

# 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:

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.