



Grammar 1

Modals: ability, permission, requests, offers & suggestions

1 Read about modal verbs.

Ability

- We use **can** to talk about ability in the present and **could** to talk about ability in the past. We use **be able to** to talk about ability in the present, past or future.
*She **can/is able to** drive a car.*
*I **couldn't/wasn't able to** write when I was three.*
- We can use **could** or **was/were able to** to talk about general ability in the past. To talk about a single completed action in the past, we must use **was/were able to**.
*He **could/was able to** read when he was four.*
*They **were able to** catch the kidnapper.*

Permission

- We use **can**, **could** or **may** to ask for permission and **can** or **may** to give or refuse permission.
***Could** I go to the park, Dad?*
*You **can** visit the prisoner.*
*You **may not go** into the prison.*
- We use **can** or **be allowed to** to talk about permission in the present or future.
*You **can't/won't be allowed to** come back into this shop ever again.*

- To talk about the past, we use **could** or **was/were allowed to** for general permission and **was/were allowed to** for permission on a particular occasion.
*She **could/was allowed to** stay out late whenever she wanted.*
*She **was allowed to** stay out late last night.*

Requests, offers & suggestions

- We use **can**, **could**, **will** or **would** to ask someone to do something for us.
***Can/Will** you **pay** this parking fine for me?*
***Could/Would** you **tell** the detective I'm ready to answer his questions now, please?*
- We can use **can**, **could**, **shall** I or **would you like me to ...?** to offer to do something for someone.
***Can/Could/Shall** I call the police?*
***Would** you like me to call the police?*
- We use **can/could** to make suggestions.
*You **can speak** to Joe's probation officer.*
*You **could ask** for his advice.*

2 Read these sentences, paying attention to the modal verbs. What do they express? Which sentence is more formal?

- Can you take me to school, Mum?
- Could you lend me some money, please?

Read 6.1-6.4 of the Grammar Reference before you do the tasks.

3 Circle the correct words.

- Shall I / Am I able to** bring you some books the next time I visit?
- You **could / will be able to** see the prisoner after lunch.
- Would / May** I visit my wife while she's in prison?
- Would / Can't** you like to tell us where you were yesterday evening?
- The police were happy that they **were able to / were allowed to** find the criminal.
- Shall / Could** you call my lawyer? I think I'm in trouble.
- My parents said I **won't be allowed to / can** see Jim anymore because he shoplifts.
- The burglar hit you very hard! **May you / Are you able to** stand up now, sir?

4 Choose the correct answers.

- Sharon ____ read and write before she started school.
a can b could c was allowed to
- The young offender ____ miss a meeting with his probation officer to go to his sister's wedding.
a was allowed to b may not c could
- ____ you phone me if you find out who stole my car, please?
a Shall b Will c Couldn't
- He ____ get a job right now because he has to do thirty hours of community service each week.
a can't b may c shall
- ____ you like me to take you to the police station?
a May b Can c Would
- Once he'd found the clue, Officer Boyle ____ solve the murder case.
a was able to b could c may

