

- 2 *Might* is more tentative and slightly less certain than *may*.

*It **might** rain. Take your umbrella.*  
*'Where's Peter?' 'He **might be** ill. He didn't look well yesterday.'*

- 3 Learners of English often express these concepts of future possibility with *perhaps* or *maybe ... will* and so avoid using *may* and *might*. However, these are widely used by native speakers, and you should try to use them.

### could

- 1 *Could* has a similar meaning to *might*.

*You **could be** right. I'm not sure.*  
*That film **could be** worth seeing. It's had decent reviews.*

- 2 *Couldn't* is not used to express a future possibility. The negative of *could* in this use is *might not*.

*You **might not be** right.*  
*That film **might not be** any good.*

- 3 *Couldn't* has a similar meaning to *can't* above, only slightly weaker.

*She **couldn't have** a ten-year-old daughter! She's only 21 herself.*

### Related verbs

Here are some related verb forms that express probability.

*William's so brainy. He's **bound to pass** the exam.*  
***Are you likely to come across** Judith while you're in Oxford?*

## ➔ 7.3 Uses of modal auxiliary verbs and related verbs

### Ability

- 1 *Can* expresses ability. The past is expressed by *could*.

*I **can** speak three languages.*  
*I **could** swim when I was three.*

- 2 Other forms use *be able to*.

*I've never **been able to** understand her. (Present Perfect)*  
*I'd love to **be able to** drive. (infinitive)*  
***Being able to** drive has transformed my life. (-ing form)*  
*You'll **be able to** walk again soon. (future)*

- 3 To express a fulfilled ability on one particular occasion in the past, *could* is not used. Instead, we use *was able to* or *managed to*.

*She **was able to** survive by clinging onto the wrecked boat.*  
*The prisoner **managed to** escape by climbing onto the roof.*

### Advice

- 1 *Should* and *ought to* express mild obligation or advice. *Should* is much more common.

*You **should** go to bed. You look very tired.*  
*You **ought to** take things easier.*

- 2 We use *had better* to give strong advice, or to tell people what to do. There can be an element of threat – 'If you don't do this, something bad will happen.'

*You'd **better** get a haircut before the interview. (If you don't, you won't get the job.) I'm late. I'd **better** get a move on. (If I don't, I'll be in trouble.)*

### Note

The form is always past (*had*), but it refers to the immediate future.

*She'd better start revising. The exams are next week.*

### Obligation

- 1 *Must* expresses strong obligation. Other verb forms use *have to*.

*You **must** try harder!*  
*You **mustn't** hit your baby brother.*  
*What time do you **have to** start work?*  
*I **had to** work hard to pass my exams. (Past Simple)*  
*You'll **have to** do this exercise again. (future)*  
*We might **have to** make some economies. (infinitive)*  
*She's **never had to** do a single day's work in her life. (Present Perfect)*  
*I hate **having to** get up early. (-ing form)*

- 2 *Must* is usually associated with a more formal, written style.

*Candidates **must** answer three questions. (On an exam paper)*  
*Books **must be** returned by the end of the week. (Instructions in a library)*

- 3 Informally, *must* expresses the opinion of the speaker.

*I **must** get my hair cut. (I am telling myself.)*  
*You **must** try harder. (Teacher to student.)*

- 4 *Have to* expresses an obligation based on a law or rule, or the authority of another person.

*Children **have to** go to school until they're 16. (It's the law.)*  
*Mum says you **have to** tidy your room.*

- 5 *Mustn't* expresses negative obligation. *Don't have to* expresses the absence of obligation.

*You **mustn't** steal. It's illegal.*  
*You **don't have to** go to England in order to learn English.*

- 6 *Have got to* is common in British English. It is more informal than *have to*.

*I've **got to** go now. Cheerio!*  
*Don't have a late night. We've **got to** get up early tomorrow.*

- 7 Here are some related verb forms that express obligation.

*Visitors **are required to** have a visa.*  
*When you're 18, you're **supposed to** take responsibility for yourself.*  
*You **aren't supposed to** park on double yellow lines.*  
*You **need to** think carefully before you make a decision.*  
*He **doesn't need to** work. He's a millionaire.*

### Permission

- 1 *May*, *can*, and *could* are used to ask for permission.

***May** I ask you a question?*  
***Can/Could** I borrow your car tonight?*

- 2 *May* can be used to give permission, but it sounds very formal. *Can* and *can't* are more common.

*You **can** use a dictionary in this exam.*  
*You **can't** stay up till midnight. You're only five.*

- 3 To talk about permission generally, or permission in the past, we use *can*, *could*, or *be allowed to*.

*Children **can/are allowed to** do what they want these days.*  
*I **couldn't** go out on my own until I was 16.*  
*I **wasn't allowed to** go out on my own until I was 16.*

- 4 Here are some related verb forms that express permission.

*Passengers **are not permitted to** use mobile phones.*  
*My parents **don't allow me to** ...*  
*I'm **not allowed to** stay out late.*  
*My parents **don't let** me ...*