

Modals of Ability – Present

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Grammar Notes

A. Introduction to Modals

Modals (also known as *modal verbs*) are words that come before the main verb.

Modals give the verb extra meaning, such as:

- ability (*can*)
- advice (*should*)
- necessity (*must*)
- possibility (*might*)

Pattern

modal + base verb

Modals are always followed by a base verb.
A base verb is a verb with **no ending** (-s, -ed, -ing, etc.) added to it.

Examples

- I **can** cook.
- She **can** ride a bike.
- He **can** play the guitar.



Grammar Notes cont.

B. Modals of Ability

We use modals of ability to show that someone **is able to do** an activity. *Can* and *can't* are **present** modals of ability.

	Use	Examples
Positive	Use can + base verb when someone is able to do something in the present tense.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can sing. • She can knit. • They can play tennis.
Negative	Use cannot + base verb when someone is not able to do something. The short form of cannot is can't .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You cannot swim. • He can't play piano. • We can't drive.
Question	<p>Use can + subject + base verb to ask if someone is able to do something.</p> <p>Use yes + subject + can or no + subject + can't to give a short answer to a question about ability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you snowboard? Yes, I can. / No, I can't. • Can he play baseball? Yes, he can. / No, he can't. • Can the children ski? Yes, they can. / No, they can't.

Note:

When speaking quickly, *can* has no stress when followed by a verb. *Can* is reduced to /kən/ except in short answers. We don't reduce *can't*.

Listen and repeat.

Examples:

- I kən **ski**.
- She kən **sing**.
- Kən you **dance**?

But:

- Yes, I **can**.
- No, I **can't**.
- He **can't ride** a horse.

Exercise 1

PICTURE DICTIONARY

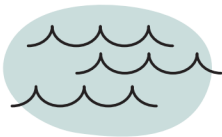
What can you do? Circle all the activities you can do.
Then tell your partner what you can and can't do.

Example:

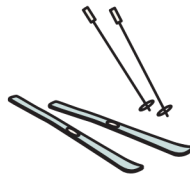
- A: I can swim.
- B: I can swim too.

- B: I can ski.
- A: Oh, I can't ski.

- A: I can't snowboard.
- B: I can't snowboard either.



swim



ski



snowboard



skate




jog




play basketball




Exercise 1 cont.



play baseball



play tennis




play the guitar




play the piano




use a computer




dance



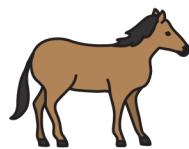
sing




drive




ride a bike



ride a horse



cook














knit

Exercise 2

FILL IN THE BLANKS

Write *can + verb* in the blanks.

#	Activity	Sentence
Ex		He _____ <i>can play</i> _____ basketball.
1		She _____ baseball.
2		I _____ a horse.
3		My sister _____ .
4		My aunt _____ .
5		They _____ the guitar.
6		My father _____ .
7		He _____ .
8		My friend _____ a computer.
9		We _____ .
10		You _____ .

Exercise 3

COMPLETE THE ANSWERS

Write the answers using *can* or *can't*.

Ex. Can he cook?

Yes, he can .

Ex. Can they ski?

No, they can't .

1. Can she play tennis?

Yes, _____ .

2. Can you play the piano?

Yes, _____ .

3. Can they snowboard?

No, _____ .

4. Can your friends drive?

Yes, _____ .

5. Can your brother skate?

No, _____ .

6. Can your mother knit?

No, _____ .

7. Can he use a computer?

Yes, _____ .

8. Can you swim?

Yes, _____ .

9. Can they play baseball?

No, _____ .

10. Can she jog?

Yes, _____ .

Exercise 4

PRONUNCIATION

A. Sentences

Listen to the recording or your teacher.
Repeat the sentences out loud. Then write five things you can do.
Say them out loud to your partner as quickly as you can.

Sentences

1. I can swim.
2. They can skate.
3. She can sing.
4. He can ride a horse.
5. We can play the guitar.

My Sentences

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

B. Questions & Answers

Listen to the recording or your teacher. Repeat the questions out loud. Then ask your partner the questions as quickly as you can. Write his or her answers.

Questions

1. Can you ski?
2. Can you dance?
3. Can you cook?
4. Can you play the piano?
5. Can you ride a bike?

My Partner's Answers

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Exercise 5 (Student A)






PAIR WORK

A. Chart

Ask your partner what Julia and Lee can or can't do. Complete the chart.

Example:

A: Can Lee play basketball?
B: Yes, he can.

					
Julia	✓		✗		✗
Lee		✗		✓	

B. Writing

Now write sentences about Julia and Lee.

Ex. *Julia can play basketball.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

Exercise 5 (Student B)






PAIR WORK

A. Chart

Ask your partner what Julia and Lee can or can't do. Complete the chart.

Example:

B: Can Julia play basketball?
A: Yes, she can.

					
Julia		✓		✗	
Lee	✓		✗		✓

B. Writing

Now write sentences about Julia and Lee.

Ex. *Julia can play basketball.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

Exercise 6

FIND SOMEONE WHO

Write the questions below.
Then walk around the classroom and ask your classmates questions.
Write your classmate's name on the right if he or she answers "yes."

#	Find someone...	Question	Classmate
1	who can swim.	<i>Can you swim?</i>	
2	who can ski.		
3	who can play tennis.		
4	who can use a computer.		
5	who can cook.		
6	who can ride a bike.		
7	who can ride a horse.		
8	who can play the guitar.		
9	who can play the piano.		
10	who can sing well.		

Exercise 7

WRITING

Write about your abilities. Write 3–5 sentences about what you *can* do and 3–5 sentences about things you *can't* do.

Example:

I love sports. I can play basketball. I can also play volleyball.
I can ski, but I can't snowboard...

Exercise 8

QUIZ

Circle the correct answer.

1. Sayo can _____ well.
 - a) sings
 - b) singing
 - c) sing
2. Can you play the piano?
 - a) No, I don't.
 - b) No, I can't.
 - c) No, I won't.
3. Can you _____ ?
 - a) to dance
 - b) dance
 - c) dancing
4. Mark _____ ride a bike.
 - a) cann't
 - b) can't
 - c) ca'nt
5. Julia _____ basketball.
 - a) cans play
 - b) can plays
 - c) can play
6. Can you _____ ?
 - a) swim
 - b) swimming
 - c) to swim
7. I can't _____ .
 - a) snowboarding
 - b) snowboard
 - c) to snowboard
8. Can your father cook well?
 - a) Yes, he can.
 - b) Yes, he is.
 - c) Yes, he does.
9. Mary can't _____ .
 - a) skating
 - b) skates
 - c) skate
10. Can you jog?
 - a) Yes, I am.
 - b) Yes, I can.
 - c) Yes, I do.

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students learn how to use *can* and *can't* to describe their abilities. Writing, speaking, and pronunciation tasks are included.

LEVEL: Beg – Low Int

TIME: 2 hours

TAGS: modals, modal verbs, modals of ability, be able to, can, can't, cannot, pronunciation, grammar, grammar exercises

Exercise 1

Answers will vary. Have students discuss their abilities in pairs (following the example) or as a class.

Exercise 2

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------|
| 1. can play | 6. can sing |
| 2. can ride | 7. can study/read |
| 3. can drive | 8. can use |
| 4. can knit | 9. can cook/eat |
| 5. can play | 10. can skate |

Exercise 3

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. she can | 6. she can't |
| 2. I can | 7. he can |
| 3. they can't | 8. I can |
| 4. they can | 9. they can't |
| 5. he can't | 10. she can |

Exercise 4

Answers will vary. Monitor your students for correct reduced pronunciation and sentence formation.

Exercise 5

B. WRITING

Order of answers may vary.

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Lee can play basketball. | 6. Julia can't play the guitar. |
| 2. Julia can sing. | 7. Lee can play the guitar. |
| 3. Lee can't sing. | 8. Julia can't cook. |
| 4. Julia can't ride a horse. | 9. Lee can cook. |
| 5. Lee can't ride a horse. | |

Exercise 6

Answers will vary. Monitor your students for correct question formation. Encourage reduced pronunciation.

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Can you swim? | 6. Can you ride a bike? |
| 2. Can you ski? | 7. Can you ride a horse? |
| 3. Can you play tennis? | 8. Can you play the guitar? |
| 4. Can you use a computer? | 9. Can you play the piano? |
| 5. Can you cook? | 10. Can you sing well? |

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

Exercise 7

Answers will vary.

Exercise 8

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. c | 3. b | 5. c | 7. b | 9. c |
| 2. b | 4. b | 6. a | 8. a | 10. b |

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Note that *cannot* and *can not* are both acceptable spellings; however, the one-word spelling is far more common.