

# Modal Verbs

Modal verbs express the mode of a verb: possibility, ability or any other condition of the main verb. They cannot be conjugated and they cannot be used without a main verb.

## CAN

Form:

Affirmative: subject + can + base verb

Negative: subject + can't+ base verb

Interrogative: can + subject + base verb

Uses:

- We often use 'can' to say that something is possible or that someone has the ability to do something.

For example: Who can answer the following question?

Peter can help you.

Can he have dinner with us today?

- 'Can' has only two forms: can (present) and could (past). So sometimes you have to use 'be able to' to express the future.

For example: Peter will not be able to come tomorrow.

## COULD

Form:

Affirmative: subject + could+ base verb

Negative: subject + could + base verb

Interrogative: could+ subject + base verb

Uses:

- In the present, 'could' expresses a possibility.  
For example: Could this be a mistake?
- 'Could' is also used as a synonym of 'can' but it is more formal.  
For example: Could you open the window?
- 'Could' expresses a possibility or ability in the past.  
For example: When I was young, I could swim very fast.
- In the future, it also expresses a possibility.  
For example: It could rain tonight.

## BE ABLE TO

### Form:

Affirmative: subject + (am, is, are) able to+ base verb

Negative: subject + (am not, isn't, aren't) able to+ base verb

Interrogative: (am, is, are)+ subject + able to + base verb

### Uses:

- 'Be able to' can be used in the present, past and future tenses. It can be used instead of 'can' but it is less usual.

For example: Are you able to speak any foreign languages?

- 'Be able to' is used when you mean that someone managed to do something in a particular situation.

For example: The fire spread very quickly but everyone was able to escape.