MODAL VERBS

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Obligation/duty/necessity

- Must (strong obligation to do sth which the speaker has decided is necessary). *I must start going to the gym regularly.*

- have to: (strong obligation/necessity, when somebody other than the speaker has decided that is necessary). *My doctor says that I have to start going to the gym regularly.*

- *Jim's mum keeps telling him that he has to brush his teeth.*

Moral obligation

- should/ought to (less emphatic than must, when sth is the right thing to do). *You ought to respect older people.*

- Shouldn't *You shouldn't talk to your parents like that. Try showing some more respect. After all, they are your parents.* (it's the right thing to do).

Absence of necessity

- don't have to/don't need to/needn't (when sth isn't necessary to do in the present or in the future). *Her arm has healed; she doesn't have to wear a cast.*

- *You don't need to lose weight.*

- *You needn't buy any lettuce for salad; we have plenty at home.*

Permission

- Can/may/could (to ask/give permission. May is more formal than can. Could is the most formal of the three). *Can/May/Could I borrow your recipe book this week?*

- Can (when you are allowed to do sth) *Julie can stay up late tonight because there is no school tomorrow.*

Prohibition/lack of permission

- Mustn't/can't (when it is forbidden to do sth). *You mustn't/can't use your mobile phone while the plane is landing.*

Inability

- Can't (to express inability in the present/future).
  Nicole can play the piano beautifully (She is able to).
  George can't play the violin (He isn't able to).

Offers/suggestions

- Can *Can I get you another serving of pasta? (Would you like me to ....?* (Informal).

- Would *Would you like some more fruit salad?* (Do you want...?)

- Shall *Shall I help you chop the vegetables?* (Would you like me to...?/Do you want me to...?)

- Can/Could *We can find something better to do than watch TV all weekend. You could go for a walk on the beach tomorrow morning.* (Let's .../Why don't you...?)

Probability

- Will *Beth will finish the marathon; she would never give up* (It's 100% certain).

- Should/ought to *William should/ought to win the race; he has been training hard for it!* (It's 90% certain; it's probable).

Advice

- Should *You should/ought to try doing exercising more* (I advise you to…/it's a good idea/it's a good thing to do.)

Read the following statements and identify their linguistic function.

- *We should eat more fruit and vegetables; we will feel more energetic.*
- *I must start exercising more.*
- *James may go to the gym tomorrow.*
- *Jess should go to bed earlier on weekdays.*
- *You don't have to attend the gym session today.*
- *You may be surprised to hear that many vegetables have herbal qualities.*
- *You should always read the label of products before you consume them.*
- *I mustn't take this medication until I've checked with my doctor.*