

MODAL VERB: CAN

ABILITY

To be able to:

- *Can you drive?*
- *She can speak four languages.*
- *Can you read that sign from this distance?*
- *The doctors are doing all that they can, but she's still not breathing properly.*
- *Do the best you can - I realize the circumstances are not ideal.*
- *If the party is awful, we can **always** leave (= that would be one possible solution to our problem).*
- *"She's really furious about it." "Can you blame her (= I'm not surprised)?"*

Can do (US INFORMAL)

Used to say that you can and will do something:

- *"Will you mail this letter for me, please?" "Can do."*
- *"I need you to pick up the kids today." "Sorry, no can do (= no I can't)."*

PERMISSION

To be **allowed** to:

- *If you finish early you can go home.*
- *She can come whenever she likes, as far as I'm concerned.*
- *Finish up your dinner and you can have dessert.*
- *How early can you get off this afternoon?*
- *Anyone can go - you don't have to be invited.*

Sometimes used to **tell** someone **angrily** to do something (INFORMAL):

- *If you carry on being horrible to your sister, Sophie, you can just go to bed!*

REQUEST

Used to request something:

- *If you see Brett, can you tell him I'm in town next weekend?*
- *Can you make a little less noise, please? I'm trying to work.*

POSSIBILITY

Used to express possibility:

- *You can get stamps from the local newsagents.*
- *You can get very nasty skin diseases from bathing in dirty water.*
- *Smoking can cause cancer.*
- *Noise can be quite a problem when you're living in a flat.*
- *He can be really annoying at times (= he is sometimes very annoying).*

OFFER

Used in polite offers of help:

- *Can I help you with those bags?*
- *I'm afraid Ms Ferguson has already left the office. Can I be of any help?*

CAN: FORM **(Modal Verb)**

AFFIRMATIVE FORM:

Can comes first in the verb phrase (after the subject and before another verb):

- We [verb phrase] **can** take the train to Birmingham.

Can is never used with another modal verb:

- He **can** hear the music from his room sometimes.
 - Not: He ~~can might~~ hear the music ... or He ~~might can might~~ hear the music ...

NEGATIVE FORM:

The negative form of can is can't. We don't use don't/doesn't/didn't with can:

- I **can't** believe you said that!
 - Not: I ~~don't can~~ believe you said that!

We can use the full form **cannot** (one word) in formal contexts or when we want to emphasise something:

- I **cannot** understand why she behaves like that.

QUESTION FORM:

Warning:

The subject and **can** change position to form questions. We don't use **do/does/did**:

- **Can this** really be true?
 - Not: ~~Does this can really be true?~~
- **Can't you** ask for another day off work?

We use **can** and **can't** in question tags:

- You **can't** take photos inside the museum, **can you?**
- Abby **can** speak Japanese, **can't she?**