

Modal verbs – can/could

Introduction

1) We use modal verbs to show if we believe something is certain, probable or possible (or not). We also use modals to ask permission, make requests and offers etc.

Modal verbs fall into the category of auxiliary verbs (also known as *helping verbs*). It means that they are used together with a main verb to give grammatical information and additional meaning to a sentence.

2) The modal verb *can* has only two forms: *can* (*present*) and *could* (*past*). We use the modal verb *can* and *the base form of the verb* to form sentences. Questions are formed by inverting the subject and *can*. Negatives are formed with *not*. Contracted forms are used (*can't/couldn't*).

We can use the modal:

can	could
a) to talk about general abilities or skills in the present. <i>I can cook and bake.</i>	a) to talk about general abilities or skills in the past. <i>I could paint beautifully as a kid.</i>
b) to make general statements about what is possible/impossible (not allowed). <i>It can be very hot in summer. (=Sometimes it is very hot in summer.) You can't smoke here.</i>	b) to make general statements about what was possible/impossible (not allowed). <i>It could be very hot in summer. (=Sometimes it was very hot in summer.) He couldn't do it! He is such a sweet guy.</i>
c) to ask for permission (informal). <i>Can I borrow your pencil, please?</i>	c) to ask for permission (formal) <i>Could I use your phone, please?</i>
d) to request something (informal) <i>Can you help me, please?</i>	d) to request something (formal) <i>Could you show me the way, please?</i>
e) to make offers. <i>Can I carry these bags for you?</i>	e) to make suggestions. <i>We could go to the bar if you want.</i>

Short Story Dialogue

- *Jamie, could you help me, please?*
- *Yeah, of course!*
- ***Could you be the one to cook dinner today?***
- *Well, I can cook, but I'm not the best at it. Are you sure you want my help?*
- *Yes, I am sure that you can do it. You can simply follow the recipe, I'll leave the cooking book on the table.*
- ***That I can do! You can count on me.***

Independent Practice - Modal verbs – can/could

1) Fill in the gaps with *can/can't* or *could/couldn't*.

- a. Liz loves her brother to death, but she understand why he behaves like that sometimes.
- b. My grandmother traveled a lot. She speak 4 languages.
- c. I eat 4 brownies in 1 minute.
- d. I looked everywhere for the book, but I find it.

2) React to the situations. Form sentences using *can* or *could*.

a. Your friend is struggling with his project. Offer your help.
b. You are having a family dinner. Ask your aunt's husband William to pass the salt.
c. You are 8 y.o. and you want to go to your friend's place. Ask your mom's permission.

3) Answer the questions.

a. Can you play any musical instrument?
b. Could you become a superhero?
c. Can you learn 20 new English words a day?

Independent Practice: Answers - Modal verbs – can/could

1) Fill in the gaps with *can/can't* or *could/couldn't*.

- a. Liz loves her brother to death, but she **can't** understand why he behaves like that sometimes.
- b. My grandmother traveled a lot. She **could** speak 4 languages.
- c. I **can** eat 4 brownies in 1 minute.
- d. I looked everywhere for the book, but I **couldn't** find it.

2) React to the situations. Form sentences using *can* or *could*.

- a. I can help you with your project.
- b. William, could you pass the salt, please?
- c. Mom, can I go to my friend's place, please?

3) Answer the questions. Sample Answers:

- a. Yes, I can play the guitar.
- b. No, I couldn't become a superhero because I am too anxious.
- c. Yes, I can learn 20 new English words a day.