

Modal auxiliaries

In English, we use modal auxiliary verbs to express ideas such as possibility, ability, obligation and compulsion. It is often possible to use the same auxiliary to express different ideas. For example, we can use 'can' to talk about ability and possibility.

Test your understanding of modal auxiliary verbs with this grammar exercise.

Complete the following sentences using appropriate modal auxiliary verbs. The idea that you should express is indicated in the brackets.

1. I be there before 8 o'clock.
(compulsion)

must
would
ought
will

2. you lend me a few dollars?
(polite request)

Would
Could
Either could be used here

3. You not have done this to me.
(criticism)

Modal auxiliaries

should

would

Either could be used here

4. She be driving now. (probability)

must

would

can

5. It rain in the evening. (weak possibility)

might

can

may

6. You not have waited for them. (lack of necessity)

need

can

may

must

Modal auxiliaries

7. I wait any longer? (necessity)

Need
Can
May
Will

8. You to follow traffic rules.
(obligation)

should
ought
must

9. I turn the heating on? (necessity)

Need
Should
Either could be used here

10. You have helped me. Why did
you just sit and watch? (criticism)

should
could
Either could be used here

Modal auxiliaries

Answers

1. I must be there before 8 o'clock. (compulsion)
2. Would / Could you lend me a few dollars? (polite request)
3. You should not have done this to me. (criticism)
4. She must be driving now. (probability)
5. It might rain in the evening. (weak possibility)
6. You need not have waited for them. (lack of necessity)
7. Need I wait any longer? (necessity)
8. You ought to follow traffic rules. (obligation)
9. Should / Need I turn the heating on? (necessity)
10. You could / should have helped me. Why did you just sit and watch? (criticism)