

Modal	Function	Form in the Present	Form in the Past
Can	To show ability	I can run 10 miles.	I could run 10 miles when I was young.
	To suggest a possibility or give an option	Students can pre-enroll in classes.	
	To ask for or to give permission	Can you call me? You can leave now.	
	To show impossibility	It cannot be Jim standing there. He went away for the weekend.	
Could	To show past ability		I could run 10 miles when I was young.
	To ask a polite question	Could I call you?	
	To show possibility	Why isn't Mary here? She could be busy.	Why wasn't Mary at the party last night? She could have been busy.
	To show impossibility	He could not be here at the party. He is out of town.	He could not have been at the party last night. He was out of town.
	To suggest a possibility/opportunity or give an option	You could try going this way.	You could have tried going that way.
May	To ask for or to give permission (formal)	May I call you?	
	To show possibility	The instructor may come to class late today.	The instructor may have come to class late yesterday.
Might	To show possibility	The instructor might come to class late today.	The instructor might have come to class late yesterday.
Should	To show advisability	You should try the new restaurant downtown.	You should have tried the new restaurant downtown.
	To show obligation	I should renew my driver's license.	I should have renewed my driver's license.
	To show expectation	You should receive my letter in two days.	You should have received my letter in two days.
Ought to	To show advisability	You ought to exercise regularly.	You ought to have exercised regularly.
	To show obligation	I ought to register to vote.	I ought to have registered to vote by October.
	To show expectation	You ought to receive my letter in two days.	You ought to have received my letter two days ago.