



Listen and repeat. Then act out.



The modal verbs are: **can, could, must, will, would, shall, should, may, might, ought (to)**, etc. They have the same form in all persons. They come before the subject in questions and take **not** after them in negations. They take an **infinitive without to** after them except for **ought** which is followed by a **to infinitive**.

Can she play tennis? No, she **can't** play tennis but she **can** play golf.

He **ought to** listen to you.

We express **ability** with:

**can** (ability in the present or future) Can you swim? No, I **can't**. I **can** run fast though.

**could / was able to** (ability in the past for repeated actions)

She **could / was able to** dance for hours when she was young. (repeated action)

**was able to** (= managed to) (ability in the past for repeated actions or a single action)

He **was able to** win the race. (single action) (**NOT** ~~He could win the race.~~)

**BUT:** I **couldn't / wasn't able to** find my keys. (single action)

He **couldn't / wasn't able to** ski when he was young. (repeated action)

**Can** is the Present Simple form and **could** is the Past Simple. **Can** borrows the rest of its tenses from the verb phrase **be able to**. She **hasn't been able to** finish it yet.

1

Fill in: **can, could or be able to** in the correct tense.

John: 1) ... Can ... you ski?

Dave: Yes, I 2) ..... I went skiing last year and I

3) ..... go down the learner's slope easily.

John: I 4) ..... ski when I was younger but since I hurt my leg I 5) ..... (not).

Dave: Actually, I think ice-skating is much easier. I 6) ..... ice-skate when I was five years old.

John: Really? I tried ice-skating once but I 7) ..... (not) stand up at all!





## 2 Fill in: *can* / *can't*, *could* / *couldn't*, *was* / *wasn't able to* or *have been able to*.

- 1 A: I'd like to speak to Mr Turner, please.  
B: I'm sorry but Mr Turner .... *can't* ....  
come to the phone right now. He's busy.
- 2 A: I ..... ride a bicycle until  
I was ten.  
B: Well, I didn't learn until I was twelve.
- 3 A: How was the test, Lily?  
B: It was difficult but I .....  
answer all the questions.
- 4 A: Is Kim good at languages?  
B: Yes, she ..... already  
speak French, German and Spanish.
- 5 A: Maksim was a very talented child.  
B: I know. He ..... play the  
violin when he was seven.
- 6 A: ..... you swim, Sophie?  
B: Of course. I ..... swim  
since I was five.



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We express **possibility / probability** with:

- **may / might** + present infinitive He **may** be back before noon. (It's possible.)  
There **might** be some cheese in the fridge. (It's possible.)
- **could** + present infinitive He **could** still be at home. (It's possible.)
- **must** + present infinitive They look alike. They **must** be twins. (I think they are twins.)
- **can't** + present infinitive You have been sleeping all day. You **can't** be tired. (I don't think it's possible that you are tired.)
- **Can ...?** + present infinitive **Can** he still be at work? (Is it possible?)
- **could / might** + perfect infinitive We **could have had** an accident. (It was possible but it didn't happen.)

**Might** is the past form of **may**. **Might** can also be used for present situations, too.  
There's a lot of traffic. I **might** be a little late for the meeting.



- 3 You are Auntie Claire. This is part of a letter that a 13-year-old student has sent you. Read it, then write him/her a letter giving your advice. Use *may* / *might*, *could*, *must* or *can't*.

Dear Auntie Claire,

I lied to my parents about my exams. When they found out that I had failed, they became very angry. They shouted at me and made me go to my room. They don't let me go out with my friends now. I can't even watch TV. I feel terrible.

Unhappy

Auntie Claire



Dear Unhappy,

You 1) *may / might*...

have some problems with your family

right now but it 2) ..... be that serious. You

3) ..... try talking to a friend or a relative.

You 4) ..... have an aunt or a cousin who

can help you. You 5) ..... find that

discussing the problem with them is better. Your parents

6) ..... really be as angry as you think; they

7) ..... be upset but they 8) ..... realise why you're so unhappy. I suggest you try talking to

them again – you 9) ..... be surprised.

Good luck,

Auntie Claire



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May I see Mr Parson?

I'm sorry, you *can't* see him.  
He is busy at the moment.



We express **permission** with:

(asking for permission)

**can** (informal)

**could** (more polite)

**may** (formal)

**might** (more formal)

**Can** I borrow your pen?

**Could** I borrow your car?

**May** I use your phone?

**Might** I see your driving licence, please?

(giving / refusing permission)

**can** (informal, giving permission)

**may** (formal, giving permission)

**mustn't** (refusing permission)

**can't** (refusing permission)

You **can** have one more if you want.

You **may** stay a little longer.

You **mustn't** park here.

You **can't** enter this room.