

# UNIT 5

## Modal Verbs

- ◆ The verbs *can, could, may, might, must, will, would, shall, should* and *ought* are **modal verbs**. They do not take a suffix (-s, -ing or -ed). e.g. *He should stay here.* They are followed by a bare infinitive, except for *ought* which is followed by a to-infinitive. e.g. *They may come tonight. You ought to get a job.* They go before

the subject in questions and are followed by *not* in negations. e.g. *Can I say something? I couldn't understand him.* Modal verbs do not usually have tenses. They can refer to the present or the future. e.g. *I must go now.* (present) *You must call me early tomorrow morning.* (future)

### Ability (Can-Could-Be able to)



He **was able to** climb up the tree.

*Can* is used in the present and future. *Could* is the past tense of *can*. We use **be able to** to form all the other tenses.

- ◆ **Can = be able to** - ability in the present  
e.g. *Tom can play the guitar.*
- ◆ **will be able to** - ability in the future  
e.g. *When you graduate, you will be able to get a job.*  
**But** we use *can* when we decide now about something we will do in the near future.  
e.g. *I haven't got any money now, but I can pay you tomorrow. (= I decide now about something I will do tomorrow.)*
- ◆ **Could = used to be able to** ability in the past (repeated past action)  
We can use **was/were able to** with no difference in meaning.  
e.g. *I could/was able to run fast when I was young.*
- ◆ **was/were able to** = managed to do ability in the past (single past action)  
We use **was/were able to** to show that someone had the ability to do something in a particular situation in the past.  
e.g. *Although it was dark, he was able to find his way.*
- ◆ We normally use **could** with the verbs *see, hear, smell, taste, feel, understand, guess* and *remember*.  
e.g. *She listened carefully and she could hear people talking in the next room.*  
(NOT: ... ~~she was able to hear~~ ...)
- ◆ In negations we can use **couldn't** or **wasn't/weren't able to** with no difference in meaning.  
e.g. *I couldn't/wasn't able to reach him on the phone.*

### Obligation/Duty/Necessity (Must-Have to-Should/Ought-Need)



Everyone **should** recycle their rubbish.

We use *must* to refer to the present or future.

- ◆ **must** = *it is your duty/you are obliged to do sth*  
e.g. *You must listen to your teacher.*
- ◆ **have to** = *it is necessary to do sth*  
e.g. *We have to be at the airport at 9 o'clock.*  
We use *must* when the speaker decides that something is necessary. We use *have to* when somebody else other than the speaker has made the decision.  
e.g. *I must finish the report by tomorrow. (The speaker decides.)*  
*I have to finish the report by tomorrow. (Somebody else has made the decision.)*
- ◆ **Must** and **have to** have different meanings in questions.  
e.g. *Must I tidy my room? (= Do you insist that I tidy my room?)*  
*Do I have to tidy my room? (= Is it necessary for me to tidy my room?)*
- ◆ **Have got to** has the same meaning as *have to*, and is often used in everyday speech.  
e.g. *'I've got to phone Mum tonight.'*
- ◆ We use *have to* when we need to use other tenses.  
e.g. *We had to call for the doctor when Aunt Lucy fainted last night.*
- ◆ **should/ought** (less emphatic than *must*)  
**Should** and **ought** express duty.  
e.g. *People should take/ought to take better care of the environment.*
- ◆ **need** = *it is necessary to*  
e.g. *Need I talk to the boss right away?*