

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