

Chapter 6

Ways to Express Ability and Possibility / Necessity and Obligation

Objectives

1. To know the meaning of the notions : ability and possibility / necessity and obligation.
2. To use these notions in the conversation.

In a speech act, speakers may convey some facts of something or about someone. They may express their opinion regarding something or someone. They may show their emotions, namely satisfaction and dissatisfaction or sympathy and regret. They may use language as a medium to fulfill their needs. They may finally want to show certain conceptual or notional aspects in their conversation. Some of these aspects will be illustrated in this chapter.

A. Expressing ability and possibility

A1. Ability

An ability is a notional aspect; speakers want to indicate that someone knows how to do something or someone is capable of accomplish something.

Presentation : Different ways to express an ability.

Study the following mini-talks and complete the tasks provided.

Mini-talk 1 :



Excuse me. Can you speak English?

Sri



Yes, I can.

Check your understanding

The word indicating an ability is _____.

Mini-talk 2 :



Can you swim?

Yes, I can but I'm not able to swim today because I've got fever.

Jack



Check your understanding

The words indicating an ability are _____.

Mini-talk 3 :



Is it difficult to read Chinese characters?

No, not at all. I know how to read them when I was ten years old.

Mei



Check your understanding

The word indicating an ability is _____.

Mini-talk 4 :



Ed

Could you speak louder?
I can't hear you.

I'm sorry. I couldn't visit
your Dad yesterday.

It's all right. I wasn't able
to leave early either.



Jane

Check your understanding

The words indicating ability are _____.

Key to your pronunciation

The sentences indicating ability do not have any special intonation pattern. Normally, the modals "can" and "could" receive a secondary stress. Students should learn to make a distinction of the modal "could" whether it functions as a request or an ability in the past. Practice saying the sentences below.

Ability	Responses
Can you ³ swim ⁴ ? ₂	Yes, I ³ can. ₂ No, I ³ can't. ₂
Could you visit your dad ³ yesterday ⁴ ? ₂	Yes, I ³ could. ₂ No, I ³ couldn't. ₂
Are you able to swim ³ today ⁴ ? ₂	Yes, I'm ³ able to. ₂ No, I'm ³ not able to. ₂
Were you able to leave ³ early ⁴ ? ₂	Yes, I was ³ able to. ₂ No, I wasn't ³ able to. ₂
Request	Responses
Could you ³ speak ⁴ louder? ₂	Yes, of ³ course. ₂ I'm ³ afraid not. ₂

Explanation

An ability to do something can be expressed in three ways.

1. By modals "can" and "could".
2. By the expression "be able to".
3. By the phrase "know how to".

The students should review various structural forms of ability provided below.

	present tense	past tense	future tense
<u>Positive</u>	can be able to am is	could was able to were able to are	will be able to shall be able to
<u>Negative</u> (inability)	can't be not able to	couldn't wasn't able to weren't able to	won't be able to

Complete the tables below. Note that each set of sentence has a similar in meaning.

1. **Can you speak English?**

Are you able to speak English?

Do you know how to speak English?

2. _____

I don't know how to drive.

3. **I couldn't get back in time.**

4. _____ ?

_____ ?

Were you able to finish your homework yesterday?

5. _____ ?

_____ ?

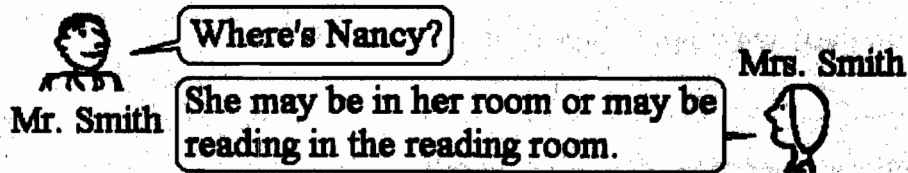
Do you know how to cook Western food?

A2. Possibility

A possibility is a condition of something likely to happen. The speakers will express this condition whenever they are uncertain or whenever they expect certain things can be done. To indicate the possibility of the event to happen can be done in many ways. Study the presentations below. Pay attention to the functions of the modals.

Presentation : Ways to express possibility.

Mini-talk 5 :



Check your understanding (Do orally with friends)

1. Does Mrs. Smith really know where Nancy is?

2. How many possibilities does she give to Mr. Smith?

3. Tell your friends these possibilities (in full sentences).

4. Tell your friends the phrase indicating possibility.

5. What conjoins these possibilities?

Mini-talk 6 :



Ed

Why is she late?

The traffic must be bad or she must have been busy with the children.

And she shouldn't have driven by herself.



Tom

Check your understanding

1. Does Tom know the reason that she is late?

2. How many inferences does he give to Ed?

3. Tell your friends these possibilities of his inferences (in a full sentence).

4. What does Ed think of these possibilities?

5. What does he finally do?

Mini-talk 7 :



John

Hello, Mike. I'm sorry I should have told you on the phone that the price has gone up 10% during last month.

It's also my fault. I should have enquired about it.

Mike



Check your understanding.

1. What causes John to feel sorry?

2. Did John call Mike last month?

3. Did he tell Mike about the price?

4. Did Mike enquire of John on the phone about the price?

5. Tell your friends the part of a sentence which indicates a past event which hasn't been fulfilled.

Mini-talk 8 :

Mr. Smith: What would you do if you found a wallet in the street Joe?

Joe: I would take it to the police.

Mr. Smith: What would you do Mei?

Mei: I might bring it to you.

Check your understanding.

1. Is it a possible condition that Mr. Smith is talking about?

2. What would Mary do if that condition happened?

3. What would Ann do if that condition happened?

4. Tell your friends the two possibilities to be done under this condition.

5. Tell your friend part of a sentence which indicates possible hypothesis.

Key to your pronunciation

1. Wh-questions have an intonation pattern 231⁺, but if the speakers mention the name of the hearers at the end, the intonation pattern would be 233⁺.

2 Where is 3 Nancy? 1

2 Why is she 3 late? 1

2 What 3 would you do 2 Mei? 3 4

2 What 3 would you do 2 if you found a 3 wallet in the street 2 Joe? 3 4

2. The conjoined sentence "or" must be spoken with the following intonation patterns.

2 The traffic must be 3 bad, 4 or she must have been 3 busy with the 3 children. 1

2 She may be in her 3 room, 4 or may be 3 reading in the 3 dining room. 1

Explanations

1. Possibility is an expectation which may or may not happen. It can be expressed in the following forms.

<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
may / might	may not / might not
would + V ₁ + if clause	wouldn't + V ₁
should have + V ₃	shouldn't have + V ₃
must be + V ₃ / adj.	-

Although "might", "should", and "would" are classified as past tense forms, they are often used in connection with actual present or future tense. Students must learn to distinguish these differences, so that they could master the grammatical structure of the English language.

2. The common form of possibility is "may" and "might" as in example(5) -(6) below. Since possibility involves expectation that something might happen, it may involve other notional aspects, namely, inference, that is the speakers may propose the possibility which he concludes or infers from the facts as in example (7). Moreover, possibility may have something to do with "hypothesis".

Something which might happen and if it happens, something would be done. Therefore, "would" and "might" are used in the case. "Would" also has a meaning of "determination" being used in condition of possible hypothesis as in(8). Lastly, "should + present perfect" is used when the speakers refer to the event in the past that was expected to be fulfilled, but it was not. So this type of possibility will have a meaning which is "contrary-to-fact" as in(7). The real meaning is "She drives by herself.". The 4 forms of possibilities are summarized below.

Types of possibility	Forms of modals	Examples
Common type.	may / might	1) She may be in her room. 2) She might be in her room.
Influence	must	3) The traffic must be bad.
Possible Hypothesis	would / might	4) I might bring it to you. 5) I would bring it to the police.
Contrary to fact	should	6) She shouldn't have driven by herself.

3. In addition to modals, possibility can be expressed as in the following 7) - 8), and its opposite meaning is impossibility will be expressed in 9) - 10), respectively.

- 7) It is possible to get this report finished within a week.
- 8) It is possible that this report will be finished within a week.
- 9) It is impossible to get this report finished within a week.
- 10) It is impossible that this report will be finished within a week.

Sometimes, the modal "can" may be used to indicate "possibility" as in 11)

and impossibility as in 12).

- 11) This can be done. (possibility)
- 12) That can't be done. (impossibility)

The phrase "perhaps" and "maybe" is very common in speaking as in 13) -

14).

- 13) Perhaps you didn't work hard.
- 14) Maybe you didn't work hard.

A3. Practice

Speaking and writing exercises

Say the following sentences in another way, then write them down in the given spaces.

1. Police dogs are able to jump high.

2. I wasn't able to see you last week.

3. Ann can't play tennis tomorrow evening.

4. Sue was able to write when she was 6 years old.

5. She'll be able to go to the hairdresser tomorrow afternoon.

Complete the following mini-talks with various forms of possibilities. You may answer orally if you wish.

Mini-talk 9 :



Pat

I can't find my dictionary.

You might have left it on the desk.

You

You must have left it on the desk.

You

It's possible that you have left it on the desk.

You

Mini-talk 10 :



Pat

I can't find my wallet.

You

You

You

Mini-talk 11 :



Pat

I don't know why I did so badly on the test.

You

You

You

Mini-talk 12 :



Pat

What's that thing? I really don't know.

You

You

You

Mini-talk 13 :



Pat

I wonder where my watch is.

You

You

You

Listening and speaking practice.

1. **Sentence Practice.** Right to left drills. Listen and repeat after the instructor.

1. It's possible / that / you have left it / on the desk.

on the desk.

you have left it on the desk.

that you have left it on the desk.

It's possible that you have left it on the desk.

2. I know / how / to read them / when / I was / ten years old.

3. She / may be / in her room / or / may be / reading / in the dining room.

4. The traffic / must be bad / or / she / must have been / busy / with the children.

5. What would / you do / if / you / found / a wallet / in the street.

2. Substitution Drills. Substitute the given words or phrases to the underlined words.

1. I can speak English.

can't

could

couldn't

2. I'm able to speak English.

'm not able to

was able to

wasn't able to

3. Is it possible to apply for a grant?

a scholarship?

financial support?

financial assistance?

4. She shouldn't have driven by herself.

cooked

done it

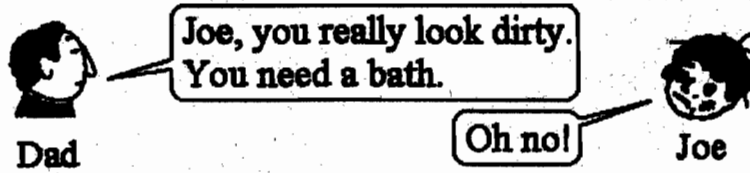
gone

B. Expressing necessity and obligation

Necessity is a condition of something being needed. It is expressed by the verb "need". When something is in need, the it must be obligated. Study the presentation below.

B1. Presentation : Necessity

Mini-talk 14 :

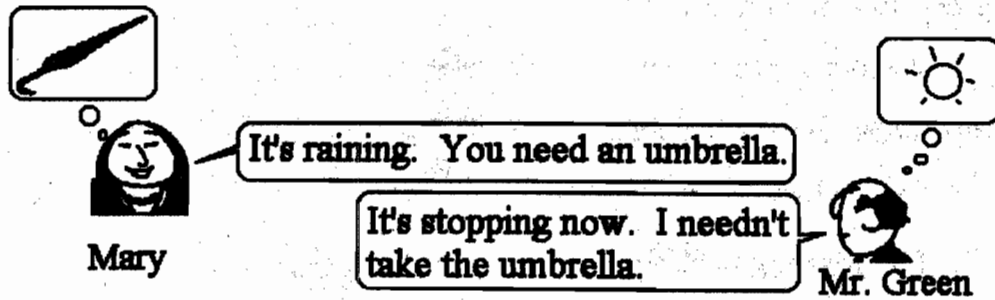


Check your understanding

What indicates necessity?

What does Joe need?

Mini-talk 15 :



Check your understanding

What indicates a condition of being unnecessary?

Why doesn't Mr. Green need an umbrella?

Mini-talk 16 :



This coming summer, I want to have a long holiday.

Are you well-prepared for it?



Sue

Not quite. I need some new clothes, a large suitcase, and a lot of money.

Check your understanding

What does Nancy need?

Key to your pronunciation

Practice speaking a statement with a series by rising the intonation (233⁺), except for the last noun phrase (231).

I need some new ³ clothes, a large ³ suitcase, and a lot of ³ money.
2 2 1

Explanation

Conditions of being necessary are expressed by the verb "need" followed by a noun phrase. The opposite meaning is needn't followed by a verb phrase.

Joey needs a bath

Nancy needs some new clothes, a large suitcase, and a lot of money.

Dave needn't take the umbrella.

The above sentences of necessity can be expressed as follows.


It is necessary for Joey to take a bath.

It is necessary for Nancy to buy new clothes.

It is unnecessary for Dave to take the umbrella.

B2. Presentation : Obligation

Mini-talk 17 :



A silhouette of a car is shown above a rectangular box containing the text "\$10,000".

Ed: **That brand new car is \$10,000. I've only got \$7,000. I need another \$3000.**


Tom: **So you have to work for another year.**

Check your understanding

What indicates the condition of being necessary?

What indicates the condition of obligation?

Mini-talk 18 :



A simple clock face is shown at the top center.

Mary: **May we go now?**

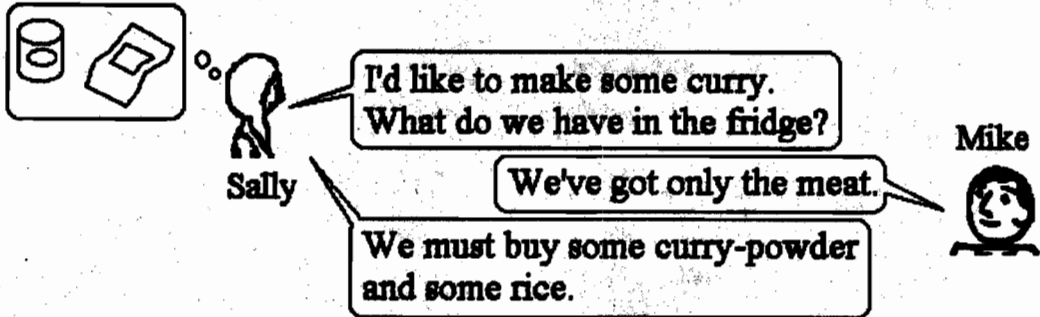
Mr. Green: **No, we mustn't go out yet. It isn't time. We must stay here until a quarter to twelve.**

Check your understanding.

Why isn't Mary allowed to go out?

What indicates "obligation"?

Mini-talk 19 :



Check your understanding

What does Sally need? Why?

What indicates obligation?

Key to your pronunciation

The modal "may" can indicate "permissions" and possibility. The difference between these two motions is from the type of stress.

Permission : May we go out now?

("mày" with tertiary stress)

Possibility : You may finish it within a month.

("mây" with a secondary stress)

Explanation

Two verbs are used to express "obligation". They are "must" and "have to" followed by an infinitive without "to".

Ed has to work for another year.

Mary must stay until a quarter to twelve.

Sally must buy some curry-powder.

B3. Practice

Speaking and writing exercises.

Complete the given spaces with the condition of necessity as directed. You may do them orally first, then write them down.

1. Our hands are dirty. (cleaning)

They need cleaning.

2. We must go to the bank. (some money)

3. We have to make a telephone call. (a telephone number)

4. We 're thirsty . (a drink)

5. We mustn't eat contaminated food. (clean food)

Practice how to use need, needn't, must, have to, don't have to.

1. The floor is dirty.

It needs cleaning.

It must be cleaned.

It has to be cleaned.

It's necessary to clean this dirty floor.

2. The wall is dirty.

Supply the answer to the following questions as directed. You may do them orally first and then write down the answers.

1.

Do you have to listen to him?

Yes, I do.



Sam

Yes, I have to.



Tom

Yes, it's necessary to listen to him.



Ed

2.

Do you have to make a telephone call?

(Negative) _____



Sam

(Negative) _____



Ed

(Negative) _____



Tom

3.

Did you have to go out yesterday?

(Positive) _____



Sam

(Positive) _____



Ed

(Positive) _____



Tom

4.

Did you have to sign your name?

(Negative) _____



Sam

(Negative) _____



Ed

(Negative) _____



Tom

Listening and speaking exercises

Sentence Practice. Right to left drills. Listen and repeat after the instructor.

1. We / must / buy / some curry-powder / and / some rice.

some rice.

and some rice.

some curry-powder and some rice.

buy some curry-powder and some rice.

must buy some curry-powder and some rice.

We must buy some curry-powder and some rice.

2. We / have to / work / for / another / year.

3. It is / unnecessary / for Dave / to take / the umbrella.

4. I need / some new / clothes, / a large / suitcase, / and / a lot of / money.

5. We / must / stay / here / until / a quarter / to twelve.

Substitution Drills. Substitute the given words or phrases to the underlined words.

1. It's not necessary for them to leave so early.

to be more aggressive.

to finish the project.

to work so hard.

2. You must try to do your best.

finish working in the library.

allow the students to practice without interruption.

play the tape as often as necessary.

3. You have to get some envelopes at the store.

empty the waste-paper basket.

post the parcel by airmail.

explain unknown words to them.

C. Application : Dialogue Completion and Dialogue Analysis

Fill in the dialogues with the given words and phrases and then analyze them by completing the task provided.

Dialogue 1 : In front of the house.

think so / Maybe / seen it / 'd better / I was shopping / might have dropped



Sri

I can't find my key. Have you _____?

No, I haven't. _____ you left it in the drawer at the office.



Ed

No, I don't _____. I had it when _____.

Well, do you think you _____ it somewhere in the car?

Yes, I might have. I _____ look inside the car.

Dialogue Analysis

Functions of the sentence	Examples
Ability	I can't find my key.
Possibility	
Disagreement	

Dialogue 2 : At the students' admission, Ramkhamhaeng University.

department / 'm interested in / must have / don't need / transcript /
have to have / What else / Do I need / have to / for your advice

Officer



May I help you?

Sri



I _____ applying for graduate admission to this university.

What _____ are you interested in?

Humanities. Do you need my undergraduate _____ ?

Yes, you _____ a transcript.

Do I need a letter from my employer?

Yes, you _____ a letter from your employer.

Do I need any letter of recommendation from my previous study?

No, you _____ any letter of recommendation.

_____ a health certificate?

Yes, you must have a health certificate.

_____ do I need to have?

You _____ complete this application form.

Thank you very much.

You're welcome.

Dialogue Analysis

Functions of the sentence	Examples
Offer	May I help you?
Necessity	_____ _____ _____
Obligation	_____ _____ _____
Appreciation	_____
Response to appreciation	_____