

Obligation and freedom to act

We use modal auxiliary verbs to express various aspects of obligation and freedom. These uses of modal verbs are very important in the polite expression of requests, invitations and instructions.

Strong obligation

We can express strong obligation using **must** and **need**. In orders, we sometimes use **will** to express strong obligation.

You **must** send your application on or before the 18th of this month.

They **must** pay the dues.

We **must** learn to cooperate.

You **need** a visa to visit foreign countries.

He **needs** to improve his communication skills.

She **needs** to work harder.

All students **will** hand in their assignments by Friday. (This is actually an order.)

She **will** clean the floors whether she likes it or not.

Prohibition

To prohibit we can use the auxiliaries **must not**, **may not** and **cannot**.

Students **must not** use the staff car park.

You **may not** smoke in the kitchen.

Books **may not** be taken out of the library.

You **can't** wear that dress to work.

She **can't** do it.

Weak obligation; recommendation

These ideas are expressed using the auxiliary verbs **should**, **ought**, **had better**, **might** and **shall**.

You **should** stop smoking.

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He ought to sort things out.

You had better get that mole checked.

She really ought to mend her ways.

You might ask his opinion.

What shall we do now?