

## Modal verbs in reporting

**A** When there is a modal verb in the original statement, suggestion, etc., it sometimes changes when we report what was said or thought. The changes are summarised here:

|          | <i>modal verb in original</i>   | <i>modal verb in report</i>   |
|----------|---|---|
| <b>B</b> | <b>could, would, should, might, needn't, ought to, used to, could have, should have, etc.</b> | <b>could, would, should, might, needn't, ought to, used to, (i.e. no change) ①–③</b><br><b>could have, should have, etc.</b>  |
| <b>C</b> | <b>will, can, may</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>would, could, might ④ &amp; ⑤</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> <b>will, can, may</b> (existing or future situations and <i>present tense verb in reporting clause</i> ) ⑥<br><input type="checkbox"/> <b>will or would, can or could, may or might</b> (existing or future situations and <i>past tense verb in reporting clause</i> ) ⑦ |
| <b>D</b> | <b>shall</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>would</b> (talking about the future) ⑧<br><input type="checkbox"/> <b>should</b> (offers, requests for advice, etc.) ⑨  |
| <b>E</b> | <b>must</b> (= necessity)<br><b>must</b> (= conclude; see Unit 18B)<br><b>mustn't</b>         | <b>must or had to ⑩</b><br><b>must ⑪</b><br><b>mustn't ⑫</b>  |

- B**
- 'I **could** meet you at the airport.' → He said that he **could** meet us at the airport. ①
  - 'We **might** drop in if we have time.' → They said they **might** drop in if they have time. ②
  - 'You **should have** contacted me earlier.' → She said I **should have** contacted her earlier. ③

- C**
- 'She **may** have already left.' → He thought she **might** have already left. ④

If the situation we are reporting still exists or is still in the future and the verb in the *reporting clause* has a *present tense*, we use **will, can, and may** in the *reported clause* (see Unit 32). Compare:

- 'Careful! You'll fall through the ice!' → I **warned** him he **would** fall through the ice. ⑤ *and*
- 'I'll be in Paris at Christmas.' → She **tells** me she'll be in Paris at Christmas. ⑥

If the situation we are reporting still exists or is still in the future and the verb in the *reporting clause* has a *past tense*, we can use either **would** or **will, can or could, or may or might** in the *reported clause*:

- 'The problem can be solved.' → They **said** the problem **can / could** be solved. ⑦

- D**
- 'I **shall** (I'll) call you on Monday.' → She told me she **would** call me on Monday. ⑧
  - 'Where **shall** I put this box?' → He asked where he **should** put the box. ⑨

- E**
- 'You **must** be home by 9 o'clock.' → She said I **must / had to** be home by 9 o'clock. ⑩ (*had to* is more natural in speech)
  - 'I didn't hear the phone. I **must** be going deaf.' → Alex thought he **must** be going deaf. ⑪
  - 'You **mustn't** tell my brother.' → He warned me that I **mustn't** tell his brother. ⑫

**F** Note that we sometimes use a modal verb in a reported sentence when there is no modal verb in the original:

- 'You're not allowed to smoke here.' → She told me that I **mustn't** smoke there.
- 'My advice is to look for a new job now.' → She said that I **should** look for a new job now.

# Exercises

**37.1** Underline the more appropriate verb. If both are possible, underline them both. **C**

- The doctor says that he *will / would* see you in 20 minutes.
- In her letter, Elizabeth revealed that she *may / might* be getting married soon.
- Maxim tells me that he *can / could* come for dinner with us tonight after all.
- Inge promised that she *will / would* be at home by nine, so I phoned her shortly after that.
- The mechanic admitted that he *can't / couldn't* repair the radiator and had to replace it instead.
- Olivia reckons that she *can / could* save enough money to go on holiday to Canada.
- Mario explained that he *will / would* be living in Austria for the next six months.

**37.2** Complete the reported sentences using a **that-clause** with a modal verb. **A & C**

- 'If all goes to plan, I'll study medicine.' → He hoped that he would study medicine but instead he became a vet.
- 'I won't be late.' → She promised ..... and she kept her word.
- 'Perhaps we can go to Paris for the weekend.' → He suggested ..... but I was busy.
- 'I can get you there in good time.' → She guaranteed ..... but I didn't believe her.
- 'I'll pay for the meal.' → He insisted ..... and I accepted, of course.

**37.3** Complete this message left on an answering machine by reporting what Chloe said, using modal verbs in the reports. **D & E**

'You mustn't forget to bring your student discount card.'

'Where shall we meet?'

'I must be getting old.'

'I must be in the city centre by one.'

'I shall be there this time.'



'I can't come to the phone at the moment. Please leave a message after the tone.'

'Hi, Mia. I've just spoken to Chloe and she's keen to come to the pool with us tomorrow. She apologised for not turning up last week – she said she was always forgetting things and that she (1) must be getting old! But she promised (2) ..... She's meeting Jack for lunch, and she said she (3) ..... so I suggested meeting at 10:30. She (4) ..... and I said just by the pool entrance. Hope that's okay for you. Oh, and she said I (5) ..... Remember yours, too. See you there. Bye.'

**37.4** Complete the reported sentences using appropriate modal verbs. Give alternative modal verbs where possible. **F**

- 'It's vital that you attend the meeting.' → She said that I had to / must attend the meeting.
- 'If you want to travel with us, that's fine.' → She said that .....
- 'I'm not prepared to answer his questions.' → She said that .....
- 'Karl's likely to be back soon.' → She said that .....
- 'There's a possibility that I'll have to move to Milan.' → She said that .....
- 'I refuse to accept that Jason is dishonest.' → She said that .....
- 'Maria is sure to be disappointed if you leave without seeing her.' → She said that ...