ANSWER KEY WITH EXPLANATIONS

Modals MCQ Test With Answers + PDF Exercise 1

English Grammar Tests · 20 questions · Online test and questions PDF: https://englishtestsonline.com/modals-test-1/

1	**C**	2	**A**	3	**A**	4	**A**	5	**A**	6	**A**	7	**A**	8	**A**	9	**D**	10	**A**
11	**A**	12	**E**	13	**A**	14	**E**	15	**C**	16	**D**	17	**D**	18	**E**	19	**D**	20	**E**

Explanations

1. Why didn’t you help him? You _____ have done it.
✔ **C) could**
Could have + past participle criticises a past chance that was missed: you were able to help, but you didn't. Not **must have**, because that is a guess about the past (**He must have done it** = I'm sure he did it).

2. A: _____ I phone you tonight?

B: Yes, you _____.
✔ **A) may / may**
We use **may** to ask for and give permission politely: **May I…? – Yes, you may.** The short answer repeats the same modal.

3. But I _____ stay in England for six months, and not for a fortnight as I had planned.
✔ **A) had to**
The plan was in the past (**as I had planned**), so we need the past form of obligation, **had to**. Not **have to**, because that is present.

4. - I _____ draw a circle with a pencil only, and you?

- Neither can I.
✔ **A) can’t**
The reply **Neither can I** agrees with a negative sentence in the present, so the first speaker said **can't**. Not **couldn't**, because that is past and the reply uses **can**.

5. Last week I _____ go to town on a business trip as the Ministry of Education had asked me to come.
✔ **A) had to**
The Ministry asked the speaker to come, so this was a past obligation: **had to**. Not **was able to**, because the sentence is about duty, not ability.

6. If one person is careless with a library book, then it _____ be read by others.
✔ **A) can’t**
Can't shows that something is impossible: if the book is damaged, other people are not able to read it. Not **couldn't**, because the sentence is a general present situation (**is careless**).

7. After a book is written, it passes through the hands of very many different workers. Each worker works carefully, for there _____ not be any mistakes.
✔ **A) must**
Must not expresses a strong rule: mistakes are not allowed, so everyone works carefully. Not **has to**, because **has to not** is not used; the negative would be **doesn't have to**, which means 'it isn't necessary'.

8. He tried, but _____ persuade nobody.
✔ **A) could**
Nobody is already negative, so the verb must be positive: **could persuade nobody** (= couldn't persuade anybody). Not **couldn't**, because two negatives together are wrong in English.

9. People who know a foreign language _____ learn a second one easily.
✔ **D) can**
Can expresses ability: people who know one foreign language are **able to** learn another one easily. After a modal we use the base form without **to**, so **can to** is wrong. **Are able** is wrong because it needs **to** (**are able to learn**).

10. _____ I have a word with you, please?
✔ **A) may**
May I…? is a polite way to ask for permission: **May I have a word with you?** = Can I talk to you for a moment?

11. At first I _____ skate well, now I _____.
✔ **A) couldn’t / can**
At first refers to the past, so we use **couldn't** for past ability; **now** needs the present form **can**.

12. She said they _____ go to the cinema if they liked.
✔ **E) could**
In reported speech after **She said**, **can** (permission) usually changes to **could**: **You can go → She said they could go**. Not **can**, because the rest of the sentence is in the past (**liked**).

13. - What is your sister doing?

- She _____ be watching TV.
✔ **A) may**
May be + -ing shows a possibility about what is happening now: perhaps she is watching TV. Not **is able to**, because ability is not used for guesses.

14. I didn’t want to go there but I _____.
✔ **E) had to**
The sentence is in the past (**didn't want**), so we use **had to** for a past obligation: I didn't want to, but it was necessary.

15. - _____ I go there now?

- No, you _____.
✔ **C) must / needn’t**
Must I…? asks if something is necessary. The answer 'it isn't necessary' is **No, you needn't**. **Mustn't** would mean 'it is forbidden'.

16. - Where is he? - He _____ be walking in the park. He always goes there at this time.
✔ **D) must**
Must be + -ing shows a strong guess about the present. The clue **He always goes there at this time** makes the speaker almost sure. Not **can't**, because that would mean the speaker is sure he is NOT in the park.

17. Visitors _____ stay in the hospital after ten pm.
✔ **D) must not**
Must not expresses a rule or prohibition: visitors are **not allowed** to stay after 10 pm. Not **needn't** or **don't have to**, because they only mean 'it isn't necessary', not 'it is forbidden'.

18. We had an appointment yesterday afternoon but he _____ see me.
✔ **E) wasn’t able to**
Yesterday shows the past, and **wasn't able to** expresses past inability in a particular situation. Not **cannot**, because it is present.

19. I didn’t _____ ring her up, for she did it herself.
✔ **D) have to**
After **didn't** we use the base form: **didn't have to** = it wasn't necessary, because she phoned herself. Not **had to**, because **didn't** is never followed by a past form.

20. The rain was so sudden that everybody _____ take shelter.
✔ **E) had to**
The sentence is in the past (**was**), and the sudden rain made it necessary to find cover, so we use **had to**. Not **could**, because the meaning is necessity, not ability.

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