

AMERICAN MODAL USE

PRESENT PAST

FUNCTION , USE , AND SENSE

SOCIAL INTERACTION

CAN

COULD¹
Do

ABILITY & OPPORTUNITY

I **couldn't** do it yesterday;
I **can** do it, today **or** tomorrow,
but I **can't** do it Friday.
= **won't be able to**

CONDITIONAL imPOSSIBILITY

If you speak English well,
you **can** work there.
You **can't** do that
if you don't know how.

EMPATHY & SURPRISE

Perception & Cognition Verbs
I **can** see your point.
I **can** understand.
I **can't** believe it!

COULD¹ & COULD²

Past Marker or Past Context Needed
I **could** run faster + **when I was young**.
1 or 2? → 1!

REQUESTS

Hey man, **can** you help me?
Can I go to the bathroom?
OFFERS
Can I help you with that?

PERMISSION

COULD²

COULD²
Have Done

POSSIBILITY & IMPOSSIBILITY

We **could** be there soon
if we don't hit traffic.
He **couldn't** be there yet;
he just left here.



We **could have** been there on time
if we had not hit traffic.
He **couldn't have** been there;
he was with me at the time.

SUGGESTIONS

You **could** try
asking the teacher.
You **could have** tried
calling me for help.

COULD¹ CAN'T BE USED FOR
ABILITY ON SINGLE OCCASION or **SUCCESS**
incorrect → I **couldn't** finish it last night.
Use → I **was able to** finish it last night.
However → I **couldn't** finish it last night.
cf. → I **could** have finished it last night.

REQUESTS

Excuse me sir, **could** you help me?
Could I use your restroom?

PERMISSION

WILL

WOULD¹
Do

FUTURE ACTION

It **will** start at nine.
It **won't** start a minute earlier.

VOLUNTARY ACTIONS

I'll get the door.
I **said I would** get the door.

CERTAINTY & EXPECTATIONS

That **will** be Tom at the door.

Will for **Certainty** is more British;
Americans prefer **Must** or **Should**.

WOULD¹ & WOULD²

Indicative & Subjunctive
boundaries are **subtle** & often **unspoken**.

PREDICTIONS & WARNINGS

You **will** need this. You **said I would** need this.
He **was** sure that it **would** end badly.
I'll **have** finished by the time you get back.
What **will** people say?

PROMISES & REFUSALS

I **will** pay you back next week.
I **won't** do that.
He **wouldn't** do it last week.

This **use of Will** does not mark time
& differs from **Predictions** in that
it requires **special knowledge**.
e.g. You **will have** heard by now.
I'm sure you **will have** guessed
at what I'm about to say.

I - That **will** be Tom at the door now;
I'm expecting him.
S - That **would probably** be Tom at the door.
I - That **wouldn't** work **when I tried it**.
S - That **wouldn't have** worked; **I think**.

REQUESTS & IMPERATIVES

Will you help me with this?
I'll help you with that?
Won't you try some?
You **will** help him or else!

SPONTANEOUS OFFERS

WOULD²

WOULD²
Have Done

CONDITIONALS

He **would** do it **if** you wanted him to.
I **would** go **if** I could.
If it would just stop raining, I could...
I **would** say (if I **had to**) that ...

DESIRES

I **would like** (infinitive).
I **wish** it **would** stop.
I **wouldn't** want that.
I **wouldn't have** had it any other way.

INSISTENCE

He **would** do that, **wouldn't** he?
HE would say that, but **SHE wouldn't**.
Strong Word Stress =
criticism of action/behaviour.
Unspoken condition is
"if that person were there."

DRUTHERS & PREFERENCES

1. would **rather** (verb than verb)*
I'd **rather** live than die.
2. would **prefer** (infinitive)*
3. would **prefer** (noun TO noun)*
I'd **prefer** living to dying.
*I **will** prefer to do it.

REQUESTS

Would you **show** me how to use this?
Would you be so kind as to offer me...?
Would you mind showing me how to ... ?
You **wouldn't** mind if I sat here, **would** you?
*see Social Interaction Table

PERMISSION

Mind + Clause*

REPETITION & STATES IN THE PAST

Past Tense Marker Required
adverb, phrase, or clause

When I was a kid, I **would** usually hang out by the school.
When I lived in San Jose, I **would** often see people doing that.
I **used** to eat there a lot, and I **would** always order the special.

= **used to**

MUST

MUST
Have Done

OBLIGATIONS & PROHIBITION

You **must** be very careful.
You **must** have a ticket to enter.
You **mustn't** do that here.

STRONG RECOMMENDATIONS

You **mustn't** forget your medication.
You **must** get some sleep!
Rare in America; "should" preferred.

CERTAINTY & INFERENCE

You **must** be very careless.
You **must** not be from around here.
You **must** have the wrong number!

CONCLUSION (Very Certain)

He **must** not **have** gotten my message,
he always calls back.
They **must** not **have** finished yet,
the tools are still out.

EMPHATIC INVITATION

You **must** try this cake!
You **must** call me!

SHOULD

SHOULD
Have Done

SUGGESTIONS

You **should** try it.
You **should have** called sooner.
You **shouldn't** worry so much.

MILD OBLIGATIONS

You **shouldn't** do that.
You really **should** tell her.
Should I?

IDIOOMATIC IMPERATIVES

Should you get lost,
don't hesitate to call.
I **should** think so.

EXPECTATION (Certain)

It **should** be there.
It **should have** been there.
He **should have** done it by now.

UNCERTAIN OFFERS

Should I help you with that?

MIGHT

MIGHT
Have Done

SUGGESTIONS (+TRY)

You **might** try asking her.
You **might have** tried the other door.

POSSIBILITY

It **might** rain; it **might** not.
They **might** not **have** finished yet.

CONDITIONALS

If we drive all night,
we **might actually** get there on time.

CONCLUSION (Less Probable)

He **might have** been in an accident;
he's over an hour late.

EMPHATIC OFFERS

Might I offer you some cake?

MAY

MAY
Have Done

Might is **Past Tense of May**; thus,
In Written English **Might** is preferred over **May**
for **Past Possibility**

POSSIBILITY

It **may** rain; it **may** not.
He **may** not **have** finished yet.

CONDITIONALS

If we drive all night, we **may** get there
on time, but **probably not**.

CONCLUSION (More Probable)

He **may have** got stuck in traffic;
he's only five minutes late

Prohibition & Permission

You **may not** do that.
You **may** help yourself.
May I be excused?
May I help you?

Permission & Offers

MAYBE

ADVERB NOT MODAL

He **may be** American
Maybe he is American

ERRORS

He **maybe** go there.
He **maybe** have done it.



Mark Wynn



SHALL

LIMITED IDIOMATIC USAGE IN AMERICA

*

Formal Suggestions - "shall we + verb" = "let's + verb"

*

British Use is more extensive and similar to **WILL**

MODAL AUXILIARIES PHRASAL MODALS

"PHRASAL AUXILIARIES" ARE **UNLIKE** PURE MODALS

because

- they show Person
- Tense changes Sense
- are Frozen Idiomatic Forms

I **have** to go. He **has** to go.
He **had** to go. **✗** He **has** to **have** gone.
He **ought** to have **let** us go.

HAVE TO
"hafta"
"hasta"

HAD TO*
[or]
Have To
Have Done**

OBLIGATIONS *

You **hafta** do your homework.
I **had** to help her with it. *
You will **hafta** wait another hour.

NECESSITY (Lack of) *

You **hafta** eat to live.
You **don't hafta** eat ice cream.
You **didn't hafta** do that. *

CERTAINTY **

It **hafta** be here somewhere.
He **hafta have** finished by now. **
They **hafta have** heard that. **

Negative Must & Hafta

Prohibition
You **mustn't**; it's illegal.
Lack of Necessity *
You can if you wanna, but you **don't hafta**.

Positive Must & Hafta

External Obligation (either)
I **must/hafta** tell you about **our** rules.
Internal Obligation (hafta)
I **hafta** tell you because I **wanna**.

HAD BETTER
Have Done

STRONG SUGGESTIONS

You **had better** study for the test.
I'd **better** see a doctor.
Hadn't we **better** tell her?

WARNING

You'd **better** not go in there.
You **had better have** paid the bill.

DESPERATE HOPE

They **had better** get here soon,
It **had better** rain soon.

INFORMAL SPEECH

"**had**" often dropped
You **better** hurry!
You **better have** done it!

"HAD" = **SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD**
and is **NOT PAST TENSE**
"Had Best" is a less frequent variant.

HAVE GOT TO
"gotta"

Have Got To
Have Done**

OBLIGATIONS & NECESSITY

You **have got to** remember this next time.
Haven't you **got to** go to work? +
We **gotta** be there til ten. ++ / +

EMPHATIC SUGGESTIONS

You **have got to** try this cake.
You **gotta** see this movie. ++

CERTAINTY **

It's **got to** be here.
You've **gotta** be kidding me.
He **has gotta have** heard by now. **

INFORMAL SPEECH ++

"**have**" often dropped
with obligations and suggestions

NEGATIVES +

switch to "Have To" unless
"Haven't You" - questions of future obligations
"Don't Gotta" - lack of necessity (+ informal)

OUGHT TO
"oughta"

OUGHT TO
Have Done

SUGGESTIONS

You **ought to** try this; it's delicious.
You **ought not (to) have** done that. *

EXPECTATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

It **ought to** begin about 8.
It **ought to have** been where I left it.

***NEGATIVES** may drop "to".
Americans Prefer **Should Not**.
Can **Not** be used in **questions**.

OBLIGATION & PROHIBITION

You're **supposed to** know this.
You're not **supposed to** be here.

EXPECTATION (Unfulfilled)

It is **supposed to** come today.
(He **wasn't supposed to** tell you.)

EXPECTATIONS are **EXTERNAL**
(rules, customs, agreements)
and **NOT PREDICTIONS**

OBLIGATION

They **are to be** married.

RARE but STRONG & FORMAL

You **are to** leave at dawn & report at dusk.

OCCASIONALLY IDIOMATIC

What **am I to** do?

AM ABLE TO
WAS ABLE TO

ABILITY

You **are able to** read this.
We **were able to** make it.
I **won't be able to** call him.

More FORMAL & FLEXIBLE than Can

Will you **be able to** come tomorrow?
He **should have been able to** do it?

Positive Singular Actions in Past

I **was able to** finish it last night,
but he **couldn't** finish it.

AM GOING TO
"gonna"

WAS GOING TO

FUTURE (planned or certain)

I'm **going to** fly home.
You're **going to** grow old.

VISIBLE PREDICTION

You're **going to** drop that.
It sure looks like it's **gonna** rain.

UNFULFILLED INTENTIONS

I **was going to** call him,
but I **couldn't** / **wasn't able to**.

AM ABOUT TO
WAS ABOUT TO

IMMEDIATE PLANS & INTENTIONS

I **was about to** tell you.
He's **fixing to** head out. (Southern Variant)

More Informal & Immediate than Will

Negatives have Two Ways to Contract
I'm **not gonna** = I **ain't** gonna
She's **not gonna** = She **isn't** gonna
We're **not gonna** = We **aren't** gonna

Suggests more Control than Will

I'm **gonna** call her now;
I hope she'll answer.

USED TO

REPETITION IN THE PAST

I **used to use** an Apple; now I **use** a PC.

PAST SITUATION no longer existing

There **used to** be a school there.

No Past Marker Needed.

Easily Confused with
"Be Used" & "Get Used To".

LET'S

SUGGESTIONS & ENCOURAGEMENTS

Let's keep going!
Let's try again.

MODAL IMPERATIVE vs. TRUE IMPERATIVE

Let's move along now. **Let us** go!

MODAL vs. REGULAR VERB

Let's go. The boss **let us** go early. (he allowed us)

PROBABILITY RANGE for PREDICTIONS, INFERENCES, and CONCLUSIONS

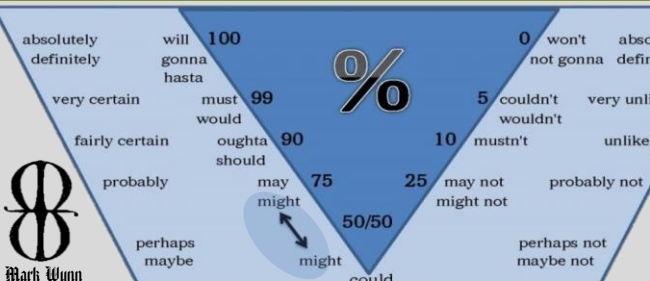
SOCIAL INTERACTION

OFFERS

PERMISSION

REQUESTS

IMPERATIVE FUNCTIONS



Adding Please

to any **Permission** or **Request**
raises formality, but **TONE** overrides all.

REQUESTS: MIND + GERUND

Would you mind **helping** me?
Do you mind **opening** the door?

PERMISSION & OFFERS: MIND + CLAUSE

Would you mind if I **help** myself?
Do you mind if I **help** myself?

Would adds **Willingness** to question.
Could adds **Possibility** to question.



MOST FORMAL

Might I offer some assistance?
MAY I help you?



COULD I help you?

CAN I help you?

LEAST FORMAL

PERMISSION

MAY I (might*)
Am I permitted to leave?
Am I allowed to go?



COULD I

CAN I

Is it okay if I leave?

REQUESTS

WOULD YOU
WILL YOU



COULD YOU

CAN YOU

DO IT

IMPERATIVE FUNCTIONS

Instructions - Cook it for an hour.
Directions - Turn right at Main Street.
Warning - Watch out for traffic.
Advice - Get some sleep.
Appeal - Please drive safely.
Prayer - Forgive us of our sins.

Please do this for me.

!

