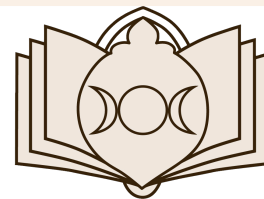


Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

01 / Meaning first, grammar second | A2-B2

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom

One little verb can turn advice into an order. Let's keep the grammar gremlins out of your social life.

The map: what do you want to say?

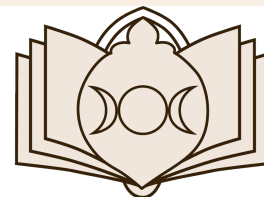
Meaning / význam	Useful forms	Example + Czech meaning
Ability / schopnost	can / could / be able to	I can swim. = Umím plavat.
Permission / dovolení	can / may / be allowed to	You can leave. = Můžeš odejít.
Request / prosba	can / could / would	Could you help me? = Mohl/a bys mi pomoci?
Obligation / povinnost	must / have to / need to	I have to work. = Musím pracovat.
Prohibition / zákaz	mustn't / can't	You mustn't enter. = Nesmíš vstoupit.
No obligation / není nutné	don't have to / don't need to / needn't	You don't have to come. = Nemusíš přijít.
Advice / rada	should / ought to	You should rest. = Měl/a by sis odpočinout.
Possibility / možnost	may / might / could	It might rain. = Možná bude pršet.
Deduction / úsudek	must / can't	She must be tired. = Určitě je unavená.

Translation is a clue, not a formula

Czech můžu can mean ability, permission or possibility. English chooses forms according to the meaning. Start with the situation, then choose the verb. A dictionary cannot read your mind. Yet.



Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

02 / How to build the sentence

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom



Core modal rule	Example
Subject + modal + base verb	She can swim. / He should study.
No -s after he / she / it	He can cook. NOT He cans cook.
No to after a core modal	You must go. NOT You must to go.
Negative: modal + not	cannot / can't; should not / shouldn't
Question: modal + subject + base verb	Can you swim? NOT Do you can swim?
Short answer: repeat the modal	Can she come? Yes, she can. / No, she can't.

Some useful forms follow different rules

Form	Statement	Negative / question
have to	She has to work.	She doesn't have to work. Does she have to work?
need to	He needs to leave.	He doesn't need to leave. Does he need to leave?
be able to	She is able to swim.	She isn't able to swim. Is she able to swim?
ought to	You ought to rest.	You ought not to ignore it. Should is more usual in questions.

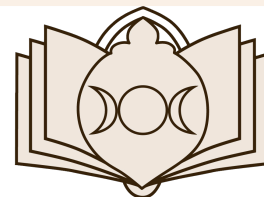
Needn't + base verb is also possible: You needn't wait. It is more common in British English and often sounds more formal than don't need to. Ought to keeps its to. Yes, there is an exception. Naturally.

Do not stack core modals

Say I will be able to come, not I will can come.
Say I may have to work, not I may must work.



Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

03 / MUSTN'T vs DON'T HAVE TO: the essential difference

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom



MUSTN'T = NESMÍŠ	DON'T HAVE TO = NEMUSÍŠ
It is forbidden. Do not do it.	It is not necessary. You can choose.
You mustn't park here. Tady nesmíš parkovat.	You don't have to park here. Nemusíš parkovat tady; můžeš jinde.
You mustn't pay with cash. Hotovost není povolena.	You don't have to pay with cash. Hotovost není nutná; můžeš použít kartu.
You mustn't come in. Nesmíš vstoupit.	You don't have to come in. Nemusíš vstupovat. Je to na tobě.

Same situation, different message

A museum sign says: You mustn't touch the paintings. = zákaz.

A friend says: You don't have to visit every room. = není to nutné.

One protects the artwork. The other protects your tired feet.

Also expresses prohibition	Also expresses no obligation
You can't take photos here. Tady se nesmí fotografovat.	You don't need to bring a camera. Nemusíš si brát fotoaparát.
You aren't allowed to enter. Nemáš dovoleno vstoupit.	You needn't book in advance. Nemusíš rezervovat předem.

A dangerous translation trap

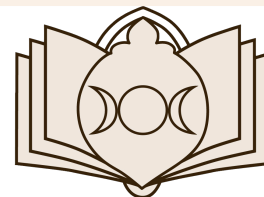
Mustn't is not the English translation of nemusíš.

Mustn't = nesmíš. Don't have to = nemusíš.

These meanings deserve separate drawers in your brain.



Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

04 / MUST, HAVE TO, NEED TO and SHOULD

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom



Form	Meaning / typical focus	Example
must	Strong obligation; often the speaker's insistence or an official rule.	I must send this today. Musím to dnes poslat.
have to	Necessity; often caused by rules or circumstances.	I have to wear a uniform at work. V práci musím nosit uniformu.
need to	Something is necessary to reach a goal or meet a need.	I need to charge my phone. Potřebuji nabít telefon.
should / ought to	Advice or what is a good idea; weaker than an order.	You should save a copy. Měl/a by sis uložit kopii.

Must and have to often overlap. "Internal vs external obligation" is a useful tendency, not an absolute rule: official signs can use must. Context and tone matter.

Order or advice?

You must wear a helmet. = It is required.

You should wear a helmet. = I recommend it.

You shouldn't share your password. = advice against doing it.

You mustn't share your password. = prohibition.

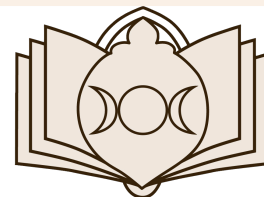
Past and future obligations

Time	Obligation	No obligation
Past	I had to work yesterday.	I didn't have to work yesterday.
Future	I'll have to work tomorrow.	I won't have to work tomorrow.

Use had to for a past obligation, not musted. Must can refer to a future obligation: I must call tomorrow. Use will have to when you need that future verb form.



Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

05 / CAN, COULD and BE ABLE TO: ability

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom



Situation	Form	Example + meaning
Present ability	can / can't	I can speak Czech. Umím česky.
General past ability	could / couldn't	At ten, I could swim. V deseti jsem uměl/a plavat.
One successful past event	was / were able to; managed to	We managed to open the door. Podařilo se nám otevřít dveře.
One failed past event	couldn't / wasn't able to	I couldn't open the door yesterday. Včera jsem ty dveře nedokázal/a otevřít.
Future ability	will be able to	I'll be able to drive after I pass. Budu moci řídit, až udělám zkoušku.
After another modal / to	be able to	I want to be able to speak fluently. Chci umět mluvit plynule.

Why not COULD for every past success?

I could swim when I was six. = general ability.

I managed to swim to the shore yesterday. = one actual success.

For a specific affirmative achievement, usually choose managed to or was able to. With perception and mental processes, could is natural: I could hear the music.

Future possibility is another meaning

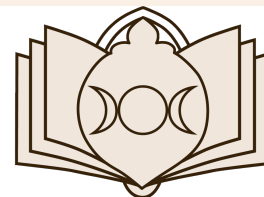
I could help you tomorrow. = a possible option or offer.

I'll be able to help you tomorrow. = future ability or availability.

Could is not always past. English enjoys recycling.



Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

06 / Permission, requests and polite questions

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom



Purpose	Example	What it means
Ask permission: neutral	Can I open the window?	Můžu otevřít okno?
Ask permission: polite	Could I open the window?	Mohl/a bych otevřít okno?
Ask permission: formal	May I open the window?	Smím otevřít okno?
Give permission	Yes, you can. / Yes, you may.	Ano, můžeš / smíš.
Request: neutral	Can you send me the file?	Můžeš mi poslat ten soubor?
Request: more polite	Could you send me the file?	Mohl/a bys mi poslat ten soubor?
Request: polite willingness	Would you help me, please?	Pomohl/a bys mi, prosím?

COULD does not make the request past

Could you help me now? is about now. Could adds politeness or distance. Tone still matters; please is not a magic wand.

Give permission with CAN or MAY

"Could I leave early?" → "Yes, you can."

Do not normally use "Yes, you could" to grant permission; it sounds like you are discussing a possibility.

WOULD YOU MIND...?

Would you mind opening the window? = Vadilo by vám otevřít okno?

Use -ing after mind. "No, not at all" means you do not mind and agree to do it. The yes/no logic follows mind, so a clear phrase helps.

Offers with SHALL

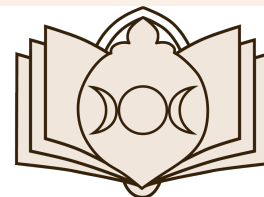
Shall I carry that? = Mám to vzít / odnést?

Shall we start? = Začneme?

Common with I / we for offers and suggestions, especially in British English.



Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

07 / MAY, MIGHT, COULD: possibility; MUST, CAN'T: deduction

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom



How certain is the speaker?	Example	Meaning
Possible, not certain	She may / might / could be at home.	Možná je doma.
Strong positive deduction	Her lights are on. She must be home.	Určitě / nejspíš je doma; usuzuji to.
Strong negative deduction	She's in Paris. She can't be home.	Nemůže být doma; to není možné.

No fixed probability percentages

May, might and could overlap when expressing a possibility. Might can sound more tentative, but there is no reliable "may = 50%, might = 30%" rule. A crystal ball with percentages is still a crystal ball.

CAN and COULD do different jobs here

Prague can be cold in winter. = general possibility; it sometimes is.

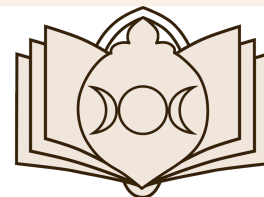
It could be cold tomorrow. = a specific uncertain possibility.

For a particular uncertain situation, use may / might / could rather than affirmative can.

Same verb, different meaning	Example
MUST: obligation	You must be home by ten. = Musíš být doma do deseti.
MUST: deduction	You must be tired. = Určitě jsi unavený/á.
CAN'T: inability	I can't swim. = Neumím plavat.
CAN'T: prohibition	You can't park here. = Nesmíš tu parkovat.
CAN'T: deduction	That can't be right. = To přece nemůže být správně.

May not / might not can mean "possibly not": She might not come. = Možná nepřijde. May not can also deny permission in formal contexts: You may not enter. = Nesmíte vstoupit. Read the situation.

Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

08 / WILL, WOULD and SHOULD: more than one job

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom



Form + use	Example	Meaning
will: decision / offer	I'll carry your bag.	Vezmu ti tašku. (Nabídka / rozhodnutí.)
will: promise	I'll call you tonight.	Večer ti zavolám. (Slib.)
will: prediction	I think it will rain.	Myslím, že bude pršet.
won't: refusal	He won't help us.	Odmítá nám pomoci. (Podle kontextu.)
would: imagined result	If I had time, I would help.	Kdybych měl/a čas, pomohl/a bych.
would: polite offer	Would you like some tea?	Dáš / dáte si čaj?
would: repeated past action	When we were children, we would play outside every day.	Jako děti jsme si každý den hrávali venku.
should: expectation	The train should arrive soon.	Vlak by měl brzy přijet. (Očekávání.)

WOULD is not just the past of WILL

Would can express politeness, an imagined result or a repeated past action. It also replaces will in many reported statements: "I will help." → She said she would help.

Past habits: WOULD or USED TO?

Use would for repeated actions with a clear past context. Use used to for past habits or states: I used to live in Brno. Do not normally use would for that former state. A past time frame helps avoid confusion with an imagined situation.

SHOULD: advice or expectation?

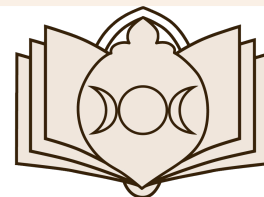
You should take a break. = advice.

The parcel should arrive today. = an expected event.

The subject and situation tell you which meaning fits.



Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

09 / Looking back: modal + HAVE + past participle | B2

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom



This is the extra shelf. Learn the everyday contrasts first, then reach for past meanings.

Pattern	Meaning	Example
must have + participle	Strong deduction about the past	She must have forgotten. Určitě zapomněla.
can't have + participle	Strong negative past deduction	He can't have seen it. To nemohl vidět.
may / might / could have + participle	A possible past explanation	She might have missed the bus. Možná zmeškala autobus.
should have + participle	A better past action; often regret or criticism	I should have checked. Měl/a jsem to zkontrolovat.
shouldn't have + participle	A past action was a bad idea	I shouldn't have sent it. Neměl/a jsem to posílat.
could have + participle	An unused opportunity (depending on context)	I could have called, but I didn't. Mohl/a jsem zavolat, ale nezavola/a.

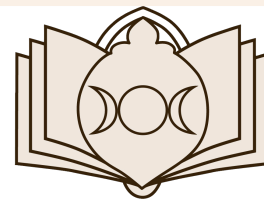
NEEDN'T HAVE vs DIDN'T NEED TO

Needn't have done	Didn't need to do
I needn't have bought milk. I bought it, but it wasn't necessary. Koupil/a jsem ho zbytečně.	I didn't need to buy milk. There was no need to buy it. Nemusel/a jsem ho kupovat. This alone does not say whether I bought it.

Past obligation is had to: I had to leave. Must have left is a deduction: I conclude that someone left. Those are very different spells.



Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom

10 / Practice: choose the meaning

◇◇◇

1. Choose the form that fits the situation

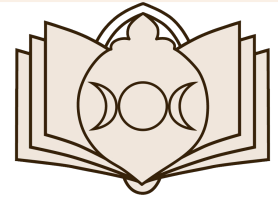
1. Photography is forbidden. You (mustn't / don't have to) take photos.
2. The task is optional. You (mustn't / don't have to) do it.
3. It's my advice. You (should / have to) take a break.
4. I'm not sure. She (might / must) be at home.
5. He is in London now. He (can't / mustn't) be in Prague now.
6. At seven, I (could / managed to) already read. (General ability.)
7. After an hour, we finally (could / managed to) repair it.
8. (May / Must) I sit here? (Ask permission.)

2. Complete with the correct form

1. She _____ (have to) work yesterday.
2. I _____ (not / have to) wear a uniform. It's optional.
3. He can _____ (speak) three languages.
4. _____ you help me, please? (Use could.)
5. I'll _____ (be able to) join you after work.
6. You should _____ (save) a copy.



Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom

11 / Practice: context & Czech traps

3. At the training centre

Choose from have to, mustn't, don't have to, should, might, can. Use each once.

The safety rules are clear: all visitors (1) _____ wear a badge. You (2) _____ enter the equipment room without permission. Lunch is optional, so you (3) _____ eat at the centre. My advice? You (4) _____ bring a notebook. The last session (5) _____ finish late, but I'm not sure. If you need a break, you (6) _____ use the lounge; it is open to everyone.

4. Translate the meaning, not just the word

1. Nemusíš přijít. Je to dobrovolné.

2. Nesmíš vstoupit. Je to zakázané.

3. Mohl/a bys mi pomoci? (Polite request.)

4. Možná bude přšet.

5. Určitě je unavená. Pracovala celou noc.

5. Optional B2 challenge

1. I bought a ticket, but entry was free. I _____ bought a ticket.

2. Calling was the better choice, but I didn't call. I _____ called.

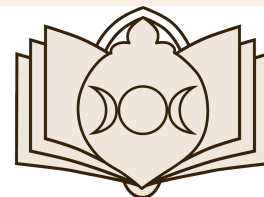
3. Maybe she forgot yesterday. She _____ forgotten.

6. Your turn

Explain three rules at your school or workplace: one obligation, one prohibition and one optional action. Add advice for a newcomer and one polite request.



Modal Verbs



**ISABEL'S
CLASSROOM**

Isabelsclassroom.com
youtube.com/isabelsclassroom

12 / Answer key: the spell check



1. Meaning

1. mustn't; 2. don't have to; 3. should; 4. might;
5. can't; 6. could; 7. managed to; 8. May.

2. Forms

1. had to; 2. don't have to; 3. speak; 4. Could;
5. be able to; 6. save.

3. Training centre

1. have to; 2. mustn't; 3. don't have to;
4. should; 5. might; 6. can.

4. Possible translations

1. You don't have to come. It's optional.
Also: You don't need to come. / You needn't come.
2. You mustn't enter. It's forbidden.
Also: You aren't allowed to enter.
3. Could you help me?
4. It may / might / could rain.
5. She must be tired. She worked all night.

5. B2 challenge

1. needn't have; 2. should have;
3. may have / might have / could have.

6. Sample answer

We have to wear a badge. We mustn't share passwords. We don't have to eat lunch at work. You should save your files regularly. Could you show me the meeting room, please?

