MODAL VERBS

The following modal verbs are used to indicate likelihood, ability, permission, and obligation.

Can

ability in the present:

I can hear my neighbour’s dog barking.

Could

ability in the past:

I could hear my neighbour’s dog barking last night.

possibility in the future:

It could rain tomorrow.

Will

certainty in the future:

She will go home after work.

offer or promise to do something in the future:

He will do the dishes.

willingness to do something in the future:

Perhaps she will help me with my homework tomorrow.

conditional: what will happen in the present or future, but depends on other events:

I will go the store when I find my wallet.

informal request:

Will you drive me home?

Would

possibility but not necessarily real:

It would be very hard to memorize the entire textbook.

conditional: what might happen, but depends on other events
I would go to the store if I could find my wallet.

*formal/polite request:*

Would you drive me home?

**Would have**

*possibility in the past that didn’t occur:*

I would have gone to the store if I could have found my wallet.

For more on modal verbs visit the [Dalhousie Writing Centre](http://www.learnenglish.de/grammar/verbmodal.htm).

Sources:

http://www.learnenglish.de/grammar/verbmodal.htm