

Can

Introduction



Birds **can** fly.

Definition

Can is a modal auxiliary verb which has different uses.

Construction

Affirmative: subject + 'can' + **bare infinitive**
I **can** swim.

Negative: subject + 'can' + 'not' + **bare infinitive**
I **cannot** swim. I **can't** swim.

Interrogative: 'can'+ subject + **bare infinitive**
Can you swim?

Note that like other modal auxiliaries, **can** has no infinitive and we use the same form with 'I', 'you', 'he', 'she', 'it', 'we' and 'they'.

'Do' is not used for negative or interrogative sentences.

Cannot

In the negative, we use **cannot** in formal written English. It is rare in conversation unless we use it for insistence. For example: These instructions are too complicated. I **cannot** understand them.

Uses

Use	Examples
Ability	She can speak four languages. She is ill so she can't play tennis at the moment. Can you swim?
Possibility	Sorry, I can't meet you today. I'm too busy. But I can see you tomorrow. Can you work on Saturday? Rachel's on holiday.
Permission	'Can I leave early today?' 'Yes, you can , no problem.' You can't watch TV before you do your homework.
Requests	Can I have the tomato soup and a steak? Can you help me with this? Can you tell me how to get to the station?
Offers	Hello, can I help you? Can we take you to the station?

Examples



He **can** drive!



Yes, I **can** have lunch with you - I'm free.



Please **can** I go to the party?
No, you **cannot**. You're too young!



Can you take a message?



Can I get you something to drink?



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