

English Modal Verbs Table

Modal verb	
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	for polite requests, offers and invitations	- Would you please sit down? - Would you like some tea? - We are meeting with Sarah next Saturday, would you like to come along?
	to say what you want to do or have	I would like a piece of cake.
ought to	the right thing to do	You ought to apologize.

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English Modal Verbs – Situations Table

Situation	Modal Verb	Example
requests (formal)	may	May I sit down?
requests (informal)	can	Can I sit down?
requests (polite)	could	Could I sit down?
requests (polite)	would	Would you mind if I sit down?
permission (formal)	may	You may sit down.
permission (informal)	can	You can sit down.
obligation (full)	must	You must tell the police the truth.
obligation (partial)	should	You should tell your friends the truth.
obligation (partial) (less common)	ought to	You ought to tell your friends the truth.
logical conclusions (stronger than "should")	must	He left an hour ago, so he must be there already.
logical conclusions (weaker than "must")	should	He left half an hour ago, I believe he should be there already.
possibility (general)	can	It can rain sometimes.
possibility (weaker than "may" and "might")	could	It could rain, but it is not very common in this part of the country.
possibility (weaker than "may")	might	It's not very cloudy yet, but it might rain.

possibility (stronger than "might")	may	It's starting to get cloudy – it may rain soon.
future actions/states/intentions	will	Look at the sky! It will rain soon.