

Modal verbs

1 Presentation

We use the modal verbs **can**, **could**, **may**, **would**, **will** and **shall** for requests, offers, invitations and permission. Study the table below.

	Use	Examples
can	to ask somebody to do something to ask for or give permission to offer to do something	Can you help me? Can I have another chocolate? Yes, you can use my laptop. No, you you can't use my laptop. Can I help you with your bags?
could	to ask somebody to do something to ask for permission (<i>more polite</i>)	Could you call me a taxi? Could I come to work a little later? Do you think I could borrow your phone?
may	to ask for or give permission (<i>polite</i>)	May I speak to you for a second? Yes, you may use my laptop. No, you may not use my laptop.
would you like	to make an offer or invitation	Would you like another chocolate? Would you like to go out?
will	to ask somebody to do something	Peter, will you come here for a minute?
would	to ask somebody to do something (<i>very polite</i>)	Would you carry my bags for me, please?
shall I ...	to offer to do something	Shall I answer the phone for you?

Dialogue

A: **Would you like** to go for a walk in the park?

B: Sure. **Can we** go after lunch?

A: Of course. **Could you** meet me outside my building?

B: No problem.



2 Practice 1 - Requests and offers

Listen to a dialogue between a host and guest. Complete the four requests/offers and replies below.

1. A: _____ you something to drink?
B: Yes, please. A coffee _____ nice.
2. A: _____ lunch now?
B: No thanks, I'm _____.
3. A: _____ one of those biscuits over there? They look very tasty.
B: Yes, of course. _____.
4. A: _____ my email from your computer? I'm expecting an important message.
B: _____ the internet isn't working at the moment.

3 Practice 2

What would you say in the situations below? Use the modal verbs on page 1. More than one answer may be possible.

1. You need to take a short break from your work. Ask your boss for permission. Be polite.
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2. You are organising a party. Invite your friend Ross.
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3. You are at a clothes shop. You see a shirt that you really like. Ask the shop assistant to show it to you.
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4. You see an old lady trying to carry some heavy bags. Offer to help her.
.....
5. You have arranged to have lunch with a friend at 2pm. Ask her if she can meet you at 1pm instead.
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6. A stranger asks for permission to smoke in your building. You refuse.
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7. You need to post a letter urgently, but you have no time. Your neighbour is going out. Ask him/her to do it for you. Be polite.
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