

can

English A1

What this topic teaches

can is the little verb of ability , permission and requests . Chinese has , and for these jobs; English packs them into one word.

- Ability: *I can swim.*
- Permission: *Can I go now?*
- Requests: *Can you help me?*
- The best news in the whole course: **can never changes**. No -s for *he*, no past tense, no nothing. *I can, you can, she can, they can.* After the ego letter of topic 7, *can* is a holiday.

The forms: one word for everyone

	Form	Example
statement	can + base verb	She can speak three languages.
negative	cannot / can't	He can't swim.
question	Can + person + verb?	Can you cook?

- △ The verb after *can* is always the base form: *can swim*, never “*can to swim*”, never “*can swims*”. *can* does all the grammar work, so the next verb relaxes completely.
- *cannot* is written as one word. *Can't* is the spoken short form.
- Short answers: *Can you swim?* – *Yes, I can.* / *No, I can't.* Just *can*, no verb needed.

Three jobs, one word

Job	Question	Meaning
ability	Can you swim?	Do you know how?
permission	Can I borrow this?	Is it allowed?
request	Can you help me?	Please do it.

- The same sentence can do two jobs: *Can I open the window?* asks permission, and only you know if the room is hot.
- Register : *Can I...?* is neutral and friendly. *Could I...?* is more polite and arrives in A2. Teachers and grandmothers prefer the polite version; your classmates accept *can*.
- △ Traditional teachers may insist *may* is for permission. *May I go?* is very formal – good for exams and palaces, stiff for the playground.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **No to.** is one piece, so “*can to speak*” sneaks in. English: *can speak*. The base verb only.
- △ **No -s, ever.** “*She cans swim*” – the one day the ego letter takes off, don’t invite it back. *She can swim*.
- △ **can has no future form.** “*I will can*” ×. The future of *can* is *will be able to*: *After this course, I will be able to speak English*. File it away for later.
- △ **Huì means two things:** a learned skill (*I can swim*) and a prediction (= “it will rain tomorrow”). English *can* covers only the skill. For predictions, English uses *will* – an A2 topic that is already looking forward to meeting you.

Say it aloud

A truth-telling game: three abilities, one lie. Your partner guesses the lie.

- I can ride a bike. I can cook noodles. I can speak a little English – and a lot of sarcasm.
- I can’t dance. I have certificates in not dancing.
- Can you play any instrument? – Yes, I can. The triangle . It is still an instrument.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. *She* ____ *swim*. (ability) – **can**. One word for every person; no -s, no changes.
2. *Can you* ____ (*to help / help*) *me?* – **help**. After *can*, the base form only.
3. Question for permission to leave: – **Can I go now?** Flip *can* to the front.
4. *He can’t* ____ (*dance / dances*). – **dance**. *can* does the grammar work; the verb relaxes.
5. *After this course, I* ____ *speak English*. (future ability) – **will be able to**. *can* has no future form; it retires at tomorrow.