Name _____ Date _____

Spot the modal verb

Modal verbs are helper verbs that show how likely something is.

1 Learn



A **modal verb** is a helper. It stands just in front of the **main verb** and changes its meaning: it can show how **likely** something is, or whether we **can** or **should** do it.



It **might** **rain** later.

Rain is the **main verb**: the action. *Might* is the **modal verb**: it helps *rain* and tells us it is possible, but not sure.

Modal verbs: **can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must** (and **ought to**)

Worked example: find the modal verb in Should we take an umbrella?

1. **Find the main verb (the action):** **take**
2. **Look for its helper.** In a question the modal verb often jumps to the **start**: **Should** we take…?
3. **Check by turning it into a statement:** We **should** **take** an umbrella. The modal verb sits right in front of the main verb.

Flip's tip: modal verbs never change their spelling: no *-s*, *-ed* or *-ing* (~~she musts~~, ~~it mighted~~). The main verb after them is always in its plain form: *might* ***rain***, *will* ***go***, *must* ***be***.

Warm up: draw a ring round the modal verb.

We will win the match. You could ask Ava. Can you see the moon?

Grown-ups: if your child rings the action word, say "That's the main verb. Which little word is helping it?" Reading the sentence without the modal ("We win the match") shows how the meaning changes.

Name _____ Date _____

2 Try it together a child and a grown-up, about 10 minutes



Modal verb hunt

You need: any story book with lots of talking in it, and a pencil.

1. Open the book at any page and take turns reading a few lines aloud.
2. Hunt for modal verbs: **can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must**. Look out for short forms too, like **can't**, **won't** or **I'll**.
3. For each one, find the main verb it is helping. Write both in the table.
4. Read the sentence again without the modal verb. How does the meaning change?

Modal verb	Main verb	Without the modal, the sentence means...
might	*find*	*"They find the key." It sounds certain now.*

Grown-ups: "I'll" hides "will" and "won't" hides "will not". If a question starts with a modal ("Could you...?"), ask your child to turn it into a statement to find the main verb.

3 Practise

A. Draw a ring round the **modal verb**. Underline the **main verb** it helps.

1 The bus should arrive soon.

2 Leo can swim two lengths.

3 That noise must be the wind.

4 We may visit Gran on Sunday.

5 Would you pass the salt, please?

6 Might the snow stop by lunch?

B. Turn each statement into a question. Draw a ring round the modal verb in your question.

1 We should leave now. _____

2 Mia can play the drums. _____

3 The dog will need a walk. _____

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Name _____ Date _____

C. Is the word in bold a **modal verb**? Tick yes or no.

Sentence	Yes	No
The cat **could** climb the fence.		
The cat **climbed** the fence.		
You **must** try this soup.		
I **want** to try this soup.		
Shall I open the window?		

D. Write a sentence about tomorrow using each modal verb.

might _____

will _____

Challenge

Leo says the modal verb in **It could snow tonight** is **snow**. Is he right? Explain how you know.

_____

_____

I can...

Tick when you can.

- [ ] say what a modal verb is
- [ ] find the modal verb and the main verb it helps
- [ ] spot a modal verb at the start of a question