

# 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?

Jack



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

**Check your understanding**

The words indicating an ability are \_\_\_\_\_

**Mini-talk 3 :**



Is it difficult to read Chinese characters?

Mei



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

**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 pt. Practice saying the **sentences** below.

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

### ***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.

\_\_\_\_\_?

\_\_\_\_\_?

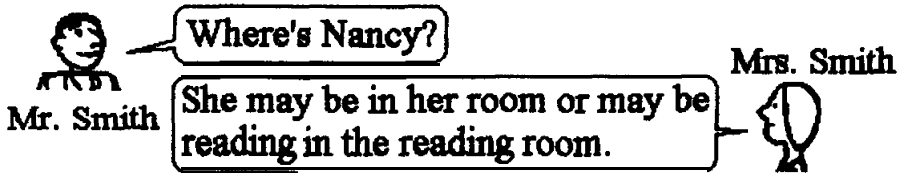
Do you know how to cook **Western** food?

## 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 23 1<sup>+</sup>, but if the speakers mention the name of the hearers at the end, the intonation pattern would be 233<sup>+</sup>.

2 Where is Nancy?

2 Why is she late?

2 What would you do Mei?

2 What would you do | if you found a wallet in the street / Joe?

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

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

2 Shemaybe in her room, | or may be reading in the dining room.

## ***Explanations***

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

### **Positive**

may / might

**would + V<sub>1</sub> + if clause**

should have + V<sub>3</sub>

**must be + V<sub>3</sub> / adj.**

### **Negative**

may not / might not

wouldn't + V<sub>1</sub>

shouldn't have + V<sub>3</sub>

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 <u>may</u> be in her room. 2) She <u>might</u> be in her room.
Influence	must	3) The traffic <u>must</u> be bad.
Possible Hypothesis	would / might	4) I <u>might</u> bring it to you. 5) I <u>would</u> bring it to the police.
Contrary to fact	should	6) She <u>shouldn't</u> 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-talkl:



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 :



I wonder where my watch is.

Pat

\_\_\_\_\_

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

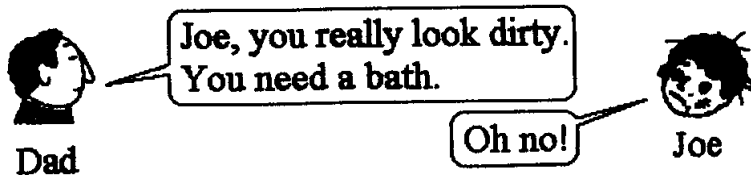
**gone**

**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***

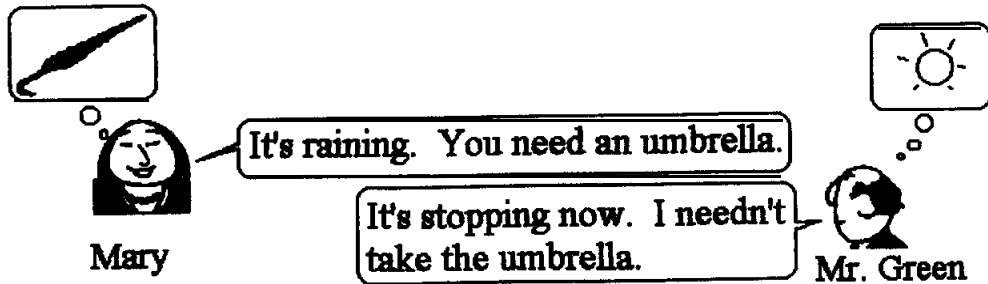
What indicates necessity?

---

What does Joe need?

---

**Mini-talk 15 :**



***Check your understanding***

What indicates a **condition** of being unnecessary?

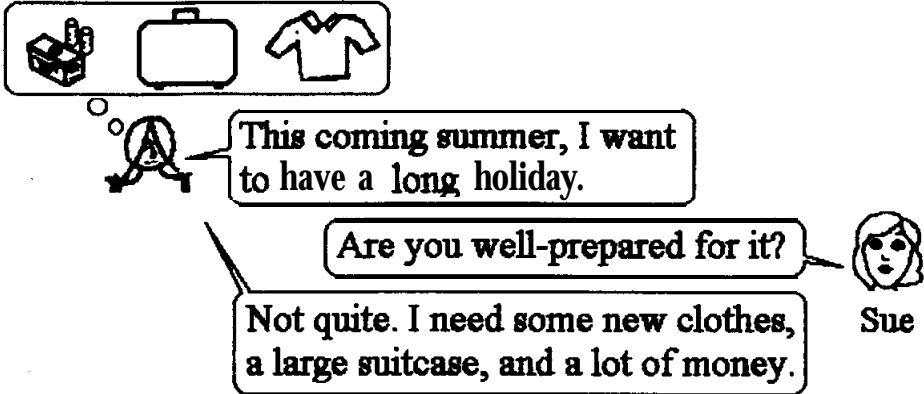
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Why doesn't **Mr.** Green need an umbrella?

---



Mini-talk 16 :



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

Are you well-prepared for it?

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

Sue

**Check your understanding**

What does Nancy need?

---

**Key to your pronunciation**

Practice speaking a statement with a series by rising the intonation (233<sup>+</sup>), except for the last noun phrase (23 1).

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

**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 are 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 :




\$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 :



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*.

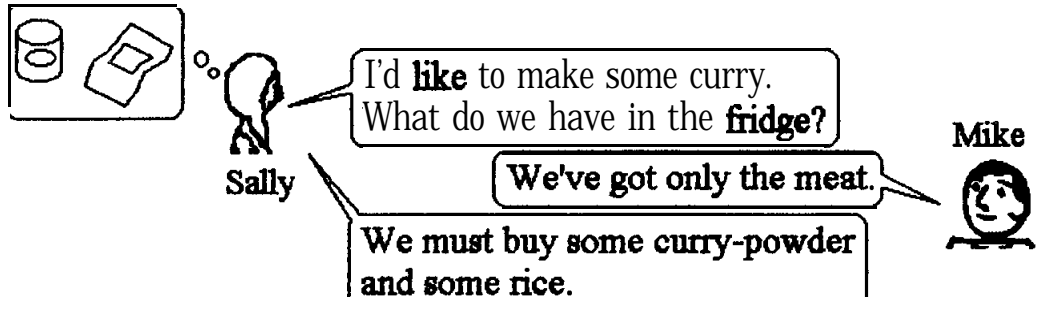
Why isn't Mary allowed to go out?

---

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)

Possibiity : 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 cuny-powder and some rice.

buy some cuny-powder and some rice.

must buy some umy-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-pap** 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 \_\_\_\_\_ 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 student 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?



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	_____