

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

## 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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