

WHAT ARE MODAL VERBS?

A modal verb is a verb that is used in combination with a normal verb. While auxiliary verbs help make questions and negatives and put a verb in a particular tense, **modal verbs** add a special meaning. For example, the phrase

“They go to school” can change meaning with a modal verb in the following ways:

They must go to school. = They have an obligation to go.

They can go to school. = They have the possibility to go.

They might go to school. = It's possible they will go to school.

Modal verbs can express obligation, advice, permission, offers, the future, and possibility.

May and Might

May and *might* are modal verbs that can have a similar meaning. They can be used to describe two ideas:

- Possibility (in the past, present or future)
- Permission

Possibility in the Present

We can use both *may* and *might* to express a possibility or make a prediction. For example,

Tom might win this game. He's been playing very well recently.

We may go out later. I'm not sure.

Do you think the company might hire more people next year?

Permission

When we ask and give permission we often use *may* as an alternative to *can*. For example,

May I come in?

May we sit here? - Yes, you may.

May I leave early Sir? - No, you may not.

Reference:

Wall Street English (s.f.). The Modal Verbs May and Might.

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