

CAN - Ability

The modal verb can is used in a variety of ways. Below are brief explanations of usage along with an exercise for you to check your understanding.

Generally, we should know that can is used to express ability or absence of ability.

I **can** read = I am able to read. (I have the ability)

I **can't** fly = I am unable to fly. (I don't have the ability)

Can is the same for all subjects. We don't add an 'S' in the third person (like other verbs)

The verb that comes after **Can** is in the infinitive without **to**:

- I **can** *spea*k Spanish. (= it is possible for me to speak Spanish = I have the ability to speak Spanish)
- He **can** *swim* well.
- We **can** *see* our neighbour in the garden.
- They **can** *play* the guitar.

Negative

To form the negative we add "**not**" after **can** to form one word: **cannot**.

We can also contract the negative to form **can't**. (can't = cannot)

- I **cannot** *play* the piano. We **can't** *go* to the cinema tonight.
- She **cannot** *spea*k French very well. He **can't** *drive* a car.

Questions

To form the question we change the position of the subject and the auxiliary verb. The main verb is still in the infinitive without *to*.

- Where **can** I *buy* an ice-cream?
- **Can** I *go* to the party, please?
- **Can** you *spea*k Japanese?
- What **can** we *do* on Saturday?

Remember that you can use short answers:

- Can I sit here please? **Yes, you can.**
- Can you speak Chinese? **No, I can't.**

CAN - CANNOT

USES OF CAN

Simple Present Tense

1. ability or possibility

- I can swim.

2. permission

- You can use my pen.

CAN + VERB * *Base form of the infinitive

He can speak English. ✓

He can speaks English. ✗ No S

He can to speak English. ✗ No TO

AFFIRMATIVE

SINGULAR

I can speak English.
 You can ride a bike.
 He can drive a car.
 She can play the guitar.
 It can swim.

NEGATIVE

I can't speak French.
 You can't ride a horse.
 He can't drive a truck.
 She can't play the piano.
 It can't fly.

PLURAL

We can play football.
 You can see the stars.
 They can dance.

We can't play tennis.
 You can't see germs.
 They can't sing.

QUESTIONS

+ Affirmative They can speak Spanish.

? Question Can they speak Spanish?

Short Answer Yes, they can. / No, they can't.

CONTRACTION

can't = cannot

He can't sing.
 = He cannot sing.

Practice

Exercise 1

Put the words in the correct order to make sentences.

1. very | play | my | can | brother | football | well

2. homework | with | you | I | can | help | your

3. in | Sue | English | can't | read

4. you | it | I | about | cannot | tell

5. make | can | your | mum | cakes | good

6. go | you | tonight | can | out

.....
7. dad | cannot | a | horse | ride | my
.....

8. morning | come | I | tomorrow | can't
.....

9. again | Bill | drive | his | can | car
.....

10. you | my | can't | mobile | use | new | phone
.....

Exercise 2

Use modal verbs can or can't to make similar sentences.

1. Don't park your car here. It is illegal.
You park your car here.
2. Why don't you stay with us? No problem!
You stay with us.
3. I don't think this car is expensive. It's ten years old.
This carbe expensive.
4. I am not good at basketball.
I play basketball.
5. Let's take a taxi.
We take a taxi.

Exercise 3

Put the words in the correct order to make questions.

1. me | hear | you | can
.....?
2. you | song | sing | can't | this
.....?
3. on | come | why | can't | Peter | Sunday
.....?
4. brother | can | run | your | fast
.....?
5. where | can | tonight | sleep | we
.....?