

Extension exercises

Chapter 11: Modal verbs

Researching how people use English

Construct a brief questionnaire to use with a few native speakers or other proficient users of English in order to find out how they use or perceive that they use modal verbs. You could use or adapt the following, or could explore other aspects of modal verbs.

Example questionnaire

What differences, if any, are there between the meaning or use of the sentences in the following groups?

- (i) He may come here tomorrow.
He might come here tomorrow.
He could come here tomorrow.
- (ii) He has to be here early.
He must be here early.
He ought to be here early.
He should be here early.
He needs to be here early.
- (iii) We ought to be leaving, oughtn't we?
We ought to be leaving, didn't we?
We ought to be leaving, shouldn't we?

Comparing dictionaries

Choose one 'pure' modal verb and one semi-modal verb.

Look each of these up in at least two learners' dictionaries. The aim of this exercise is for you to decide which of these two dictionaries you would most recommend to learners at different levels.

- 1 How clearly, accurately and fully do the dictionaries define and illustrate the different meanings of the different verbs?
- 2 How clearly, accurately and fully do the dictionaries describe and illustrate the formal and syntactic characteristics of the verbs?

Course materials

Choose a coursebook intended for learners in a particular year of studying English or of a particular level of English (for example, pre-intermediate).

Before looking at it closely, consider:

- Which uses of which modal verbs might you expect to be taught at this level?
- How detailed and comprehensive would you expect the material to be in terms of subtleties of form and meaning (including analysis of differences between different modal verbs)?

Look carefully at the material and answer the following questions.

- 1 How clearly does the contents page or the index enable you to find the relevant pages in the book?
- 2 Are:
 - different meanings and functions of each verb considered together?
 - different verbs with similar meanings and functions considered together?
 - the different meanings and functions of the different verbs all considered separately?
- 3 How much contrasting of different uses and different verbs is there (if at all)?
- 4 How clearly, accurately and fully does the material define and illustrate the different meanings and functions of the different verbs? How appropriate is this?
- 5 What sorts of opportunities does the material provide for the students to practise using the verbs? Is there a main focus on choosing correct forms? Are there opportunities for the students to use the verbs in order to understand or express ideas and opinions, or to obtain or communicate information?