



Use modal verbs like *can* or *may* and adverbs like *surely* or *perhaps* to express probability when you need people to understand perfectly well.

## Modals & Adverbs for Probability

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Sometimes we want to express what we think about the future with a definite degree of probability, as in “This will doubtlessly happen” or “That could never be”.

How to be so precise? We can do it by mixing modal verbs like *will* or *could* with adverbs such as *definitely*, *probably* and others.

See the examples below—where I’ve underlined modal verbs so they’re easy to recognize.

## Sure

When you are certain something will happen use will, definitely, certainly, doubtlessly, inevitably, absolutely or surely.

- Modal alone It *will* rain. Look at those dark clouds.
- Adverb alone She's *absolutely* the best candidate.
- Modal + adverb It *will certainly* work.

## Likely

If you think chances are not one hundred per cent but still high you can use should. Adverbs? Try with probably, apparently or seemingly.

- Modal alone It *should* rain. The weather man said so.
- Adverb alone The plane *apparently* lands at 10.00 PM.
- Modal + adverb He *should probably* break the record. He *trained hard*.

## Possible

When there's about half the chance of something occurring we use could with perhaps, possibly, feasibly or maybe.

- Modal alone He *could* arrive in the next few minutes.
- Adverb alone There have *possibly* been many people affected by the bankruptcy.
- Modal + adverb We *could maybe* lend you the money but you must promise you won't invest in gold again.

## Unlikely

If possibilities are not that high but there's still a chance, we can use may or might (might is less probable), doubtfully or improbably. However we can't combine these modals and

adverbs so we have to choose one or the other!

- Modal alone They *might* win. Our team is in low form.
- Adverb alone She'll *doubtfully* arrive on time. The bus is late.

### **Impossible**

When there are zero possibilities apply won't or can't. If you prefer an adverb, go for never, which is short and direct.

Again, we can't use two negative words in the same phrase so it's not possible to mix these modals with never.

- Modal alone That *can't* be done. We *won't* allow it.
- Adverb alone She *never* agrees to my proposals.

Andrew's advice: We have the tools to be accurate so why not use them? Listeners and readers will appreciate our clarity.

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