

MODAL VERB “CAN”

Can is used to express ability and also it is used to ask for informal permission. (usually at home or with friends).

Examples:

They can really play football well. (ability) She

can dance all night long. (ability)

He can play the piano. (ability)

Can I go and see my friends? (informal permission)

If I do the dishes can I watch my favorite program? (informal permission) Can I

shut the door? It's awfully cold in here. (informal permission)

Examples of questions with “can” when asking about abilities. Can he speak Russian?

Yes, he can. No, he can't.

Can she really fly an airplane?

Yes, she can. No, she can't.

Argentina is really a good team, but can they win the World Cup? Yes, they can.

No, they can't.

Can you really speak five languages fluently?

Yes, I can. No, I can't.

Can Superman really bend steel with his bare hands?

Yes, he can. No, he can't.

For ability with “can” the structure is as follows:

SUBJECT	+ CAN	+ VERB IN INFINITIVE FORM	+ COMPLEMENTIZER
I	can	swim	twenty miles easily.
You	can	paint	very well.
He	can	speak	Russian.
She	can	play	baseball.
It	can	jump	over the fence.
We	can	beat	the other team.
They	can	work	really fast.

The modal verb “can” is also used much in the same way as “may” is used when asking for permission or making a request, but it is used less formally. Usually “can” is used among friends or at home.

Examples:

Can I go to the beach after I’m finished with my homework?

Can we play football with you guys?

Can you please shut the window?

Can you please pass the salt?

Can I see those pictures you’re looking at, they look really interesting?

When asking for permission or making a request with “can” the structure is as follows:

CAN	+ SUBJECT	+ VERB IN INFINITIVE FORM	+ COMPLEMENTIZER
can	I	visit	them next summer?
Can	you	come	to my party?
Can	he	go	with us?
Can	she	play	with us?
Can	it	sleep	in tomorrow?
Can	we	speak	Japanese?
Can	they	borrow	our car tonight?

The negative form of “can” is “can’t” when using “can’t” for abilities. It is also used as a negative answer when asking for permission or a request. The structure is as follow:

SUBJECT	+ CAN’T	+ VERB IN INFINITIVE FORM	+ COMPLEMENTIZER
I	Can’t	swim	Well.
You	Can’t	Speak	Japanese.
He	Can’t	cook	At all.
She	Can’t	Play	The violin.
It	Can’t	Jump	The fence.
We	Can’t	Go	To the dance.
They	Can’t	Buy	That car yet.

Examples of “can’t” as a negative answer to polite requests and asking for permission.

Request: Mother, can I go to the movies later?

Answer: No, you **can’t**.

Request: Can I borrow your pen for a second?

Answer: No you **can’t** because I need it now.

Request: Sir, can I talk to you for a second?

Answers: No you **can’t**, I’m terribly busy.



Request: Mom, can I watch a movie on TV tonight?

Answer: No you **can't**, you have a lot of homework to do.

Request: Maria, can I have your telephone number?

Answer: No you **can't**, you've already asked my younger sister, my best friend, and for Sylvia's number.



Read the sentences carefully and determine if the modal verb might is being used to show ability, make a request of or ask for permission informally.

1. Can you help me?

A. Ability

B. Request

C. Informal permission

2. I can speak English Fluently.

A. Ability

B. Request

C. Informal permission

3. Can I close the window? It is kind of cold here.

A. Ability

B. Request

C. Informal permission

4. Mon. Can we go to the movies tonight?

A. Ability

B. Request

C. Informal permission

5. Can I talk to you for a minute?

A. Ability

B. Request

C. Informal permission

6. She can play the piano very well.

A. Ability

B. Request

C. Informal permission

7. Can I put my things on the top of your desk?

A. Ability

B. Request

C. Informal permission

8. Can I help you?

A. Ability

B. Request

C. Informal permission

9. My wife and I can drive big trucks.

A. Ability

B. Request

C. Informal permission

10. Excuse me officer. Can I leave now?

A. Ability

B. Request

C. Informal permission

