Modal Verbs

A picture guide for Year 5. Modal verbs are one of the new Year 5 grammar terms.

A modal verb is a helper verb.

It goes before the main verb and shows **how likely**, **possible** or **necessary** something is.

can · could · may · might · must · shall · should · will · would · ought to

The certainty scale

will / must	certain		It will rain.
should / ought to	very likely		It should rain.
may / could / might	possible		It might rain.
won't / can't	impossible		It won't rain.

Adverbs of possibility do the same job

These adverbs also show how sure we are. They are part of the Year 5 curriculum too.

perhaps · maybe · possibly · probably · definitely · certainly · surely · clearly · obviously

Perhaps it will snow tomorrow. We will **definitely** be late.

Modal Verbs: jobs and rules

Modal verbs do several different jobs - and there is one simple rule for using them.

What job is the modal doing?

💪 Ability

can, could

I **can** swim 50 metres.

✅ Permission

can, may

May I go out to play?

📜 Rules and advice

must, should, ought to

You **must** wear a helmet.

🎲 Possibility

might, may, could

We **might** go to the beach.

⏳ Future

will, shall

I **will** phone you tonight.

🎀 Polite asking

would, could

Could you pass the salt, please?

The rule: modal + the plain verb

✔ Right

She **can** swim.
We **must** go.

✘ Wrong

She can ~~swims~~.
We must ~~to~~ go.

Your turn: circle the modal verb

1. You should drink lots of water.
2. Dad might pick us up.
3. Could you help me, please?
4. We will probably win.

For parents: a fun game is "weather forecaster" - take turns predicting tomorrow with will, might and won't.

Answers: 1. should 2. might 3. Could 4. will (+ adverb "probably")