

MEANINGS OF MODALS: CLASSROOM RULES

Walk into a classroom in the United States, and you'll see a variety of posters stating different classroom rules and instructions for students. Some of these posters might include phrases such as *raise hand to speak* or *don't interrupt another student*. Even if there are no posters, most teachers have a list of classroom rules and instructions. These rules are usually written as short phrases without modals; however, a modal is still implied.

Some rules in the classroom are obligatory and others range from strong to weak suggestions. For example, some teachers have a rule that says, "Be on time for class." The intended meaning for some teachers is "You **must** be on time for class." The rule is obligatory, and there are consequences for students who are late. Other teachers might intend the rule to mean "You **should** be on time to class." Given this meaning, the teacher is making a strong suggestion, but there might not be consequences for not following the rule. Rephrasing rules using modals helps to reveal the intended level of necessity.

In this week's Teacher's Corner, you get a chance to review your classroom rules with students and assess their understanding of the rules. Your students will decide the level of necessity implied in each directive and then rewrite each rule using an appropriate modal.

LEVEL

High Beginning and higher (Some awareness of modal forms required)

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Writing

GOALS

During this activity, students will be able to do the following:

americanenglish.state.gov

- Define classroom rules according to degree of necessity
- Rewrite classroom rules into complete sentences using the appropriate modal

MATERIALS

- Chalkboard/white board and chalk/markers
- Paper and pencils/pens
- List of classroom rules
 - You can use the list of classroom rules in Appendix A, use or make your own list, or use posters from your classroom.

PREPARATION

- Post the list of classroom rules where all students can see it.
- Write the following rule on the board to use as a model: *Raise your hand before speaking.*
- Write following chart on the board:

Degree of Necessity	Corresponding Modal	Meaning
Obligatory 	must	
	will	
	should	
	may	
Suggested	can/could	

PROCEDURE

1. Begin class by telling students: “Today we are going to review some classroom rules and rewrite them so that each rule’s meaning is clear. In order to do that, we must talk about modals and how they are used in English to show whether a rule is necessary or optional.”
2. Turn students’ attention to the model on the board: *Raise your hand before speaking.*
 - a. Ask students to explain the rule.

- b. Follow up with the question “Do you always need to raise your hand before speaking in our class, or only sometimes?”
 - c. Once students answer this question, turn their attention to the chart written on the board. Explain that using different modals can change how necessary a rule is.
 - d. Ask students which modal they would use with the rule *Raise your hand before speaking*.
 - e. After students choose a modal, ask them how they would describe the meaning of the modal. Write their definitions on the chart.
3. Group students into small groups of three.
 - a. One quick and easy option is to group them by their seating arrangement.
4. Tell students that they will work together in their groups to define the other four modals listed on the chart.
5. Once each group has come up with a definition for the other modals, have each group share a definition for one of the words. Ask the class what they think of the group’s definition and, if everyone approves of the definition, write that definition on the board.
6. Return to the example rule: *Raise your hand before speaking*. Ask the class how they would write the rule using a modal.
 - a. Remind learners that modals do not change for tense or subject and that they precede the main verb.
 - b. Write their examples on the board. For example, students might say, *You must raise your hand before speaking*.
7. Ask learners to look at the classroom rules posted at the front of the classroom. Assign each group one or two rules, depending on how many groups there are, and ask them to do the following:
 - a. First, decide the degree of necessity implied in the rule.
 - b. Then, choose an appropriate modal to use with the rule.

- c. Finally, write the rule in a complete sentence using a modal. Most of the rules listed will need a subject and a modal added to the rule.
8. Once groups finish rewriting the rules assigned to them, ask them to write their rules on the board or share them with the whole class.
9. Review all of the rules with the students so that they know how obligatory each rule is.

VARIATIONS

An alternative to this activity is to have students work together to come up with a list of classroom rules rather than providing the list for them. Students could work as a whole class to brainstorm what they believe the rules of the classroom are, and they could then write those rules on the board at the beginning of the activity.

EXTENSIONS

The activity could be extended for students by asking them to create new posters for the rule they developed with the group. The poster could contain a shortened version of the rule and the longer version with the modal included. These posters could be hung around the classroom as a reminder of the class rules.

Classroom Rules

Raise your hand before speaking.

Wait until someone finishes talking to begin speaking.

Go to the bathroom as needed.

Bring paper and pencil or pens to class.

Turn in your homework on time.

Be on time for class.

Put your books on the shelf.

Keep your backpacks out of the aisle.

Look at your paper during tests.

Put cell phones on silent during class.