

Lesson Plan: Semi-modals (be bound to, be supposed to, be likely to)

Level: Advanced (C1–C1+)

Time: 75–90 minutes

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Distinguish subtle differences in meaning between **be bound to, be supposed to, and be likely to**
- Use semi-modals accurately to express **expectation, obligation, probability, and prediction**
- Select appropriate semi-modals based on **context, certainty, and register**
- Self-correct common advanced learner errors

Target language overview

1. Be supposed to

Core meaning:

- Expectation, rule, duty, or agreed arrangement
- Often implies **something may not actually happen**

Examples:

Employees are supposed to arrive by 9 a.m.

The train is supposed to leave at noon (but it might be late).

Notes:

- Common in spoken English
- Often used to complain or express frustration

- Past form: *was/were supposed to*

2. Be likely to

Core meaning:

- High probability based on evidence or logic
- Neutral and factual in tone

Examples:

Prices are likely to rise next year.

She's likely to win the election.

Notes:

- Common in academic, news, and formal contexts
- Can be replaced with *will probably* (slightly less formal)

3. Be bound to

Core meaning:

- Very strong expectation or near certainty
- Often suggests inevitability

Examples:

With this weather, delays are bound to happen.

If you don't rest, you're bound to get sick.

Notes:

- Stronger than *be likely to*
- Often used to warn or reassure

Meaning Comparison Chart

Semi-modal	Strength	Meaning Focus	Typical Context
be supposed to	medium	expectation / duty	spoken, informal to neutral
be likely to	strong	probability	formal, neutral
be bound to	very strong	inevitability	spoken emphasis, warnings

Lesson procedure

1. Lead-in (10 minutes)

Activity: What do you expect?

Display statements and ask students to discuss in pairs:

- The meeting will start on time.
- People will complain about the new rules.
- The weather will improve tomorrow.

Elicit:

- How sure are you?
- Is this a rule, a prediction, or a personal opinion?

Introduce the idea that English has **different ways to show expectation and certainty**.

2. Presentation (20 minutes)

Step 1: Contextualized examples

Present a short scenario (news / workplace context):

"Employees are supposed to follow the new safety procedures. However, accidents are still likely to happen. Without proper training, mistakes are bound to occur."

Ask CCQs:

- Which action is a rule?
- Which is a prediction?
- Which feels almost inevitable?

Step 2: Form focus

Board structures:

- **be supposed to + base verb**
- **be likely to + base verb**
- **be bound to + base verb**

Highlight:

- All change for tense and subject
- Negatives and questions:

Is it supposed to rain?

It's not likely to happen.

3. Controlled practice (15 minutes)

Activity: Choose the best semi-modal

Students choose the most appropriate option and justify their choice:

1. The report is _____ be finished by Friday (company rule).
2. With these results, the plan is _____ succeed.
3. He's late again—he was _____ call to apologize.

Answers:

1. supposed to
2. likely to / bound to (context dependent)
3. supposed to

Discuss why other options sound unnatural or too strong/weak.

4. Semi-controlled practice (15 minutes)

Activity: Rewrite with precision

Students rewrite sentences using a different semi-modal **without changing the meaning too much**:

1. It will probably rain tonight.
2. Employees must wear ID badges.
3. If you skip practice, you will fail.

Possible answers:

- It's likely to rain tonight.
- Employees are supposed to wear ID badges.
- If you skip practice, you're bound to fail.

5. Communicative practice (15–20 minutes)

Activity: Expert opinions

Students work in small groups. Each group chooses a topic:

- *Technology*
- *Education*
- *Climate*
- *Work culture*

They prepare 4–5 statements using all three semi-modals:

- One rule/expectation
- One strong prediction
- One inevitable consequence

Groups present and classmates listen for accuracy and nuance.

6. Error Analysis & Feedback (10 minutes)

Write typical advanced-level errors:

- ✗ He is likely that he will win
- ✗ You are bound get tired
- ✗ We supposed to finish yesterday

Elicit corrections:

- ✓ He is likely to win
- ✓ You are bound to get tired
- ✓ We were supposed to finish yesterday

Common advanced pitfalls

- Confusing **grammatical subject** with logical subject
- Overusing *be bound to* in neutral contexts
- Using *be supposed to* when obligation is strong (*must* needed)

Optional homework / extension

- Write a short opinion article using all three semi-modals
- Record a 2-minute spoken prediction about the future
- Analyze a news article and underline semi-modals used