

Modals

The modal verbs are :

- can
- may
- must
- Shall
- could
- might
- should
- Would

We use modals to show if we believe something is certain, possible or impossible:

- My keys must be in the car.
- It might rain tomorrow.
- That can't be Peter's coat. It's too small.

We also use them to do things like talk about ability, ask permission, and make requests and offers:

- I can't swim.
- May I ask a question?
- Could I have some tea, please?
- Would you like some help?

Semi-Modals

What Are Semi-modal Verbs?

Semi-modal verbs (also known as quasi-modal verbs or marginal modal verbs) are a group of verbs in English that share some features with modal verbs but are not true modals. Unlike modal verbs, semi-modal verbs can be inflected for tense and person, and they can take 'do' as an auxiliary verb in negative and interrogative sentences. Semi-modals are used to express necessity and obligation or give advice.

Some of the common semi-modals in English are:

- Ought to
- Had better
- Dare
- Need
- Used to
- Have to
- Functions and Properties
- Ought to

Ought to

"Ought to" is a semi-modal verb in English that is used to express obligation or duty, often indicating a moral or ethical obligation. It is similar in meaning to "should," but is considered more formal and less common in everyday conversation.

The properties of ought to:

- Shows mood ✓
- Describes the action of main verb ✓
- Can be used to form questions and negative statements ✓
- Can be used with another modal verb ✗
- Can be inflected ✗
- Can be used with to-infinitive and -ing form ✗

Unlike modal verbs, 'ought to' ends with the particle 'to', but like modal verbs, it is followed by the base form of the verb and has the same form for all persons. Take a look at some examples:

- They ought to be angry about this discord .
- You ought to be vomiting after drinking nine bottles of water .

Had Better

"Had better" is a fixed expression often classified as a semi-modal verb, as it shares some characteristics with modal verbs but is not a true modal verb.

"Had better" is typically used to talk about a present or future situation, not a past one. It is used to suggest that a particular course of action is the best or most advisable thing to do in a given situation.

The properties of had better:

- Shows mood ✓
- Describes the action of main verb ✓
- Can be used to form questions and negative statements ✗
- Can be used with another modal verb ✗

- Can be inflected X
- Can be used with to-infinitive and -ing form X

Now take a look at some examples:

- He had better be gone by now.
- You had better talk to the principal.

Need

The properties of the semi-modal need:

- Shows mood ✓
- Describes the action of main verb ✓
- Can be used to form questions and negative statements ✓
- Can be used with another modal verb ✓
- Can be inflected X
- Can be used with to-infinitive and -ing form ✓

'Need' is another verb in English that can be both a main verb and a semi-modal verb. 'Need' as a main verb means to require something and think something is important to have or to be obligated to do something.

- Alex needs help .
- She needs some money to buy a new car .

Semi-modal 'need' is not inflected for person or tense, and it can be used with or without 'to' before the following verb. In its semi-modal form, "need" is used to express necessity or obligation, similar to "must" or "have to."

- They need to be here for the ceremony .
- You need not stay in a relationship just because you cannot break his heart .

Used to

We use 'used to' to say that an action happened continuously, habitually, or frequently during a period in the past, but not any longer.

The properties of the semi-modal used to:

- Shows mood ✓
- Describes the action of main verb ✓
- Can be used to form questions and negative statements X
- Can be used with another modal verb X
- Can be inflected X
- Can be used with to-infinitive and -ing form X

Now take a look at some examples:

- Gianni used to have long hair .
- Didn't you use to smoke ?

Going to

We use 'going to' to express our intention or plan to do something in the future. The decision or plan is made before speaking and may involve some preparation or arrangement.

The table below summarizes the properties of the semi-modal going to:

- Shows mood ✓
- Describes the action of main verb ✓
- Can be used to form questions and negative statements ✓
- Can be used with another modal verb ✗
- Can be inflected ✗
- Can be used with to-infinitive and -ing form ✗

Pay attention to the examples:

- I am going to be in London next week .
- She is going to wash the dishes .

Have to

'Have to' is used to indicate a present obligation or necessity to do something. It can be used to express certainty, give advice, describe annoying events, or indicate obligations.

The table below summarizes the properties of the semi-modal have to:

- Shows mood ✓
- Describes the action of main verb ✓
- Can be used to form questions and negative statements ✗
- Can be used with another modal verb ✓
- Can be inflected ✗
- Can be used with to-infinitive and -ing form ✗

Take a look at some examples:

- We have to do the dishes as soon as possible .
- You have to sleep well to be ready for the exam.