them.

22. REWRITE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES WITH THE APPROPRIATE MODAL.

1. Perhaps it will rain today. (may)  
It \_\_\_\_\_
2. It's a good idea to take some money with you. (should)  
You \_\_\_\_\_
3. It's not necessary to clean your room right now. (need)  
You \_\_\_\_\_
4. I suggest you say goodbye before you leave. (should)  
You \_\_\_\_\_
5. You know how to do that by yourself. (can)  
You \_\_\_\_\_
6. Parents have an obligation to teach their children the difference between right and wrong. (must)  
Parents \_\_\_\_\_
7. It is necessary for Dad to get up very early tomorrow morning. (have to)  
Dad \_\_\_\_\_
8. In the future, children will know how to use computers before the age of five. (to be able to)  
In the future children \_\_\_\_\_
9. It is forbidden for boys to ride skateboards in the street. (must)  
The boys \_\_\_\_\_
10. It is not necessary to be rich in order to be happy. (have to)  
You \_\_\_\_\_