



# Modal Verbs

## “Can” and “Could”

Grammar > Intermediate 5



## Exercise 1 – Learning

Verbs do much more than express an action, such as '**running**'.

There are also **helping verbs**, like '**be**' that help express the tenses of other verbs, as in 'I *am* running (now)', 'I *was* running (before)', etc.

A specific set of helping verbs are '**modal verbs**', which tell us the '**mood**' of the sentence:

- Is the speaker certain of what they say (or is it just a possibility/prediction/expectation)?
- Is the speaker asking/demanding someone to do something?
- Is the speaker asking for or giving permission to do something?

Modal verbs in this lesson: **can, could**



## Can

Positive sentence: **subject + can + main verb**

- I / you / we / they **can** dance.
- He / she / it **can** dance.

Negative sentence: **subject + can + NOT + main verb**

We negate the modal verb '**can**' and not the main verb.

- You **cannot** sit here.
- They **can't** come to the party.

Interrogative sentence: **Can + subject + main verb?**

Raise your intonation at the end of the sentence.

- **Can I come** to the party?

**Tip:** Can has only one form; it does not change form depending on the subject. For example, "He cans dance" is incorrect.



## Use of 'can':

1. Use '**can**' to describe ability:

- I **can** cook.
- I **cannot** cook.

2. Use '**can**' to describe opportunity or possibility:

- We **can** cook if you want.
- We **cannot** cook here.

3. Use '**can**' to request or give permission:

- **Can** I sit here?
- Yes, you **can**.
- No, you **cannot**.



## Could

Positive sentence: **subject + could + main verb**

- I / you / we / they **could** dance.
- He / she / it **could** dance.

Negative sentence: **subject + could + NOT + main verb**

We negate the modal verb '**could**' and not the main verb.

- You **could not** sit here.
- They **couldn't** come to the party.

Interrogative sentence: **Could + subject + main verb?**

Raise your intonation at the end of the sentence.

- **Could I come** to the party?

**Tip:** Could has only one form; it does not change form depending on the subject. The main verb is always the bare infinitive.



### Use of 'could':

1. Use '**could**' to describe past ability or possibility:

- I **could swim** when I was 5 years old.
- She **could speak** 7 languages.

2. Use '**could**' to request or give permission:

- **Could I sit** here?
- Yes, you **could**.
- No, you **couldn't**.



## Exercise 2 – Ordering

*Put the words into the correct order.*

**Example:** Can help you me? → Can you help me?

### Content:

1. go could I to the store.
2. she Can take train this to Berlin?
3. No, she take cannot the train.
4. dance can She.
5. He park could his there car.
6. Could bring you your dog?
7. Yes, I bring could him.
8. It's sunny, we picnic can a have today.



## Exercise 3 – Sentence Construction

*Use what you learned in class to create sentences with your tutor.*

**Example:** I study English every day. → I can/could study English every day.

### Content:

1. He drives trucks.
2. She takes professional pictures.
3. Lisa speaks Russian.
4. Jack goes on a trip to China.
5. Megan and David relax on the bench.
6. I stay up late.