Mixed Modals:
Core Modal Verbs: Can, Must, Should & May Exercises

Fill in the blank with the correct option.

1. I ___ speak three languages: English, Spanish, and French.
   a) can   b) must
   c) should   d) may

2. You ___ wear a seatbelt in the car. It's the law.
   a) can   b) must
   c) may   d) should

3. You look tired. You ___ go to bed early tonight.
   a) must   b) can
   c) should   d) may

4. It ___ rain later this afternoon. Take an umbrella just in case.
   a) can   b) must
   c) should   d) may

5. ___ I use your phone for a moment, please?
   a) Can   b) Must
   c) Should   d) Will

6. Students ___ be quiet during the exam. No talking is allowed.
   a) should   b) must
   c) can   d) may

7. I think you ___ see a doctor about that cough.
   a) must   b) can
   c) should   d) may

8. He ___ swim very well. He's been taking lessons since he was five.
   a) may   b) should
   c) must   d) can

9. You ___ eat more fruit and vegetables. It's good for your health.
   a) should   b) can
   c) must   d) may

10. All passengers ___ show their tickets before boarding the train.
    a) may   b) must
    c) can   d) should

11. Sarah ___ not be at home. I saw her at the shops ten minutes ago.
    a) can   b) should
    c) may   d) must

12. I ___ ride a bicycle, but I ___ drive a car yet.
    a) may ... may not   b) should ... shouldn't
    c) must ... mustn't   d) can ... can't

13. You ___ turn off your phone in the cinema. It disturbs other people.
    a) should   b) can
    c) may   d) must

14. The concert ___ start late because of the bad weather.
    a) should   b) may
    c) must   d) can

15. My grandmother is 85, but she ___ still cook amazing meals.
    a) must   b) may
    c) can   d) should

16. You ___ park here. Look at the sign — it says 'No Parking'.
    a) shouldn't   b) may not
    c) can   d) mustn't

17. We ___ leave now, or we'll miss the bus.
    a) must   b) can
    c) may   d) should

18. ___ you help me carry these bags? They're very heavy.
    a) Must   b) Can
    c) Should   d) May

19. I'm not sure, but the meeting ___ be cancelled tomorrow.
    a) must   b) can
    c) may   d) should

20. If you feel stressed, you ___ take a break and go for a walk.
    a) must   b) may
    c) can   d) should

Answers

1. a) can

2. b) must

3. c) should

4. d) may

5. a) Can

6. b) must

7. c) should

8. d) can

9. a) should

10. b) must

11. c) may

12. d) can ... can't

13. a) should

14. b) may

15. c) can

16. d) mustn't

17. a) must

18. b) Can

19. c) may

20. d) should

Explanations

1. "can" (a)

Use 'can' to talk about ability — something you are able to do. 'I can speak three languages' means I have the ability to speak them. 'Must' expresses obligation, 'should' expresses advice, and 'may' expresses possibility.

2. "must" (b)

Use 'must' for strong obligation or rules, especially laws. Wearing a seatbelt is required by law. 'Should' would only suggest it's a good idea, but 'must' shows it is compulsory.

3. "should" (c)

Use 'should' to give friendly advice or a recommendation. The speaker is advising the tired person, not ordering them. 'Must' would be too strong for personal advice in this context.

4. "may" (d)

Use 'may' to express possibility — something that is perhaps true or might happen. 'It may rain' means there is a chance of rain. 'Must' would mean you are certain it will rain.

5. "Can" (a)

Use 'Can I...?' to ask for informal permission — it asks whether you are allowed to do something. 'Must I...?' asks about obligation, 'Should I...?' asks for advice, and 'Will I...?' makes a prediction about the future.

6. "must" (b)

Use 'must' for strict rules and regulations. The exam rule requires silence — it is not optional. 'Should' is too weak for a strict rule like this.

7. "should" (c)

Use 'should' to give advice or make a recommendation. 'I think you should see a doctor' is a gentle suggestion. Using 'must' would sound like a command rather than advice.

8. "can" (d)

Use 'can' to describe a general ability someone has. He learned to swim as a child and has the skill now. 'May' would mean it's possible he swims well but we're not sure, which doesn't match the certainty in this sentence.

9. "should" (a)

Use 'should' for health advice and recommendations. The speaker is suggesting a healthy habit, not giving an order. 'Must' would be too strong for general health advice.

10. "must" (b)

Use 'must' for official rules and requirements. Showing a ticket is a compulsory step before boarding — passengers have no choice. 'Should' would imply it is optional.

11. "may" (c)

Use 'may not' to express possibility that something is not the case. 'She may not be at home' means it's possible she isn't there. 'Can't' would express impossibility, and 'must not' would express prohibition, neither of which fits here.

12. "can ... can't" (d)

Use 'can' for ability and 'can't' for lack of ability. The speaker has the ability to ride a bicycle but does not yet have the ability to drive a car.

13. "should" (a)

Use 'should' to express what is the right or considerate thing to do. While some cinemas have strict rules (must), here the speaker is giving a recommendation based on politeness. The phrase 'it disturbs other people' supports advice rather than a strict rule.

14. "may" (b)

Use 'may' to talk about a future possibility. 'The concert may start late' means it is possible but not certain. 'Must' would imply certainty, and 'should' would imply expectation.

15. "can" (c)

Use 'can' to talk about ability, especially when highlighting a surprising skill. Despite her age, she has the ability to cook well. 'Must' would change the meaning to obligation.

16. "mustn't" (d)

Use 'mustn't' for prohibition — something that is not allowed. The 'No Parking' sign shows it is forbidden. 'Shouldn't' is only a recommendation, which is too weak here.

17. "must" (a)

Use 'must' when something is urgently necessary. Missing the bus is a real consequence, so the situation demands immediate action. 'Should' would be less urgent than the situation requires.

18. "Can" (b)

Use 'Can you...?' to make an informal request for help. It asks about someone's ability and willingness. 'Must you...?' would ask about obligation, and 'Should you...?' would ask if it's advisable.

19. "may" (c)

Use 'may' to express uncertainty about the future. 'I'm not sure' signals that the speaker is guessing, which matches 'may' (possibility). 'Must' would express certainty, which contradicts 'I'm not sure'.

20. "should" (d)

Use 'should' for personal advice and recommendations. The speaker is suggesting a good way to deal with stress — it is a helpful suggestion, not an obligation. 'Must' would be too strong for personal wellbeing advice.