



Modals of Ability, Permission and Advice — B1 exercises

Printable worksheet · 23 questions · answer key with explanations on the last page
virtuousenglishacademy.com/grammar/b1/modals-ability-permission-advice-exercises

Name _____ Date _____ Score _____ / 23

A. Multiple choice

10 questions

Circle the letter of the correct answer.

1. ____ you pass me the salt, please?
A) Could B) Should C) Must D) May
2. She ____ speak three languages by the time she was ten.
A) can B) could C) may D) should
3. The fire was fierce, but everyone ____ escape through the back door.
A) could B) was able to C) can D) may
4. You ____ see a dentist about that tooth.
A) should B) can C) may D) could have
5. ____ I leave early today? I have a hospital appointment.
A) Must B) May C) Should D) Would
6. Which sentence is grammatically wrong?
A) She can swim. B) She cans swim. C) She could swim. D) She may swim.
7. You ____ apologise before this gets any worse.
A) had better B) would better C) should better D) might better
8. It ____ rain later, so take an umbrella just in case.
A) must B) might C) should D) can
9. What is the difference between 'You should call her' and 'You must call her'?
A) None at all B) Should is advice, must is obligation
C) Should is stronger D) Must is politer
10. I ____ ride a bicycle until I was almost twelve.
A) couldn't B) mustn't C) shouldn't D) may not

B. Fill in the blank

8 questions

Write the missing word or words in the gap.

1. _____ you help me lift this box, please?
2. She _____ read fluently before she started school.

3. The lock had rusted badly, but I _____ able to open it eventually.
4. You _____ see a doctor if the pain continues.
5. _____ I borrow your charger for ten minutes?
6. You _____ better leave now or you will miss the train.
7. It _____ snow tonight, so drive carefully.
8. I _____ swim at all until I was fifteen.

C. Sentence building

5 questions

Put the words in the correct order and write the sentence on the line.

1. the / Could / open / window, / please? / you

Make a polite request.

2. age / of / could / play / chess / the / five. / at / She

Describe a general ability in childhood.

3. were / two / We / seats. / book / able / last / the / to

Describe one specific past success.

4. should / to / your / apologise / sister. / You

Give ordinary advice.

5. ask / you / May / I / personal / a / question?

Request permission formally.

Answer key

Every answer carries the reason behind it. Read the reason for the questions you got right as well — that is where you find out whether you were right for the right reason.

A. Multiple choice

1. **A) Could** — Could is the standard polite request form, and has nothing to do with past time here.
2. **B) could** — Could describes a general ability that lasted over a period in the past.
3. **B) was able to** — For a single successful occasion in the past, English needs was or were able to rather than could.
4. **A) should** — Should gives advice about the sensible course of action.
5. **B) May** — May is the careful, formal way of asking permission from someone senior.
6. **B) She cans swim.** — Modal verbs never take a third-person s.
7. **A) had better** — Had better gives strong advice with an implied warning about the consequences.
8. **B) might** — Might expresses a genuine possibility that is neither certain nor unlikely.
9. **B) Should is advice, must is obligation** — Should recommends; must imposes. Confusing the two makes ordinary advice sound like an order.
10. **A) couldn't** — Couldn't is the negative of past ability.

B. Fill in the blank

1. **Could** — Could opens a polite request, with no reference to past time.
2. **could** — Could describes a general ability held over a period in the past.
3. **was** — One specific past success needs was able to rather than could.
4. **should** — Should recommends a sensible course of action.
5. **May** — May is the most formal way of requesting permission.
6. **had** — Had better gives urgent advice with a warning attached.
7. **might** — Might expresses an uncertain future possibility.
8. **couldn't** — Couldn't states the absence of an ability in the past.

C. Sentence building

1. **Could you open the window, please?**
2. **She could play chess at the age of five.**
3. **We were able to book the last two seats.**
4. **You should apologise to your sister.**
5. **May I ask you a personal question?**