

EC 2 & 3 Modals - Can, Could & May

Form – How is it formed?

Can, could & may are modal verbs. A modal verb is not the main verb. A **modal** verb "modifies" or adds meaning to a main verb.

Grammar Form - Asking for Permission

Modal + **subject** + predicate

Pattern	Sentence	Degree of Politeness
Can + subject + predicate	Can I see the book?	less polite
Could + subject + predicate	Could I see the book?	polite
May + subject + predicate	May I see the book?	more polite

*Use the subject "**I**" with **may**. Don't use the subject **you**.

Grammar Form - Polite Requests

Add **PLEASE** to make your request polite.

Please + modal + subject + predicate	Please can I see the book? Please could I see the book? Please may I see the book?
Modal + subject + please + predicate	Can I please see the book? Could I please see the book? May I please see the book?
Modal + subject + predicate + please	Can I see the book please ? Could I see the book please ? May I see the book please ?

Grammar Form – Giving Permission

Can & May

Subject + **modal** + predicate

Pattern	Sentence
Subject + can + predicate	You can see the book.
Subject + may + predicate	You may see the book.
Subject + could + predicate = conditional statement	You could see the book. Incorrect by itself. I said that you could see the book. Correct

Grammar Form - Not Giving Permission

Can't & May Not

Subject + **modal** + **not** + predicate

Pattern	Sentence
Subject + can + not + predicate	You can not see the book. You can't see the book.
Subject + may + not + predicate	You may not see the book.

Use the base form of a verb after a modal.

He can visit our house. **Correct**

He can visits our house. **Incorrect**

He cans visit our house. **Incorrect**

She may not do that. **Correct**

She may not does that. **Incorrect**

She mays not do that. **Incorrect**

Meaning - what does it mean?

Can means to be able to or be permitted to. *Could* is the past tense of *can* and is more formal than *can*. *May* is the most formal and polite.

Can and *could* also mean ability – a person's skill or general ability. This can be the ability to do something in the present or the future.

General abilities.

I can play the piano well.

He can't ride a bike.

Ability to do something in the present or future.

He can go to Hawaii if he saves his money.

He can't travel by himself.

We use ***could*** to talk about the **past**.

I could speak French when I was in high school.

She couldn't pass the test.

Use – when/why is it used?

Use *may*, *can*, and *could* to ask for permission. Also use *can* and *could* to talk about abilities.

For more information on modals and practice exercises, go to

<http://www.englishpage.com/modals/modalintro.html>