CAN - COULD - WOULD - SHOULD

These are MODALS VERBS. A modal verb is an auxiliary verb that expresses necessity or possibility.

They don't change their form to adjust to a subject. That is to say, they are always used in the same form for every person.

You use them when:

- You want to express ability, or you want to tell that a person knows how to do something, in the PRESENT, you use CAN OR CAN'T.

  Examples:
  I can speak English.
  I can drive.
  My son can swim.
  They can cook.

- You want to express ability, or you want to tell that a person knows how to do something, in the PAST, you use COULD or COULDN'T.

  Examples:
  I could skate when I was younger.
  My son couldn't speak English last year.

- When you want to give advice or make recommendations, you use SHOULD or SHOULDN'T.

  Examples: You should listen to music in English.
  I should work fewer hours.
  My students shouldn't wait a long time for me to connect.

Other uses are:

- You can use CAN - COULD talk about probability and expectation for the present.

  Examples: I think I can go to the supermarket after writing these notes. (It is possible.)
  Maybe we could go together to the concert. (I am expressing a possibility).

- You can use CAN to give permission.

  Examples:
  You can ask for homework whenever you want.
  You can't go out tonight.

- You can use CAN and COULD to ask for permission or to ask a request.

  Examples:

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Can you open that window, please?
Could you speak slower, please?

- You use WOULD talk about something that will happen in an **imagined situation** (often it is used when that possible situation is not going to happen).

  Examples:

  I would travel to Buenos Aires to meet you. (But the real thing is that, it is a long trip and I don't want to do it).

  I would start a degree in IT. (But honestly, it takes about 7 years and I don't want to study).

  I would take a picture with Andrea Boccelli. (I don't really think it is possible to meet him anyway).

PAY ATTENTION:

When you use WOULD + LIKE the meaning is completely different. We use would like or 'd like to say politely what we want, especially when making offers and requests. Or when you express a wish.

Examples:
Would you bring me a cup of coffee, please?
I'd like to have the Margarita pizza.
At this moment, I'd like to be in a hot beach.

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