

# CAN / CAN'T / COULD / COULDN'T

## Modal Verbs

### CAN

The three main uses of **Can** are: 1) ability 2) possibility and 3) permission. However, there are some other uses of **Can** as we will see below.

#### To express ability

**Can** means to be (physically) able to do something OR to know how to do something.

- Birds **can** fly.
- Elephants **can't** fly.

#### To ask for or give permission / To request something

**Can** is used to ask for / request permission or to give permission.

Note: **Can't** is used to refuse permission.

- You **can** use my umbrella; I don't need it right now.
- **Can** I sit in that chair please?

### COULD

**Could** is similar to **Can** and often replaces **Can** in the past tense (though not always).

#### To express ability in the past

- I **could** ride a horse when I was younger but now I can't.
- She **could** juggle eight balls when she was only 10 years old.

**Polite word used to ask for permission or to request something (in the present)**

- **Could** I please use your bathroom?
- **Could** we move on to the next topic now please?

**Couldn't: Sure that something is untrue**

Just like **can't**, you can use **couldn't** when you are sure that something isn't true or real.

- That **couldn't** be my cat meowing outside, it was hit by a car last week.
- He **couldn't** have painted that. He has no artistic ability at all.

**Reference:**

Woodward English (s.f.). Can - Could.

Retrieved from: <https://www.grammar.cl/english/can-could.htm>

