

Can/Can't: Grammar Rules and Usages

What is “Can/Can't”?

Can and *can't* (cannot) are modal verbs used to talk about ability, possibility, permission, or prohibition. They are followed by the base form of the verb.

Grammar Rules

1. Structure:

•Affirmative:

Subject + can + base verb

Example: *She can swim.*

•Negative:

Subject + can't (cannot) + base verb

Example: *They can't speak French.*

•Question:

Can + subject + base verb?

Example: *Can you play the piano?*

2. Short Answers:

- Yes, I can.
- No, I can't.

3. Base Form of Verb:

- Always use the base form of the verb after *can* or *can't*.

Correct: *He can dance.*

Incorrect: *He can dances.*

4. No “to” After Can/Can't:

- Do not use *to* before the verb.

Correct: *I can run.*

Incorrect: *I can to run.*

Usages of “Can/Can't”

1. Ability:

Use *can* to talk about what someone is able to do.

- *I can ride a bike.*
- *She can speak three languages.*

Use *can't* to show inability.

- *We can't swim.*
- *He can't drive a car.*

2. Possibility:

Use *can* to talk about what is possible.

- *You can find good food in this restaurant.*
- *It can be very cold in the winter.*

Use *can't* for impossibility.

- *This can't be true!*
- *You can't be serious.*

3. Permission:

Use *can* to give or ask for permission.

- *You can borrow my book.*
- *Can I use your phone?*

Use *can't* to show something is not allowed.

- *You can't park here.*
- *They can't enter the building without a pass.*

4. Offers and Requests:

Use *can* to make offers or polite requests.

- *Can I help you with that?*
- *Can you open the window, please?*

5. Suggestions:

Use *can* to make suggestions.

- *You can try this new restaurant.*
- *We can watch a movie tonight.*

Common Mistakes

1. Using "to" with *can*:
 - Incorrect: *I can to help you.*
 - Correct: *I can help you.*
2. Adding "s" for third person singular:
 - Incorrect: *He cans drive.*
 - Correct: *He can drive.*
3. Using "can't" without contraction:
 - Incorrect: *He cannot swims.*
 - Correct: *He cannot swim.*

Examples in Context

- **Ability:** *Maria can play the guitar very well.*
- **Possibility:** *You can see the mountains from this window.*
- **Permission:** *Can I leave early today?*
- **Prohibition:** *You can't eat in the library.*
- **Suggestion:** *We can go hiking this weekend.*