

Lesson Plan – Integrated Vocabulary, Grammar, and Writing

Modal Auxiliary Verbs: Degrees of Obligation and Certainty

Part 1: Cover sheet

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| Name: Richard Walker | Date: 11/23/10 |
| Place: College of Marin | Length: One hour and forty minutes |
| Level: Low-Advanced Grammar and Writing No. of students: 13 | Nationalities and ages: A mixed group of students from many countries; among them: Honduras, Slovakia, Israel, Tibet, Korea, Brazil, Ukraine, Poland, Russia, China, Nepal. Ages range from 18 to 50 (approximation) |
| Students' needs / purpose in learning English: These are students who have likely worked their way up the non-credit ESL class ladder to the low-advanced level. They all appear to have achieved secondary education and many have had post secondary or college education in their country. There may be a number of working professionals in the group. I can assume that all are primarily interested in improving their English to advance in their work and to have greater comfort and success in communicating with other English speakers. | |
| Relevant recent work: Students have been studying sentence types, clauses, and paragraph composition skills. They have recently begun to compose their first essays. These students already have some familiarity with the modal verbs being taught in this lesson. | |
| Goal: Students will become become more familiar with these seven modal verbs that express varying degrees of certainty and obligation. The particular focus is on comparing and evaluating their relative tone and force. | |
| Main objectives of lesson: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will gain greater understanding of the following vocabulary words having to do with obligation, possibility, and certainty: command, requirement, obligation, opportunity, suggestion, certainty, conclusion, probability, capability, possibility, chance. • Students will gain familiarity with seven modals verbs (will, must, should, can, may, could, might) and inductively determine their relative meanings through talking about these two hypothetical situations and sorting sentences into greater and lesser degrees of obligation and certainty. • Students will be able to generate their own sentences (at least two) using one or two modal verbs. | |
| Possible student problems with this lesson: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modals and modality entail a good deal of complexity. Therefore, modals are usually taught in groups of two or three in order to control complexity and not overwhelm the learner with with subtle shades, or tones, of meaning. But this lesson presents a broader range of modals to consider. | Solution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The slant of this lesson is to present the idea of modality as a range, continuum, or matter of degree. Therefore, in order to present a broader spectrum of modality, exercises will be limited to two or few situational contexts. Focus will be on the range of modality, not on a range of situational contexts. |

Lesson Plan – Integrated Vocabulary, Grammar, and Writing

Modal Auxiliary Verbs: Degrees of Obligation and Possibility

Part 2: Detailed Lesson Plan

| Aim | Activity | Interaction | Time |
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| <p>Warm up Activate awareness of modal context: degree of obligation</p> | <p>Activity #1 – Talking about obligation</p> <p>Start out with question and answer discussion about following hypothetical situation:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T (to an individual S): “When guests come to your home, do you ask them to remove their shoes?”</p> <p>This may get a laugh. It should get the students' attention. Continue to ask around the room.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: “Does anyone ask their guests to remove their shoes when they come into your home?”</p> <p>If someone does, go with the flow...</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: “Ok, very good. And what do you say to them?”</p> <p>Write the students' remark on the board.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: “Ok, lets all imagine that we do like to have our guests remove their shoes when they come to our house or apartment. Maybe we have nice expensive rugs, or we just like the feeling of everyone being in their stocking feet. What will you say to them? How will you get them to take off their shoes?”</p> <p>Write student responses on the board. Some possible student answers might be:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Will you please take off your shoes?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Please take off your shoes.</p> <p>After writing the responses, ask questions about the different words and tone of each sentence. Introduce the vocabulary word “obligation.” How much <u>obligation</u> does each sentence imply? Have the students read the definition of “obligation” to themselves and then ask one of them to read it aloud. Ask for some examples of “obligation.”</p> <p>Some examples of responses might be:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">You have to pay your school tuition.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I have to work to make a living.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">You have to have a license to drive a car.</p> | <p>T-Ss</p> | <p>15 min.</p> |

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| | <p>Ask the students to consider more possible ways to make their statements.</p> <p>T: “Would you say: ‘You have to take off your shoes.’ Yes? No? Too forceful? Too impolite? Might we say ‘You can take off your shoes?’”</p> <p>“Ok, now imagine that you are a security guard at a museum that displays beautiful antique carpets. Visitors can walk on the carpets, but they have to take off their shoes. As the security guard, what do you say to them?”</p> <p>Write the answers on the board. Discuss the meaning, tone, forcefulness, or politeness of each remark. How much <u>obligation</u> do the visitors have to take off their shoes? Discuss issues of subtext and politeness:</p> <p>T: “If the security guard asks you: ‘Would you please take off your shoes?’ do you have a choice?”</p> | | |
| <p>Discovery; Guided Practice Inductive evaluation of modal meanings</p> | <p>Activity #2a – Sorting: degrees of obligation and choice</p> <p>Students form pairs. Each pair is each given a collection of 7 cards.</p> <p>The cards (7):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guests will take off their shoes. • Guests must take off their shoes. • Guests should take off their shoes. • Guests can take off their shoes. • Guests may take off their shoes. • Guests could take off their shoes. • Guests might take off their shoes. <p>T: “Ok, now imagine that you are taking a trip and you are reading about a hotel where you would like to stay. Read the sentence on each card. If the information about the hotel has this sentence, what does it mean? For each sentence ask two questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How much <u>obligation</u> does this sentence imply? 2. How much <u>choice</u> does the guest have about whether or not to take off their shoes? <p>“Sort the cards into a list according to how strong the obligation is for guests to take off shoes in each sentence. You can number them from 1 to 7, with 1 having the most obligation and the least choice, and 7</p> | <p>Ss pairs</p> | <p>10 min</p> |

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| | <p>having the least obligation and the most choice.”</p> <p>(Once more, check the students understanding of the meaning of obligation).</p> <p>Write the vocabulary words on the side of the blackboard and refer to this list as you give instruction about greater and lesser degrees of obligation/choice:</p> <p>command requirement obligation opportunity suggestion</p> | | |
| <p>Discovery Evaluation of modal meaning</p> | <p>Activity #2b – Sharing and discussion: degrees of obligation and choice</p> <p>Ask three volunteers to write their lists on the board. Discuss each list as a class. Notice where the order differs between lists. Discuss to invoke discovery, awareness, and consensus of degree. Compare any differences. The important point is to ask about what each modal verb means in terms of <u>obligation</u> and <u>choice</u>? Introduce the vocabulary words into the discussion.</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>T: “Can we say that this sentence gives someone <i>permission</i> to take off their shoes? How about this one? Do they have any choice? How much choice do they have? If you read this sentence on a sign, would you take off your shoes? Why or why not?</p> <p>T: “What is another way to say 'must?' Can we use 'have to?' Do these two sentences mean the same thing?</p> <p>You must pay your taxes. You have to pay your taxes.</p> <p>“In this list we see that <i>must</i> has a stronger sense of obligation than <i>will</i>. And in this list we see that <i>should</i> is ranked as having a greater sense of choice than <i>may</i>. Do you agree? What do you think?”</p> | Whole class | 15 min |
| <p>Controlled Practice</p> | <p>Activity #3 (optional) – Gap Worksheet: Modal Verbs for Expressing Obligation</p> <p>Distribute worksheet and have students fill in the blanks, choosing an appropriate modal verb for each sentence. Go over answers with whole class.</p> | Ss | 10 min |

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| <p>Freer Practice</p> | <p>Activity #4 - Independent writing: Expressing Degree of Obligation and Choice</p> <p>Step 1. Independent practice: write one sentence using one chosen modal verb.</p> <p>Lay out 14 index cards on the front table—two for each modal verb under discussion:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">will, must, should, can, may, could, might</p> <p>Ask students to come up and pick a card, then write a sentence using the modal verb that they selected. Instruct Ss that the sentence should indicate some degree of <u>obligation and choice</u> about doing something in of the following topics (write these on the board):</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Health, Education, Business, The Arts, Travel, Driving, Personal Finance</p> | <p>Ss</p> | <p>5 – 8 min.</p> |
| <p>Discovery Critical evaluation of modal meaning</p> | <p>Step 2.</p> <p>Ask Ss to write their sentences on the board. For each sentence, ask class if they agree. Discuss any variation or disagreement. How much obligation is implied in each sentence? How much choice? What does the modal verb mean in each sentence? What other ways are there to say it?</p> | <p>Ss (T facilitates)</p> | <p>10 min.</p> |
| <p>Warm up Activate awareness of modal context: degrees of possibility and certainty</p> | <p>Activity #5 – Talking about Possibility and Certainty</p> <p>Start out with question and answer discussion about following hypothetical situation:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: “Do we all know what plutonium is?”</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Ss: <various answers></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">T: “Is it dangerous? Do you think it could cause cancer if you came into contact with it? How <u>certain</u> are you that if a person eats plutonium, they will get cancer? What about if they just touch it? What about working in a nuclear power plant?”</p> <p>Write various student remarks about the <u>possibility</u> of plutonium causing cancer. Illicit an opinion from individual Ss.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“S—, what do you think? Is it <u>possible</u> for plutonium to cause cancer if you handled it?”</p> | <p>T-Ss</p> | <p>10 min</p> |

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| <p>Discovery; Guided Practice Inductive evaluation of modal meanings</p> | <p>Activity #6a – Sorting: degrees of possibility and certainty</p> <p>Pass out new cards to students (plutonium sentences) and ask them to sort them in order of increasing or decreasing <u>certainty</u> with the sentence having the greatest degree of certainty at the top and the least amount of certainty at the bottom.</p> <p>The cards (7):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plutonium will cause cancer (if it is ingested). • Plutonium must cause cancer. • Plutonium should cause cancer (if it is ingested). • Plutonium can cause cancer. • Plutonium may cause cancer. • Plutonium could cause cancer. • Plutonium might cause cancer. <p>Write the vocabulary list on the board to one side:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">certainty conclusion probability capability possibility chance</p> | Ss | 5 – 8 min |
| <p>Discovery Evaluation of modal meaning</p> | <p>Activity #6b – Sharing and discussion: degrees of possibility and certainty</p> <p>Ask three volunteers to write their lists on the board. Discuss each list as a class. Notice where the order differs between lists. Discuss to invoke discovery, awareness, and consensus of degree. Compare any differences. The important point is to ask about what each modal verb means in terms of <u>possibility</u> and <u>certainty</u>?</p> | Ss (T facilitates) | 15 min |
| <p>Controlled Practice</p> | <p>Activity #7 (optional) – Gap Worksheet: Modal Verbs for Expressing Possibility</p> <p>Distribute worksheet and have students fill in the blanks, choosing an appropriate modal verb for each sentence. Go over answers with whole class.</p> | Ss | 10 min |

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| Freer Practice | <p>Activity #8 - Independent writing: Expressing Degree of Possibility and Certainty</p> <p>Step 1. Independent practice: write one sentence using one chosen modal verb.</p> <p>Lay out 14 index cards on the front table—two for each modal verb under discussion:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">will, must, should, can, may, could, might</p> <p>Ask students to come up and pick a card, then write a sentence using the modal verb that they selected. Instruct Ss that the sentence should indicate some degree of <u>possibility</u> and <u>certainty</u> about doing something in of the following topics (write these on the board):</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">science, engineering, the environment, transportation, health and medicine</p> | Ss | 8-10 min. |
| | <p>Step 2.</p> <p>Ask Ss to write their sentences on the board. For each sentence, ask class if they agree. Discuss any variation or disagreement. How much obligation is implied? How much choice? What does the modal verb mean in each sentence? What other ways are there to say it?</p> | Ss (T facilitates) | 10 min |

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Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Part 3: Rationale

Activity #1 – Talking about obligation

The aim is to activate student interest in the lesson by having them discuss a topic in which they can offer their opinions. The basic approach of the lesson is one of induction, and group discussion plays an important part. Much of language learning is done through osmosis; i.e. absorbing a feeling for usage through what one hears and learns from others. Because modal verbs convey subtle and varying meanings based on context, no absolutes are given in terms of usage and rules. The students will have to form their own judgment on how to use various modals. The point of this lesson is to provide opportunity for discussion, usage practice, and subjective evaluation.

Instead of following the usual pattern of presenting students with gap exercises centering around just two or three modals, but with a broad variety of contexts, I prefer limiting the context and comparing a wider range of modality, thereby allowing greater focus on the relative degrees of a full range of modality. And so I'm using a situational context about having—or being invited—to take off one's shoes.

Activity #2a – Sorting: degrees of obligation and choice

The students alternate between class discussion and working in pairs, or individually when writing sentences. Here, they work in pairs, providing a balance between hands-on practice (manipulation of meaning through ranking order) and discussion (testing one's understanding against that of another).

Activity #2b – Sharing and discussion: degrees of obligation and choice

By comparing lists, students deepen their discovery of the meaning of various modal verbs and possibly modify their understanding. Again, the approach of this lesson is one of induction and discovery, bases primarily on experiment and feedback/discussion. No explicit right/wrong judgments are given by the teacher. Even if the usage of a particular modal is way off from common usage, it is up to the student to realize this and alter their own understanding. The purpose is to activate awareness modal meaning through relative comparison within a limited context.

Activity #3 (optional) – Gap Worksheet: Modal Verbs for Expressing Obligation

This is the more typical series of gap (fill in the blanks) exercises. It is up to the Teacher based on his/her judgment as to whether this additional drill is needed. This is a low advanced class, and so the students should already have familiarity with the modals being discussed. Also, this exercise adds to the time and would most likely require extending the lesson over two class sessions.

Activity #4 - Independent writing: Expressing Degree of Obligation and Choice

The students experiment and discussion provides feedback for the student to gauge the effect or success of their understanding and usage. Students are guided to write in contexts that objectify modal contexts, moving them from the banal and personal into the professional or public realm. Also, limiting the modal card choices makes sure that all modals are experimented with and discussed.

Activities #5 – 8 – Talking about Possibility and Certainty

The basic pattern is repeated. The same modals are used, but this time the context is possibility instead of—and in contrast to—obligation.