

RESOURCE VIDEO

MODALS (CAN, COULD)

HOW TO USE “CAN”

We use **CAN** to talk about abilities, possibilities and to ask for and give permission.

- Affirmative: Subject + **can** + main verb
- Negative: Subject + **can't / cannot** + main verb
- Interrogative: **Can** + subject + main verb?

EXAMPLES

Affirmative:

1. Birds can fly. Fish can swim. (abilities)
2. The teacher can help you if you have any questions. (ability)
3. You can watch TV after you finish your homework. (permission)

Negative:

1. I cannot (can't) attend the meeting today. (not possible)
2. Leo cannot (can't) eat fish. He's allergic. (not possible)
3. The dog cannot (can't) go in the swimming pool. (not permitted)
4. The children cannot (can't) eat any more candy today. (not permitted)

Interrogative:

1. Can you speak English? (ability)
2. Can you help me with my homework? (ability)
3. Can the children stay up late tonight? (permission)
4. Can your husband vote in the U.S.? (ability/permission)

***CAN is very similar to MAY when used to ask for and give permission. However, CAN is more informal than MAY and more commonly used.**

PRACTICE

Q. Can you speak any other languages besides English and Portuguese?

Possible answers:

No, I cannot/can't.

Yes, I can! I can speak French / Spanish / German / Japanese.

HOW TO USE “COULD”

Could is the past tense of the verb can. We use **could** to talk about abilities, possibilities, and to ask for and give permission in a more polite and formal way.

- Affirmative: Subject + **could** + main verb
- Negative: Subject + **couldn't/could not** + main verb
- Interrogative: **Could** + subject + main verb?

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MODALS (CAN, COULD)

EXAMPLES

Affirmative

1. I could easily become a vegetarian. I rarely eat meat. (ability)
2. We could order pizza if you want. (possibility in a more formal way)
3. You could look for another job if you're that unhappy. (possibility in a more formal way)

Negative

1. I couldn't go to the meeting this morning. (not able to go, past tense of can)
2. Sally couldn't finish the test in time. (not able to finish, past tense of can)
3. When I was little, I couldn't watch any TV. My mom wouldn't let me. (not able to watch TV in the past)

Interrogative

1. Could you help me? (a polite way to ask for something)
2. How could he do that? (How was he able to do that (in the past)?)
3. Could you open the door for me? (asking for something in a more polite way)

PRACTICE

What is something that you couldn't do when you were a child that you can do now?

Possible answers:

When I was a child, I couldn't drive but now I can.

When I was a child, I couldn't speak Portuguese but now I can.

When I was a child, I couldn't work but now I can.

SUMMARY

- Use **CAN** to talk about abilities, possibilities and to ask for and give permission in an informal way.
- Use **COULD** as the past tense of CAN, to talk about abilities, possibilities, and to ask for and give permission in a more polite and formal way.