

Modal Verbs Key

**Task 1. Discuss the meaning of these sentences. Think about the different kinds of distance
– Time, Reality and Formality.**

1. You must never do that again. **order**
You shouldn't do that. **advice**
2. You can go now. **permission**
May I go now? **request**
Might I go now? **More polite request**
3. I wish I could drive. **Non-past regret**
I could swim when I was three.
Past ability
4. I could do it if I wanted to. **unreal**
I could call him instead of writing.
undecided
Could you help me please?
Formal request
5. I might be able to help you. **possible**
I might have some free time later this week – I'll call you. **promise**
6. Might I have that in writing please?
Could I have that in writing please?
Both polite requests, might is more formal
7. Might I make a suggestion? **More formal**
Could I make a suggestion? **Formal**
8. Shall I carry that for you? **Offer - polite**
Can I help you? **Offer**
9. It should work – let's try it.
It might work – let's try it. **Less sure**
10. Should you need any help, please do not
hesitate to ask. **More formal**
If you need any help, please do not
hesitate to ask. **Should = if**
11. I shouldn't think so. **Less sure**
I don't think so. **More sure**
12. He must be out – there's no answer.
deduction
He'll have gone shopping – he said he
might have to go today. **Positive prediction**
13. **A:** 'Someone called you yesterday but
he didn't leave his name.'
B: 'That'll have been George. He said he
would call.'
Positive prediction/deduction about the past
14. If you take a seat, I'll see if she's free.
Least formal
If you will take a seat, I'll see if she's
free. **Formal**
If you would take a seat, I'll see if she's
free. **Most formal**
15. I would have called you but I didn't have
your mobile number. **Unreal, excuse**
I couldn't call you because I didn't have
your mobile number. **factual**
16. Shall we go? **More formal because
inclusive of the other person's decision.**
Let's go. **Suggestion, expecting agreement**
17. Would you marry me? **unreal**
Will you marry me? **Real proposal**
18. I'll be there – don't worry. **prediction**
I might make it, I'm not sure. **Less sure**
19. Would you like another cup of tea?
Formal offer
Do you want another cup of tea? **offer**
20. OJ killed her – no doubt about it. **fact**
OJ must have killed her. I'm sure of it.
Deduction about the past
21. Look at those clouds. If it rains, we'll get
soaked. **possible**
We're lucky there's not a cloud in sight. If it
rained, we'd get soaked and we're
miles from anywhere. **unreal**
22. I wouldn't worry about it if I were you.
Unreal, reassurance
Don't worry, it'll be fine.
Instruction, real prediction
You shouldn't worry, everything'll be
fine. **Advice, prediction**