ILLUSTRATED LESSON - ENGLISH 2AC - SEMESTER 1

# Can, should and must: abilities, advice and rules

Can expresses an ability, should gives advice, and must expresses a strong rule or obligation. Must not means something is forbidden; do not have to means it is not necessary. This English 2AC lesson uses classroom and sports-club situations to explain the differences and help you build short, accurate sentences.

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**By the end of this lesson, you can**

- Choose an ability, advice or rule expression
- Use a modal followed by a base verb
- Distinguish a prohibition from the absence of an obligation

**Before you start**

Read short English sentences and familiar school vocabulary.

## 1. Start with the situation

Choose an ability, advice or rule expression. Use a modal followed by a base verb. Distinguish a prohibition from the absence of an obligation.

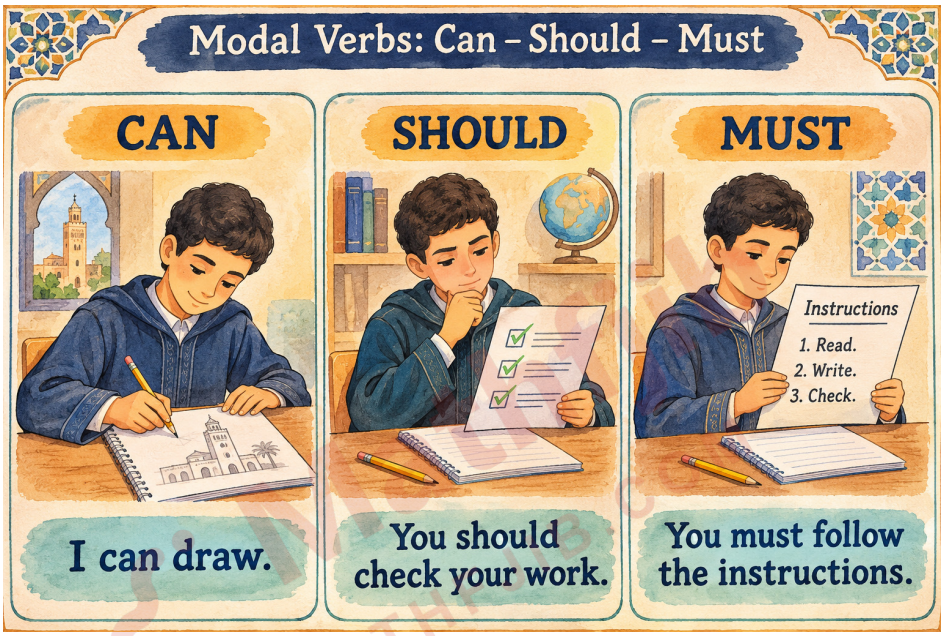



Compare the situation with the examples and explain your choice of form.

## 2. How do you describe what someone can do?

Use can before the base verb: I can draw. He can swim. The form stays the same with every subject, so do not add s to can or to the following verb. Make a negative with cannot or can't: He cannot ride a bike. For a question, put can first: Can he ride a bike? A short answer repeats it: Yes, he can. No, he can't.

An ability sentence tells us what a person is able to do. It does not describe their appearance. For a simple character description, use be with an adjective, have got for a feature and can for an ability: He is tall. He has got short dark hair. He can play basketball. Choose neutral, respectful descriptions; physical appearance does not tell you someone's character or worth.




Can + base verb expresses ability. Should gives advice; must expresses a strong obligation.

## 3. How do advice and rules differ?

Should suggests a sensible action rather than an absolute rule: You should organise your bag before school. Should not or shouldn't advises against an action: You shouldn't interrupt a speaker. Use the base verb after should. A question such as Should I bring my notebook? asks for advice about what would be useful.

Must expresses a strong obligation in the rule or situation being discussed: You must follow the teacher's safety instructions. Must not or mustn't expresses a prohibition: You mustn't push other pupils. These are example school-club rules, rather than a statement of rules at every school. Always read a real club's instructions when taking part in its activities.

| Meaning | Expression | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Ability | can | He can draw a map. |
| Advice | should | You should check the spelling. |
| Strong obligation | must | You must follow the instructions. |
| Prohibition | must not | You must not push. |
| No obligation | do not have to | You do not have to bring paint. |

**An art-club notice**

You must bring a notebook. You mustn't write on the desks. You don't have to bring paint because it is provided. You should label your work.

- The notebook is required; writing on desks is forbidden; paint is optional; labelling is recommended.

## 4. Why is mustn't different from don't have to?

If something is forbidden, you must not do it: You mustn't write on a library book. If something is optional, you do not have to do it: You don't have to bring coloured paper because the club provides it. In the second situation you may bring paper if you want. Replacing one expression with the other completely changes the message.

Read the reason after because when choosing an answer. The teacher provides pencils, so you don't have to bring one expresses no necessity. The equipment is fragile, so you mustn't touch it expresses a prohibition. Have to changes with the subject: He has to bring a notebook; he doesn't have to bring paint. Must, can and should do not take a third-person s.

## 5. A method you can reuse

**Step by step: Work step by step**

1. Identify the message: ability, advice, obligation or prohibition.
2. Choose the expression with that meaning.
3. Put a base verb after can, should or must.
4. Check whether not necessary has been confused with forbidden.




Must not means forbidden. Do not have to means not necessary.

**Remember**

Do not write He cans draw or He must to go. Use He can draw and He must go. Mustn't means forbidden; don't have to means optional.

**Key points**

- Can + base verb expresses ability.
- Should gives advice; must expresses a strong obligation.
- Must not means forbidden.
- Do not have to means not necessary.

## Exercises - Try before checking

Write your answers in your notebook. Use the lesson and write complete sentences before you read the corrections.

### Exercise 1. Describe an ability

Easy

Complete: He … draw, but he … play the piano. Use can and cannot.

### Exercise 2. Ask a question

Easy

Make a question: The boys can swim.

### Exercise 3. Give advice

Intermediate

Use should: It is a good idea to check your spelling.

### Exercise 4. Required or optional?

Intermediate

The club provides paper. You … bring your own. Choose mustn't or don't have to.

### Exercise 5. Correct the forms

Intermediate

Correct: He cans run. You must to listen.

### Exercise 6. Write a club notice

Challenge

Write one obligation, one prohibition and one optional action for an imaginary club.

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## Explained answers to the exercises

**Exercise 1. Describe an ability**

He can draw, but he cannot play the piano. Both expressions are followed by base verbs.

**Exercise 2. Ask a question**

Can the boys swim? Move can before the subject; do not add do.

**Exercise 3. Give advice**

You should check your spelling. Should presents the action as advice.

**Exercise 4. Required or optional?**

You don't have to bring your own. It is unnecessary, but bringing paper is not forbidden.

**Exercise 5. Correct the forms**

He can run. You must listen. Modal verbs use no third-person s and are followed by the base verb without to.

**Exercise 6. Write a club notice**

One possible notice: You must bring a notebook. You mustn't write on the tables. You don't have to bring pencils. Each sentence has a different purpose.

## Frequently asked questions

**What follows can, should and must?**

A base verb without to: can swim, should listen, must stop. Do not add s for he or she.

**Does mustn't mean don't have to?**

No. Mustn't expresses a prohibition. Don't have to means the action is not necessary.

**How do I describe someone in The amazing body?**

Use be for an adjective, have got for a feature and can for an ability: He is tall, he has got short hair, and he can draw.

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Follow your teacher's sequence and instructions.
Find the lesson, the pictures and the activities online.