

| FORM | MEANING / USE | EXAMPLES |
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| PERMISSION: can, could, may, might, be allowed to | | |
| can could may might | to ask for permission. less direct, more polite. more formal, less common. less direct, more formal style. | <i>Can I borrow your dictionary?</i> <i>Could I ask you a personal question?</i> <i>May I make a suggestion?</i> <i>Might I make a suggestion?</i> |
| can may | to give permission | <i>You can borrow my camera if you want to.</i> <i>"Could I make a suggestion?" "Of course, you may."</i> |
| can('t) be (not) allowed to | to talk about things that are permitted or not permitted | <i>You can drive/ are allowed to drive a car in Britain when you are seventeen. You can't smoke here.</i> |
| could was/were allowed to | to say that we had general permission to do something in the past | <i>When we were children, we could stay up/ were allowed to stay up late on Saturday nights.</i> |
| was/were allowed to | to say that someone had permission to do something and they did it <u>in a particular past situation</u> | <i>The children were allowed to stay up until midnight last night. (not 'could')</i> |

OBLIGATION AND ADVICE: should, ought to, had better, be supposed to, shall

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| should ought to | to talk about obligation, to ask for and give advice, and, in general, to say what is right or good | <i>"What should I do?" "You should stop smoking."</i> <i>You oughtn't to tell lies. (We often prefer 'ought to' to talk about authority which comes from outside the speaker eg from laws or rules.)</i> |
| should/ought to + have + p. participle | to say that someone did the wrong thing in the past | <i>I'm really tired. I shouldn't have stayed up so late.</i> <i>We had a good time. You ought to have come with us.</i> |
| had better | to express a strong recommendation in a particular situation. (<i>had better</i> often suggests a kind of threat or warning, and is stronger than <i>should/ought to</i>) | <i>I think it's going to rain. You'd better take an umbrella. It's very late. I'd better go now.</i> |
| be supposed to | to talk about what people are expected to do because of an arrangement, a rule, or a duty. (we also use <i>supposed to</i> to mean 'said to') | <i>You're supposed to start work at 8.00.</i> <i>You know you're not supposed to smoke here. (That book is supposed to be very good.)</i> |
| shall | to ask for opinion, advice or instructions | <i>I've missed the bus. What shall I do?</i> <i>Shall I apply for the job or not?</i> <i>How long shall I cook this spaghetti?</i> |

REQUESTS: can, could, may, might, will, would

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| can could may might | to ask for things. less direct and more polite. more formal. more polite than <i>may</i> . | <i>Can I have a glass of water, please?</i> <i>Could I have the bill, please?</i> <i>May I have some more coffee?</i> <i>I wonder if I might use your telephone, please?</i> |
| can could will would | to ask someone to do something for us. less definite, more polite form of <i>can</i> . less definite and more polite form of <i>will</i> . | <i>Can you help me?</i> <i>Could you do me a favour?</i> <i>Will you switch on the light, please?</i> <i>The phone is ringing. Would you answer it? (=Would you mind answering it?)</i> |

OFFERS: will, shall, can, could, would

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| will | to say that we are willing to do sth. | <i>I'll help you with your suitcase.</i> <i>Are you hungry? I'll make you something to eat.</i> |
| shall can could | to offer to do something. =do you want me to? ='ability' / ='permission' less direct and more polite than <i>can</i> . | <i>Shall I open the door for you?</i> <i>I can post this letter for you. / Can I help you?</i> <i>I could lend you some money if you want.</i> <i>Could I carry that bag for you?</i> |
| would like would prefer would rather | to make polite offers and invitations. | <i>Would you like me to help you?</i> <i>Would you prefer to stay in or go out?</i> <i>Would you rather go now?</i> |

SUGGESTIONS: shall, can, could

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| shall | to ask for and make suggestions | <i>Where shall we go? Shall we stay at home?</i> |
| can could | to suggest possible actions. less direct and more polite than <i>can</i> . | <i>We can watch TV if you like.</i> <i>We could go to the cinema tomorrow.</i> |

| FORM | MEANING / USE | EXAMPLES |
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| ABILITY: can, could, be able to | | |
| can | to talk about ability | <i>I can play the piano. (=am able to, know how to)</i> |
| be able to | <i>can</i> has no infinitive, <i>-ing</i> form or participles, so we use <i>be able to</i> . | <i>I'd like to be able to play the piano. People will soon be able to live on other planets.</i> |
| could | someone had the general ability to do sth | <i>I could swim when I was four. (=was able to)</i> |
| was/were able to | to say that someone had the ability to do something <i>in a particular situation</i> | <i>I was tired but I was able to swim back. (not could) (=managed to/succeeded in: when it was difficult.)</i> |
| could | with verbs of perception (<i>see, hear, smell, taste, feel</i>) and verbs of thinking (<i>understand, remember</i>), we use <i>could</i> when we actually did these things in particular situations. | <i>We could see a man in the garden. She didn't speak very clearly, but I could understand what she said.</i> |
| could not | for both general ability and particular situations | <i>My grandmother couldn't speak German. He tried very hard, but he couldn't swim back.</i> |
| could have + past participle | to say that s.o. had the ability or the opportunity to do sth but didn't do it | <i>You could have helped me. Why didn't you? I could have gone to university, but I decided not to.</i> |

OBLIGATION AND NECESSITY: must, have to, need

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| must | the authority comes from the speaker. | <i>You must be home by 10 o'clock. I must go and see the doctor. (I think it is necessary.)</i> |
| mustn't | there is an obligation not to do sth. | <i>You mustn't get up today. You've got a bad cold.</i> |
| have to | the authority comes from outside the speaker. | <i>I have to be home by 10 o'clock. (My parents insist.) You have to drive on the left in Britain.</i> |
| don't have to | to say that it is not necessary to do something. | <i>I don't have to / haven't got to get up. I'm on holiday. I don't need to / needn't get up today.</i> |
| haven't got to | | |
| don't need to | needn't | |
| didn't need to | past form of <i>don't need to</i> - it often means that someone didn't do something. | <i>I didn't need to unlock the door: it was unlocked. She didn't need to go out, but she went anyway.</i> |
| needn't have + past participle | to say that someone did something unnecessarily | <i>I needn't have made so much food for the party. (=I shouldn't have made so much food for the party)</i> |

DEDUCTION, PROBABILITY AND POSSIBILITY: must, should, ought to, may, might, could, can't

(saying how sure we are)

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| + must | to say that we are sure about something | <i>There's a light on. There must be someone in.</i> |
| must + have + pp | used for deductions about the past | <i>The shoes you bought must have been expensive.</i> |
| can't -negative must | to say that sth is impossible - cf. <i>must</i> | <i>Annie can't be asleep. There's a light on in her room.</i> |
| can't + have + pp | used for deductions about the past | <i>He can't / couldn't have been there! It was closed!</i> |
| should/ought to | sth is probable at the time of speaking | <i>Ann should be at work. She's normally there at 9.</i> |
| should/ought to + have + p. participle | when we expected sth to happen (either we do not know if it happened or we know it didn't.) | <i>They should have arrived. (But I don't know if they have.) They ought to have arrived, but they aren't there yet.</i> |
| may (not) | to say that perhaps sth will happen in the future or that sth is true now. | <i>It may be cold tomorrow. (=Perhaps it will be cold.) There's someone at the door. It may be Liz.</i> |
| might (not) | less sure than may. The interrogative is normally expressed by do you think? or be+likely to . | <i>We might go to the beach tomorrow. Do you think he believes your story? Is the plane likely to be late?</i> |
| - could | less sure than might. | <i>Simon could be in the living room.</i> |
| may/might/could + have + p. participle | to talk about possibility in the past | <i>I think she may have been there. (=Perhaps she was... He might/could have lost it. (=Perhaps he has lost it.)</i> |

MORE ABOUT POSSIBILITY: can, could, might

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| can | to talk about theoretical possibility | <i>Anyone can learn to swim. (=It's possible for anyone to learn to swim.)</i> |
| could | to talk about theoretical possibility in the past | <i>My brother could be really horrible as a child. (=My brother was sometimes horrible when he was...)</i> |
| could/might + have + p. participle | to say that something was possible in the past but did not happen | <i>You were very lucky. Someone could have stolen it. He was stupid to do that. He might have died.</i> |