



lingoda

# Modality in focus: using *can*

GRAMMAR

LEVEL  
Advanced

NUMBER  
C1\_4021G\_EN

LANGUAGE  
English



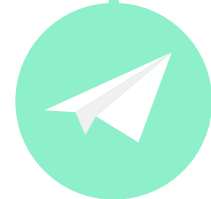


## Goals

- Can recognise more advanced modal structures using 'can'.
- Can accurately form my own sentences with 'can' to emphasise an idea clearly.



**He can't have been** that tired after his flight if he was able to go to Jill's party and stay right until the end. Though **I can't say I enjoyed** the party much myself, the food was terrible! **I can honestly say** Jill is a lovely person, but she isn't so talented in the kitchen!





## Preview and warm-up

- In this class you will learn and practise using more advanced structures using the modal verb **can**.



That's a fair point! **It could be argued that** way.

## Review: deduction using can't and cannot

We use the **negative form** of the modal verb **can** to deduce that something is **not the case**, or that something **did not happen**. Unlike **must**, **may** or **could have**, deduction in the **negative form** is usually a reaction to what someone else has said.

We use **can't** (or **cannot**) + **have** + **past participle** to make this kind of deduction.



It's too bad that John has left for his holidays already, I wanted to check something with him before he went.



He **can't have left** for his holidays yet, I saw him in the office five minutes ago!



## Make your own deductions!

Take inspiration from the pictures below and make as many deductive sentences as you can using **cannot** or **can't** for each.





## Using can in the passive voice

- Another advanced structure uses **can** in the **passive voice**. This form is quite **speculative**.
- We can use **can** in the passive voice to give a **perspective** on something, usually when there are different ways of looking at the topic.
- Using **can** in this way is **non-committal**. You are not taking as much ownership of the statement by using the passive voice.
- We use the construction: **can + be + past participle**.

- **It can be said that** London is a difficult city to live in because it is so expensive.
- **It can be concluded that**, in general, living in a rural area leads to better quality of sleep.





## Using can and could in the passive voice

- You can also make this construction using **could**: **could + be + past participle + (that)**.
- Using **could** has the effect of **distancing** you even **further** from the point that's being made. Using **could** implies you are taking less ownership than **can** as it is a **conditional** verb.

- **It could be argued that** if he had acted sooner the company could have been saved.
- That kind of behaviour **could be considered** a cry for help.
- In my country, that **could be seen** as very rude.







## Reporting formally using can and could in the passive voice

- Remember, it's **more common** to see this structure used formally!
- This structure is very useful when writing a **report** in the passive voice, when you might want to show a few different perspectives on one topic.



On the one hand, **it can be concluded that** school environments are not conducive to full concentration. However on the other hand, these statistics **can be seen as** a result of children's increased exposure to technology for longer periods of time.



## That or as?

**Below are some past participles of verbs that can be used in the passive structure 'can/could + be + past participle'. Which should be paired with 'that' and which should be paired with 'as'? Which would you only use when writing?**

argued

concluded

considered

said

seen

looked at

thought of

claimed

asserted

denied

that

as

only when writing



## Can/could with the passive voice in everyday speech

**Complete the second sentence below. Can you think of other situations where you would use this structure in everyday speech?**



I think this new policy of a stricter dress code at work is unnecessarily strict.  
It's just trying to make us all look and think the same.

It could also be seen as an attempt to...



That's a fair point. I never thought about it that way, actually. Doesn't stop it  
being annoying, though!



## Complete the sentence

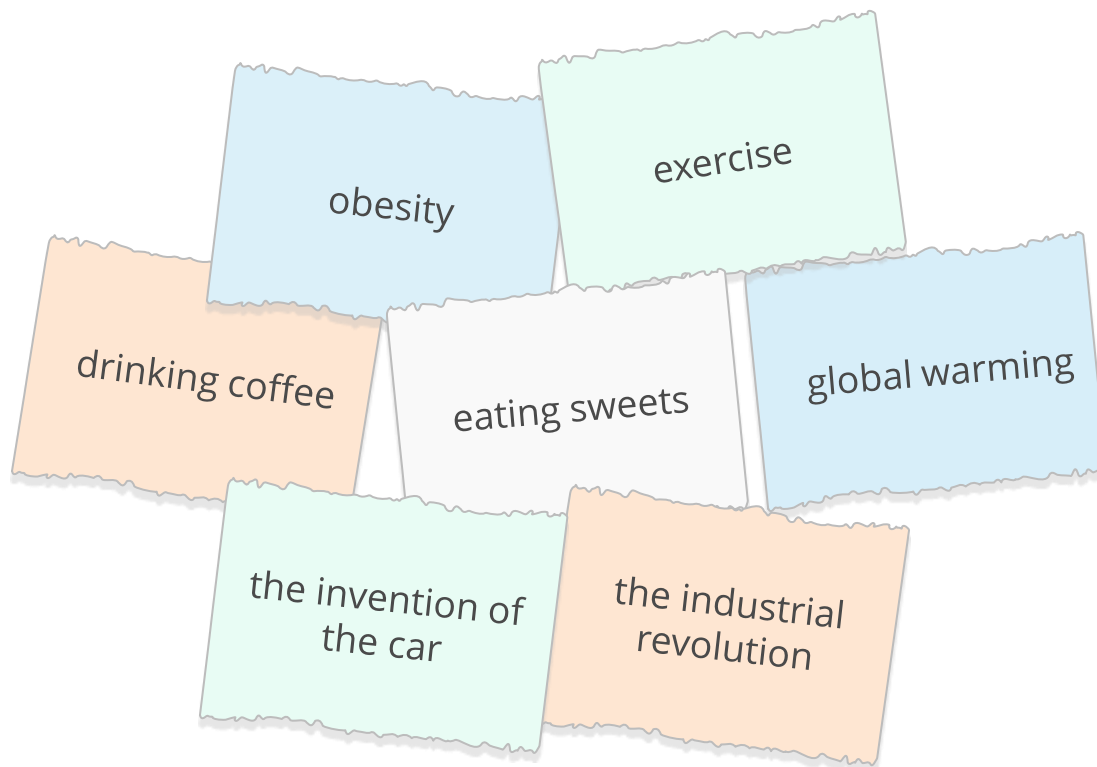
**Complete the following sentences with your own endings. Feel free to replace 'it' with a noun phrase of your choosing!**

1. It can be argued that...
2. It could be said that...
3. It could be understood as...
4. It can be seen as...
5. It could be considered as...



**Now it's your turn!**

**Look at the topics on the cards below. Make sentences about each topic using can or could in the passive voice.**





## Using can or can't for emphasis

- We also use **can** and **can't** to add emphasis in sentences.
- We use **can** and **can't** in this way in more **informal** sentences, in both spoken and in written English.
- Usually we add **can** and **can't** for emphasis with certain **verbs**, like **to say** and **to tell**.

- They have spent a lot of money on the redesign of the restaurant but I **can tell you**, it looked better before!
- I **can't say** I liked the new food much, either.





## Can and can't for emphasis in informal spoken English

- Do you know what gossip is? You will frequently hear **can** and **can't** used for **emphasis** in this kind of spoken English.
- Gossip is a light, informal and idle talk that is often about the personal lives or affairs of other people.



**I can't say** I was surprised to hear she left him, apparently he never did any work around the house and spent all of his time watching television!



## Unscramble the sentences

Can you unscramble the sentences below?

I can tell you

His idea was  
interesting but

there's a lot of  
choice on our  
wine menu

I can't say I liked  
it

she is the hardest  
working member  
of staff I have  
ever met.

As you can see

I can tell you

As you can see

we have invested  
a lot of money in  
our new library

he won't be  
showing his face  
around here for a  
while!

I can't say I  
enjoyed it

She made a  
chocolate cake  
but





## Using can and can't for emphasis

Look at the pictures below. Roleplay the situation described with your teacher and practise using can and can't for emphasis.

I can't say



Two colleagues gossiping about a colleague's promotion



An interviewer showing an interviewee around the office

As you can see

I can't say I liked it



A friend telling a story about something they did on a recent holiday



A teacher talking to a colleague about a clever student

I can tell you



## Emphasising something with an adverb in the mid position

- We also use **can** and **can't** to **emphasise** something with an **adverb** in the **mid position** for extra **detail**.
- In this structure, the adverb goes **between** the modal verb **can** and the **main** verb:
  - **Can + adverb + main verb**

- **I can honestly say** I have never before seen such a beautiful view!





## Emphasising something with an adverb in the mid position

- Below are a list of **verbs** and some of the **adverbs** that are **often** used with them.
- Be careful! It is important to make sure that your chosen **adverb** makes sense with your **main verb**, and in the **context** of your sentence!

main verb	typical adverbs	example
to say	truthfully, honestly, proudly, confidently	<b>I can honestly say</b> that was the best meal I have ever eaten.
to recommend	highly, thoroughly, definitely, heartily, personally, strongly, sincerely	<b>I can highly recommend</b> that hotel, I stayed there last month with my family and we loved it.
to understand	fully, perfectly, totally, completely	<b>I can fully understand</b> wanting to take some time to think about your decision.
to see	definitely, clearly, hardly, absolutely	<b>We can clearly see</b> a link between the two.



## Complete the sentences

**Complete the following sentences by matching the appropriate beginning on the left with an ending on the right.**

1. I can perfectly

a. say that Pamela has accepted the position as our new head of department

2. We can thoroughly

b. understand why you chose to move here

3. You can clearly

c. see how hard they have worked on the project

4. I can proudly

d. recommend his services, he is an excellent teacher



## Categorise

**Sort the adverbs below into lists that can be used with each of the four verbs. If you aren't sure, about a pair, try to put them in a sentence. Watch out – some of them will go in more than one list!**

truthfully

honestly

proudly

strongly

sincerely

hardly

personally

completely

confidently

clearly

highly

heartily

say

recommend

see

understand

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## Putting it into practise

Read the situations described on the cards below. You are going to practise emphasising something with **can** or **cannot** and an adverb in the mid position. In each case make as many different sentences as you can using as many adverbs as possible with the appropriate verb.

say  
news at work



recommend  
holiday destination



understand  
your friend's  
decision about  
something



see  
the reason for a  
decision being  
taken





## Speaking your mind

**Choose one of the topics below and speak about it for at least 3 minutes. Weigh up the pros and cons of the topic, explain possible reasons for these, or possible interpretations of the pros and cons. Finally, give your own opinion. Use as many structures from this lesson as you can!**

going to  
university

driving instead of  
taking public  
transport

eating meat

adopting a pet  
from a shelter  
instead of buying  
one



## Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!







## Answer key

### Activity p. 10

That: argued, concluded, said, claimed, denied

As: seen, looked at, thought of, considered

Only when writing: concluded, claimed, asserted, denied

### Activity p. 16

His idea was interesting but - I can't say I liked it

As you can see - there's a lot of choice on our wine menu

I can tell you - she is the hardest working member of staff I have ever met.

I can tell you - he won't be showing his face around here for a while!

As you can see - we have invested a lot of money in our new library

She made a chocolate cake but - I can't say I enjoyed it

### Activity p. 20

1b, 2d, 3c, 4a

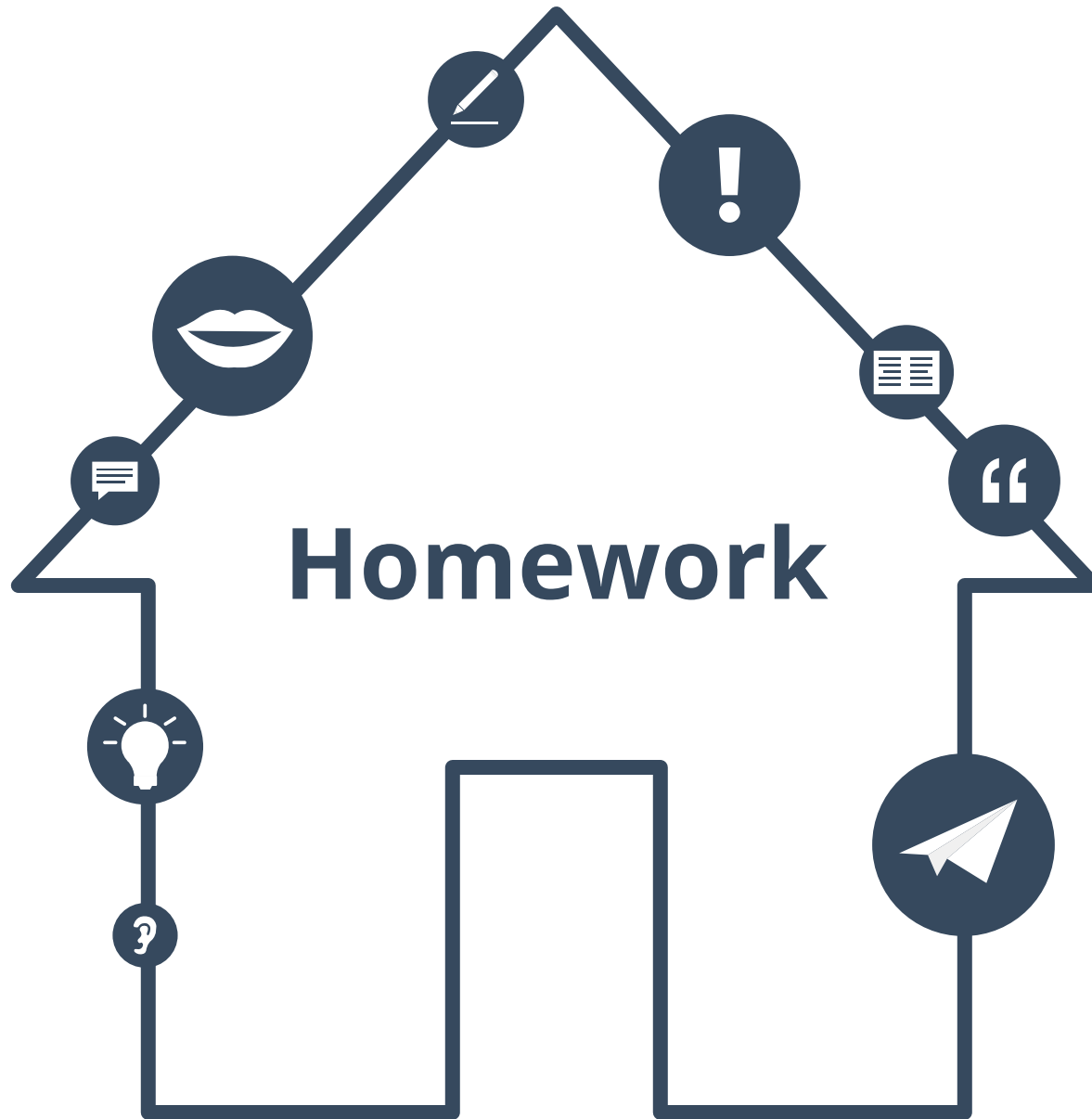
### Activity p. 21

Say: truthfully, honestly, proudly, confidently, hardly, sincerely

Recommend: highly, thoroughly, heartily, personally, strongly, sincerely, honestly

Understand: completely, personally, sincerely

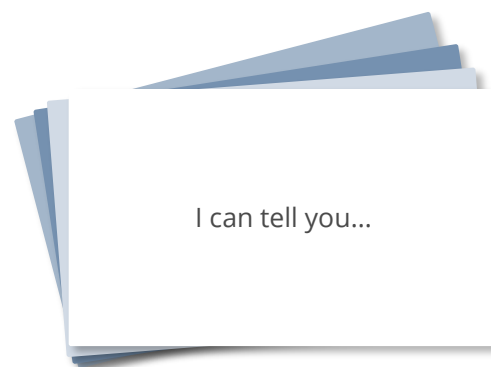
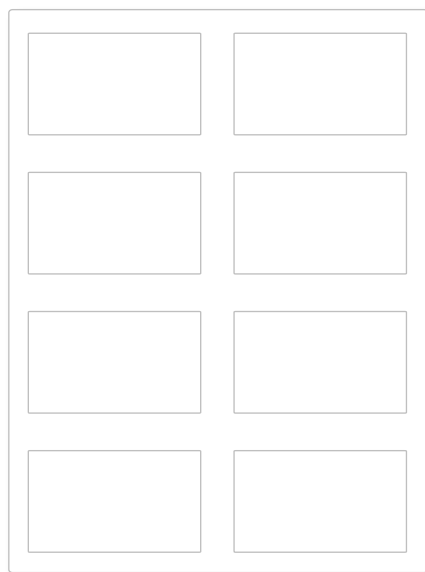
See: definitely, clearly, hardly, honestly, sincerely





## Revising the rules

**Go back through the lesson and make flashcards about the structures you learned. Were there any mistakes you kept making? Make special flashcards to help you for next time!**





## Write a review

**Using as many structures using 'can' as possible, write a review of a restaurant, holiday destination, book or film.**

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