



Use modal verbs to ask for things, for favours, for advice and for everything else.

Use Modal Verbs for Requests

English has wonderful words called modal verbs. They are great because they transmit information in a simple way. Today we will see how they can help us make requests.

Making requests with can, could, may or might

When we want to ask for something we can choose from several options, where *can* is the most direct and *might* is the most polite—as well as the least common. See the examples below, which I have ordered from informal to formal.

Can. You'd like to borrow a pen from a friend so you say "Can I borrow your pen, Fred?" It's direct, easy and informal.

Could. Now you're telling a teacher you won't finish an assignment on time. "Could I hand the project in on Wednesday instead of today please?" Still direct, still easy but more formal.

May. You're at your boss's home for dinner and your telephone rings. It's your mother so you do have to answer. "May I be excused for a minute? It's my mother calling and she hasn't been well lately." Polite but not too common. Use it only in formal circumstances.

Might. The company's general manager is at an important meeting but you have to interrupt her. You knock on the door and say: "Might I interrupt you for a minute, Ms Hopkins? Something urgent has come up." Uncommon and extremely respectful. Only for very few situations.

There are many modal verbs in English. Here we have included some of the most common for requests.

Most of these words have other meanings. For instance, could is also the past of can and should can be used to imply obligation.

Asking for advice with should

Should. You don't know whether to present plan A or plan B to your boss so you want to ask a colleague for advice. One of the most common ways to do this is by using should, as in "Should I offer them option A or B?" Other examples are "What do you think, should we paint the office next year?", "Should we set up the new factory in Spain?" or "Should I ask for a raise now?"



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