

## Modals worksheet

Information from the COCA corpus. <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>

Some things of note: btw [be] means all forms of be

1. "Be" makes up 22% of ALL of the main base verbs that follow modals and semi modals. The only exceptions are **couldn't be** where n't outnumbers be and **[be] able to do**
- The most common modal/BASE collocation is "would be" in the conditional possibility sense. This isn't in the traditional grammar books.  
*It would be a shame if the opposition have their way.*  
*It would be terrible if it rains on her wedding.*
  - Must is hardly ever used for obligation as "must be" makes up 38% of the collocations. Just like Linda said.
  - What comes after be seems to be 1) noun boxes 2) describers 3) passive d-t-n, 4) Ving in that order, but it will take some time to prove it.
  - Use n't. Forget teaching "not" to make a negative after everything except **may not, had better not, must not, ought not to, shall not, [be] not able to** (due to am??).  
Should n't/not is more even than the others.

I'm attaching my new practice handout on modals based on the COCA data. The examples mimic the most common sentence structures, and yes, "You don't have to be a rocket scientist," is right up there.

Another interesting point is the very frequent hedging/softening evidenced by the addition of "a little bit" after the verb phrases.

*Doctor: This could be a little bit painful.*  
*Patient: OOOOUUUUCH!!*

## The most common modals and semi-modals and their most common verbs

<b>would be</b>	It <u>would be</u> terrible if it rains on her wedding. (imagine the possibility—terrible!)
<b>can be</b>	Living in a new country <u>can be</u> a little bit overwhelming. (it's more than possible)  This fabric <u>can be used</u> to make a skirt. (ability; The fabric is good for a skirt.)
<b>will be</b>	That party <u>will be</u> a lot of fun. (prediction)
<b>couldn't be</b>	Min Jie and Juhye are identical twins, but they <u>couldn't be</u> more different. (it is not possible to be)
<b>could be</b>	The final test <u>could be</u> very difficult. (it is possible. There is some evidence)
<b>may be</b>	This book <u>may be</u> a little bit easier than that book. (is possibly)
<b>have to be</b>	ESL teachers <u>have to be</u> a little bit more sensitive cultural differences. (necessity)  You <u>don't have to be</u> a rocket scientist to learn English. (not necessary)
<b>should be</b>	You <u>should be</u> a little more careful when crossing the street. (I advise you to look for cars.)  Tomorrow's weather forecast is sunny and warm. It <u>should be</u> a beautiful day. (good possibility)
<b>might be</b>	Getting a tutor <u>might be</u> a good idea. (good possibility)
<b>[be] going to be</b>	Going to Parsons <u>is going to be</u> a lot of fun. (intention)  She's <u>going to be</u> a designer? She must be a good artist. (strong inference)
<b>must be</b>	There <u>must be</u> a way to make comfortable and attractive shoes! (I don't believe that it can't be done)
<b>should have been</b>	There <u>should have been</u> a better warning before the tsunami. (regret)

Use your “most common modals and semi-modals” handout to fill in these blanks. The Answers are on the back. There may be more than one good answer, but the best answer is listed first.

There’s a party tonight at Jen’s place. Jen always has great parties. There’s lots of food, drinks, and music, and she invites nice people.

1. Tonight’s party \_\_\_\_\_ fun.
2. Jen has a rooftop garden. It’s a beautiful day. It \_\_\_\_\_ a beautiful night.
3. If you want to be a good guest, it \_\_\_\_\_ a good idea to bring a bottle of wine or a six-pack of beer to the party as a hostess gift.
4. Alex told me that I \_\_\_\_\_ at Jen’s last party – it was amazing.
5. I wish that Jon would notice me. It \_\_\_\_\_ excellent if Jon comes to the party.
6. George \_\_\_\_\_ a little late to tonight’s party if he has to work late.
7. The music is blaring! It \_\_\_\_\_ (negative) louder! What is Jen thinking?
8. Loud music is great at a party, but in New York City you \_\_\_\_\_ sensitive about making too much noise because of the neighbors.
9. Even if I’m having a good time, I \_\_\_\_\_ home by midnight because I have grammar class at 9am
10. Jen is serving punch. Punch is a mixture of alcohol and fruit juices. Be careful. Punch \_\_\_\_\_ very strong even though it tastes sweet.
11. Alex just fell off his chair. He must be drunk.
12. You don’t have to be a rocket scientist to know that you should drink moderately.

Answers:

1. is going to be, will be, should be
2. should be (will be, is going to be)
3. might be (may be, would be)
4. should have been
5. would be
6. may be, might be, could be (will be, is going to be)
7. should be
8. couldn't be
9. have to be (should be)
10. can be (may be, might be)
11. must be
12. don't have to be