

sie mag es!

er muss!

es soll!

Modalverben

Modal Helping Verbs

ich kann!

willst du?

wir dürfen nicht!

①

Review: One Verb Per Subject

In our learning until now, we have dealt with only one main verb per subject.

Ich lerne Deutsch.

I am learning German.

Wir haben heute Deutschunterricht.

We have German class today.

Er sieht gern Horrorfilme.

He likes to watch horror movies.

We have seen a few instances of verb pairs, usually with the verb 'gehen' along with another activity. In those cases, the 'activity' verb was placed at the end of the sentence in the infinitive form, and only the verb "gehen" was conjugated for the subject.

Ich gehe morgen schwimmen.

I am going swimming tomorrow.

Sie geht mit Freundinnen essen.

She's going out to eat with friends.

Gehst du gern spazieren?

Do you like to go walking?

②

New: Modal Helping Verbs

Our new topic, modal verbs, are essentially “helping verbs” that combine with another verb to tell more information about the modality: can, should, must, want, and should.

When using a modal verb in a German sentence, only the modal verb is conjugated for the subject. The modal verb is the conjugated verb, and is in the expected second position for declarative sentences. The other verb – the ‘activity’ verb – will be placed at the end of the sentence or clause in its infinitive form.

Ich kann Deutsch sprechen.

I can speak German.

Er soll heute den Arzt besuchen.

He should visit the doctor today.

Willst du morgen Abend ins Kino gehen?

Do you want to go to the movies tomorrow?

Modal verbs can be combined with any other infinitive verb. This makes modal verbs both relatively easy, but also very useful in adding more meaning to your sentences and descriptions!

3

Modal Verbs Are Not Regular

Modal verbs have a different conjugation pattern than the other verbs you know so far. They are a unique set of verbs, and there are only six of them in the whole language, so it’s best to memorize them as a group.

① In all modal verbs, there are two different ‘stems’: one stem is used for the singular subjects (*ich/du/er/sie/es*), and the other is used for the plural subjects (*wir/ihr/sie/Sie*) and infinitive forms.

② The subjects *ich* and *er/sie/es* do not have any endings, but the other subjects (*du -st, wir -en, ihr -t, and Sie -en*) have the same endings as other present-tense verbs.

We’ll walk through each of the modal verbs so you can learn their meanings and conjugations.

4

können = 'can' or 'be able to'

Just like the English 'can' or 'be able to', "können" refers to the ability to do something. Saying "I am able to speak German" is the same as "I can speak German" = "*Ich kann Deutsch sprechen*".

notice: <u>no</u> endings <u>on</u> <u>ich</u> or <u>er/sie/es</u> forms!	I can	ich <u>kann</u>	we can	wir <u>können</u>
	you can	du <u>kannst</u>	you all can	ihr <u>könnt</u>
	he can	er <u>kann</u>	they can	sie <u>können</u>
	she can	sie <u>kann</u>	You formal can	Sie <u>können</u>
	it can	es <u>kann</u>		

Notice that the left side of the conjugation table (the singular subjects) uses the stem "kann-", while the right side (the plural subjects) uses the stem "könn-". This division will be the same with all modal verbs.

5

können = 'can' or 'be able to'

Ich kann gut singen.

I can sing well.

Kannst du Deutsch sprechen?

Can you speak German?

Meine Mutter kann gut kochen.

My mother can cook well.

Könnt ihr morgen kommen?

Can you guys come tomorrow?

6

müssen = 'must' or 'have to'

In English, we often say "I have to" to mean "I must". German cannot use the verb 'haben' in the sense of obligation: haben means to actually have, possess something. If you mean 'have to' in the sense of must, in German you can only use "müssen".

notice: no endings on <u>ich</u> or <u>er/sie/es</u> forms!	I must	ich <u>muss</u>	we must	wir <u>müssen</u>
	you must	du <u>musst</u>	you all must	ihr <u>müsst</u>
	he must	er <u>muss</u>	they must	sie <u>müssen</u>
	she must	sie <u>muss</u>	You formal must	Sie <u>müssen</u>
	it must	es <u>muss</u>		

Notice that the singular subjects' stem is 'muss-' without any umlaut. The plural side subjects all have an umlaut, as reflected in the infinitive 'müssen'.

7

müssen = 'must' or 'have to'

Er muss seine Hausaufgaben machen.

He has to do his homework.

Wir müssen unsere Vokabeln lernen.

We have to learn our vocabulary.

Müsst ihr morgen eine Prüfung schreiben ?

Do you guys have to write a test tomorrow?

Ich muss das Auto waschen.

I have to wash the car.

8

dürfen = 'may' or 'be allowed to'

Dürfen is used to ask for permission, and is slightly more common than the English version "may". In English, we often say "Can I ...?" to ask permission; German generally uses "Darf ich ...?" for that meaning.

notice: no endings on ich or er/sie/es forms!	I may	ich <u>darf</u>	we may	wir <u>dürfen</u>
	you may	du <u>darfst</u>	you all may	ihr <u>dürft</u>
	he may	er <u>darf</u>	they may	sie <u>dürfen</u>
	she may	sie <u>darf</u>	You formal may	Sie <u>dürfen</u>
	it may	es <u>darf</u>		

Although "darf-" may sound funny to English ears, it is a totally normal form and is used everyday in German speech. Remember of course that the plural subjects continue to use the infinitive stem "dürf-"; only singular uses "darf-".

9

dürfen = 'may' or 'be allowed to'

Darfst du einen Hund zu Hause haben ?

Are you allowed to have a dog at home?

Ich darf heute Abend nicht tanzen gehen .

I'm not allowed to go dancing tonight.

Sie dürfen ihre Notizen benutzen .

They are allowed to use their notes.

Dürft ihr laute Musik spielen ?

Are you guys allowed to play loud music?

10

wollen = 'want to' or 'desire to'

Watch out for the meaning of 'wollen' -- it is not the meaning of English "will" (as in future tense). Wollen simply means WANT, but there is no indication that it will actually happen! German does not use 'will' as future tense!

notice: no endings on <u>ich</u> or <u>er/sie/es</u> forms!	I want to	ich	<u>will</u>	we want to	wir	<u>wollen</u>
	you want to	du	<u>willst</u>	you all want to	ihr	<u>wollt</u>
	he wants to	er	<u>will</u>	they want to	sie	<u>wollen</u>
	she wants to	sie	<u>will</u>	You formal want to	Sie	<u>wollen</u>
	it wants to	es	<u>will</u>			

Notice again how the left side (singular) subjects use the stem "will-", while the right side (plural) subjects match the infinitive form "woll-". And don't let the English 'will' lead you astray: it only means 'want' in German!

11

wollen = 'want to' or 'desire to'

___ Willst ___ du nächstes Semester Deutsch ___ nehmen ___ ?

Do you want to take German next semester?

Ich ___ will ___ spät ___ schlafen ___ .

I want to sleep late.

Er ___ will ___ einen Job als Kellner ___ finden ___ .

He wants to find a job as a waiter.

Wir ___ wollen ___ jetzt nicht ___ essen ___ .

We don't want to eat now.

12

sollen = 'should' or 'supposed to'

Sollen has the connotation of 'supposed to' or 'is predicted to'. Sometimes Germans (and Google Translate) will use a subjunctive form ('sollte') instead of the basic form ('soll') to express the 'should' meaning. Since we don't learn subjunctive forms yet, please use only the basic 'soll' forms this semester to mean 'supposed to' or 'should'.

notice: <u>no</u> endings <u>on</u> <u>ich</u> or <u>er/sie/es</u> forms!	I should	ich	<u>soll</u>	we should	wir	<u>sollen</u>
	you should	du	<u>sollst</u>	you all should	ihr	<u>sollt</u>
	he should	er	<u>soll</u>	they should	sie	<u>sollen</u>
	she should	sie	<u>soll</u>	You formal should	Sie	<u>sollen</u>
	it should	es	<u>soll</u>			

Sollen is the only modal verb that does not have a stem change in the singular forms. Its stem remains 'soll-' in all subjects, but the endings are the same as all other modals.

13

sollen = 'should' or 'supposed to'

Sie soll um 9 Uhr kommen.
She is supposed to come at 9:00.

Ich soll nicht so spät schlafen.
I shouldn't sleep so late.

Sollen wir jetzt gehen?
Should we go now?

Morgen soll es sehr warm sein.
Tomorrow it's supposed to be very warm.

14

mögen = 'like' or 'enjoy'

Technically, we will not learn 'mögen' until our next chapter, but it is a modal verb and fits in the same category, so it's easiest to introduce it with the other similar verbs.

notice: <u>no</u> endings <u>on</u> <u>ich</u> or <u>er/sie/es</u> forms!	I like	ich <u>mag</u>	we like	wir <u>mögen</u>
	you like	du <u>magst</u>	you all like	ihr <u>mögt</u>
	he likes	er <u>mag</u>	they like	sie <u>mögen</u>
	she likes	sie <u>mag</u>	You formal like	Sie <u>mögen</u>
	it likes	es <u>mag</u>		

Mögen is the least common of the modal verbs, because Germans already have a more useful way to say "like/enjoy" using the adverb "gern". But notice that the singular stem is "mag-" while the plural stem is "mög-" like all other modals verbs with two stems.

15

mögen = 'like' or 'enjoy'

_____ Magst _____ du Pizza mit Thunfisch? <i>Do you <u>like</u> pizza with tuna?</i>
Ich _____ mag _____ Science Fiction. <i>I <u>like</u> science fiction.</i>
Wir _____ mögen _____ sonniges Wetter. <i>We <u>like</u> sunny weather.</i>
_____ Mögt _____ ihr die neue Professorin? <i>Do you guys <u>like</u> the new professor?</i>

16

Special: Omission of Infinitive

In most sentences with modal helping verbs, the action infinitive is placed at the end of the sentence. In casual speech, though, the action verb can be omitted, if the meaning is perfectly clear without it. We do this in English to a much lesser extent, but consider these examples in German.

Ich <u>kann</u> Deutsch.	<i>I <u>can</u> (<u>speak</u>) German.</i>	(<u>'sprechen'</u> missing)
Ich <u>muss</u> zur Uni.	<i>I <u>have to</u> (<u>go</u>) to campus.</i>	(<u>'gehen'</u> missing)
Wir <u>sollen</u> es nicht.	<i>We <u>shouldn't</u> (<u>do</u>) it.</i>	(<u>'machen'</u> missing)
<u>Musst</u> du zum Supermarkt?	<i>Do you <u>have to</u> (<u>go</u>) to the supermarket?</i>	(<u>'gehen'</u> missing)

You won't be required to omit the infinitive, so it's best to practice including the infinitive as a full normal sentence, but be aware that you may see and hear sentences like the above, where the infinitive is simply 'understood' but not present.

17

Special: Placement of 'Nicht'

Also beware of where to add 'nicht' in a modal verb construction. If the focus of negation is the 'activity' infinitive verb, the 'nicht' will be placed directly before the infinitive action. (If the modal verb were not present, the 'nicht' would be at the end of the sentence, but the infinitive must be placed at the end instead!)

Ich <u>kann</u> die E-Mail <u>nicht schreiben</u> .	<i>I <u>can't write</u> the email.</i>
Er <u>will</u> sein Bier <u>nicht trinken</u> .	<i>He <u>doesn't want to drink</u> his beer.</i>
Sie <u>müssen</u> das Buch <u>nicht lesen</u> .	<i>They <u>don't have to read</u> the book.</i>

But the normal rules about 'nicht' placement still apply: if the focus of negation is on a place or adjective, or if a noun requires 'kein' instead of 'nicht', those rules are still valid!

Ich <u>kann keine</u> E-Mails <u>schreiben</u> .	<i>I <u>can't write</u> any emails.</i>
Ich <u>will keinen</u> Kaffee <u>trinken</u> .	<i>I <u>don't want to drink</u> any coffee.</i>
Sie <u>müssen nicht</u> zur Schule <u>gehen</u> .	<i>They <u>don't have to go</u> to school.</i>

18

Special: Mögen Needs Nouns

Mögen is usually only used with nouns, as in the sentences below. Since Germans tend to use the adverb "gern" to say they like doing a verb action, they will prefer "gern" with an active verb, and "mögen" only with nouns.

Ich mag Pizza.

(I like pizza.)

Ich mag Comicbücher.

(I like comic books.)

Ich mag Filme.

(I like movies.)

Ich mag Deutsch.

(I like German.)

Ich esse gern Pizza.

(I like to eat pizza.)

Ich lese gern Comicbücher.

(I like to read comic books.)

Ich sehe gern Filme.

(I like to watch movies.)

Ich lerne gern Deutsch.

(I like learning German.)

19

Prüfen Sie Sich!

Test Yourself!

20

dürfen • können • mögen • müssen • sollen • wollen

<i>I must</i>	=	<u>ich muss</u>	<i>they want to</i>	=	<u>sie wollen</u>
<i>you can</i>	=	<u>du kannst</u>	<i>You (formal) may</i>	=	<u>Sie dürfen</u>
<i>he is allowed to</i>	=	<u>er darf</u>	<i>he likes</i>	=	<u>er mag</u>
<i>she wants to</i>	=	<u>sie will</u>	<i>I am able to</i>	=	<u>ich kann</u>
<i>it is supposed to</i>	=	<u>es soll</u>	<i>you want to</i>	=	<u>du willst</u>
<i>we are able to</i>	=	<u>wir können</u>	<i>you all may</i>	=	<u>ihr dürft</u>
<i>you all have to</i>	=	<u>ihr müsst</u>	<i>they have to</i>	=	<u>sie müssen</u>

21

Kann er Deutsch sprechen?

Can he speak German?

22

Ich muss heute arbeiten.

I have to work today.

23

Sie soll um 7 Uhr kommen.

She is supposed to come at 7:00.

24

Er will nach Deutschland reisen.

He wants to travel to Germany.

25

Darf ich heute Abend ins Kino gehen?

May I go to the movies tonight?

26

Ich mag deutsches Bier.

I like German beer.

27

Wir müssen nach Hause gehen.

We have to go home.

28

Sie will Ärztin werden.

She wants to become a doctor.

29

Kannst du bitte ruhig sein?

Can you please be quiet?

30

Morgen soll es regnen.

Tomorrow it's supposed to rain.

31

Wir können später kommen.

We can come later.

32

Sie muss ihre Hausaufgaben machen.

She has to do her homework.

33

Ich will dieses Buch lesen.

I want to read this book.

34

Können Sie helfen?

Can You (formal) help?

35

Wo sollen wir essen?

Where should we eat?

36

Mögt ihr den Professor nicht?

Don't you guys like the professor?

37

Willst du meinen Partner sein?

Do you want to be my partner?

38

Das Ende!
