



# Modals

M&R §§206–211

ENG240Y Old English / Wed 6 Oct 2010

# Modals in Modern English

can	may	must	shall	will
could	might		should	would

- Express 'modality', i.e. degrees of (un)certainity
- Modals are auxiliaries, always governing another verb
  - I **can** dance.
  - I **would** love **to** visit.

# Modals in Old English

cunnan

magan

mōtan

sculan

willan

cūðe

mihte

mōste

scolde

wolde

- Preterite also used to express greater uncertainty
- Also used as independent verbs (esp. *cunnan*, *willan*)  
(cf. “God **wills** it”, “we **must** away”)
- Sense may differ from that of the modern reflex

# Sense

cunnan	know how to; be able, can; as independent verb: know, be familiar with
magan	be able (cf. <i>cunnan</i> ) be allowed to (cf. <i>mōtan</i> )
mōtan	permission (be allowed to, may)
sculan	obligation or necessity (must, ought); authoritative expectation (shall); reported claims (is supposed to be)
willan	want, wish; less commonly pure futurity (will, shall)

# Conjugation

cunnan	ic can, þū canst, hē can, wē cunnon ic cūðe, þū cūðest, hē cūðe, wē cūðon
magan	ic mæg, þū meaht, hē mæg, wē magon ic mihte, þū mihtest, hē mihte, wē mihton
mōtan	ic mōt, þū mōst, hē mōt, wē mōton ic mōste, þū mōstest, hē mōste, wē mōston
sculan	ic sceal, þū scealt, hē sceal, wē sculon ic sceolde, þū sceoldest, hē sceolde, wē sceoldon
willan	ic wille, þū wilt, hē wile, wē willað ic wolde, þū woldest, hē wolde, wē woldon

# Example sentences

- Ænne cræft ic **cann**.
- Of ælcum trēowe ðises orcerdes ðū **mōst** etan.
- Hēo ne **mihte** þæt cild gehȳran.
- Nān man hine ne **cūðe** gecnāwan.
- Ælc cristen man **sceal** pater noster **cunnan**.
- Wē **willað** ūs tō scype gangan.
- Þū **scealt** grēot etan þīne līfdagas.
- Ne **mihtest** ðū āne tīde wacian?
- Lof **sceolde** hē drihtnes wyrcean.
- Hwȳ ne **meaht** þū hit ongītan?
- Ðū geherdest reccan þætte Iōb **sceolde** bīon se hēhsta god.