

44 Ability: **can**, **could** and **be able to**

A **Can and can't**

Vicky: *How many instruments **can** you play, Natasha?*

Natasha: *Three - the violin, the clarinet and the piano.*

Vicky: *That's terrific. You haven't got a piano here, though.*

Natasha: *No, but I **can** go to the music room in college and play the one in there.*

Vicky: *I'm not musical at all. I **can't** even sing.*

We use **can** to say that something is possible: that someone has an ability (*Natasha **can** play the piano*) or an opportunity (*She **can** go to the music room*). **Can** is usually pronounced but sometimes we say . The negative is **cannot** or **can't** .

B **Can and be able to**

In the present tense, **be able to** is a little more formal and less usual than **can**.

*Emma is good with computers. She **can** write/is **able to** write programs.*

But in some structures we always use **be able to**, not **can**.

To-infinitive: *It's nice **to be able to go** to the opera, (NOT ~~to can go~~)*

After a modal verb: *Melanie **might be able to** help us.*

Present perfect: *It's been quiet today. **I've been able to** get some work done.*

For the future we use **can** or **will be able to** but NOT *will-can*.

*If we earn some money, we **can** go/we'll **be able to** go on holiday next summer.*

*I'm afraid I **can't** come/I **won't be able to** come to the disco on Friday.*

But to suggest a possible future action, we normally use **can**.

*Let's have lunch together. We **can** go to that new restaurant.*

C **Could and was/were able to**

For ability or opportunity in the past, we use **could** or **was/were able to**.

*Natasha **could** play (OR **was able to** play) the piano when she was four.*

*In those days we had a car, so we **could** travel (OR **were able to** travel) very easily.*

To say that the ability or opportunity resulted in a particular action, something that really happened, we use **was/were able to** but not **could**.

*The plane **was able to** take off at eleven o'clock, after the fog had lifted.*

*Luckily Mark **was able to** get (OR **succeeded in getting**) the work done in time.*

*The drivers **were able to** stop (OR **managed to stop**) before they crashed into each other.*

Compare these two sentences.

*The children **could** swim when they were quite young, (a past ability)*

*The children **were able to** swim across the river. (a past action)*

In negative sentences and questions, we can use either form. *It was*

*foggy, so the plane **couldn't/wasn't able to** take off. The pool was closed, so they **couldn't/weren't able to** have a swim. **Could you/Were you able to** describe the man to the police?*

We normally use **could** (not **was/were able to**) with verbs of seeing etc, and with verbs of thinking. *We **could see** the village in the distance. As soon as Harriet opened the door, she **could smell** gas. I **couldn't understand** what was happening.*

44 Exercises

► *He can walk on his hands.*

1 Can and can't (A)

Look at the pictures and say what they can or can't do. Use these words: *climb trees, juggle, lift the weights, play the violin, walk on his hands*



1 ..3 ..
2 ..4 ..

2 Can and be able to (B)

Harriet is visiting David, who hurt himself when he fell off a ladder. Complete the conversation using *can* or a form of *be able to*. Sometimes there is more than one possible answer.

Harriet: Hello, David. I'm sorry I haven't (►) *been able to come* (come) and see you before.

I've been really busy lately. How are you?

David: I'm OK, thanks. (1)..... (I / walk) around now.

The doctor says (2) (I / go) back to work soon.

It'll be nice (3)..... (get) out again. I hate being stuck here like this.

I haven't (4)..... (do) anything interesting.

3 Could and was/were able to (C)

► Which is closer to the meaning of the sentence 'Years ago I could run a marathon'?

- I ran a marathon at one particular time in the past.
- I was once fit enough to run a very long way.

1 Which of these sentences is correct?

I was ill, so I couldn't go to the party.

I was ill, so I wasn't able to go to the party.

- Only the first one.
- Only the second one.
- Both of them.

2 Which is closer to the meaning of the sentence 'Sarah was able to leave work early yesterday'?

- Sarah left work early yesterday.
- Sarah had the opportunity to leave work early yesterday, but we don't know if she took it.

4 Could and was/were able to (C)

Put in *could* or *was/were able to*. Sometimes either is possible. Use a negative if necessary.

► Suddenly all the lights went out. We *couldn't* see a thing.

1 The computer went wrong, but luckily Emma..... put it right again.

2 There was a big party last night. You..... hear the music half a mile away.

3 I learnt to read music as a child. I..... read it when I was five.

4 People heard warnings about the flood, and they..... move out in time.

5 The train was full. I find a seat anywhere.

45 Permission: **can, may, could** and **be allowed to**

A Asking permission

We use **can, could** or **may** to ask for permission.

Can I use your pen?

Could we borrow your ladder, please? ~ Well, I'm using it at the moment.

May I see the letter? ~ Certainly. **Could** often sounds more polite than **can**. **May** is rather formal.

B Giving and refusing permission

To give permission we use **can** or **may** (but not **could**).

You **can** wait in my office if you like.

Could I borrow your calculator? ~ Of course you **can**.

You **may** telephone from here. (a written notice)

May is formal and is not often used in speech.

To refuse permission we use **can't** or **may not** (but not **couldn't**).

Could we picnic here? ~ I'm sorry. I'm afraid you **can't**. Members **may not** bring more than two guests into the club. We can also use **must not**.

Luggage **must not** be left unattended.



C Talking about permission

We sometimes talk about rules made by someone else. To do this we use **can, could** and **be allowed to**.

We use **can** to talk about the present, and we use **could** for the past.

Present: Each passenger **can** take one bag onto the plane.

Past: In the 1920s you **could** drive without taking a test.

We can also use **be allowed to**.

Present: Passengers **are allowed to** take one bag onto the plane.

Future: **Will I be allowed to** record the interview on tape?

Past: We **weren't allowed to** look round the factory yesterday.

For a general permission in the past we use either **could** or **was/were allowed to**.

/ **could** always stay/I **was** always **allowed to** stay up late as a child.

But to say that the permission resulted in a particular action, something that really happened, we use **was/were allowed to** (but not **could**).

I **was allowed to** leave work early yesterday.

We **were allowed to** go into the control room when we looked around the power station.

Compare these questions with **may** and **be allowed to**.

ASKING FOR PERMISSION

May I take a photo of you?

(= Will you allow it?)

ASKING ABOUT PERMISSION

Are we allowed to take photos?

(= What is the rule?)

45 Exercises

1 Asking permission (A)

How would you ask for permission in these situations?

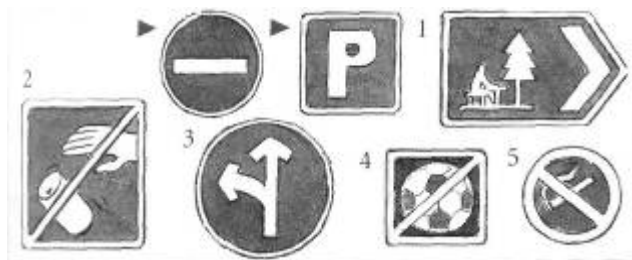
Use *Can I...?*, *Could I...?* or *May I...?* and these verbs: *borrow, join, look at, use* ►

You are at a friend's flat. You want to make a phone call. *Can I use your phone?*

- 1 You need a calculator. The person sitting next to you has got one.
- 2 You have gone into a cafe. Three people who you know from work are sitting at a table. You go over to the table.
- 3 You had to go to a lecture, but you were ill. Your friend went to the lecture and took notes. Next day you are well again and you see your friend.

2 Giving and refusing permission (B)

A policeman is telling you what the signs mean. What does he say? Use *can* and *can't* and these verbs: *drop, go, have, park, play, smoke, turn*



Policeman:

? *You can't go this way.*

? *You can park here.*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

3 Be allowed to (C)

Put in the correct forms.

Rita: I hear you've moved into a new flat with a couple of friends.

Emma: Yes, it's a nice flat, but the landlady is really strict. (►) *We aren't allowed to do* (we / not / allow / do) anything. It was my birthday last month, and

(1)..... (I / not / allow / have) a party.

Rita: Oh, (2)..... (we / allow / have) parties at our place, luckily.

(3)..... (we / allow / do) anything, more or less.

We're hoping to have an all-night party soon, but I'm not absolutely sure if

(4) (we / allow/hold) it.

4 May I...? or Am I allowed to ...? (C)

Are you asking for permission, or are you asking what the rule is? Put in *May I... ?* or *Am I allowed to ... ?*

? *May I use your computer?*

? *Am I allowed to smoke in this cinema?*

- 1 cross the road here?
- 2 ask you a personal question?
- 3 rollerblade in this park?
- 4 drive a car without insurance?
- 5 read your magazine?

46 Possibility and certainty: may, might, could, must, etc

A May, might and could

Rachel: *Whose bag is that?*

Daniel: *I don't know. It **may** belong to Maria's friend.*

Vicky: *It **might** be a bomb. It **could** explode at any moment.*

We use **may** or **might** to say that something is possible or that it is quite likely.

We can use them for the present or the future.

*It **may/might** be a bomb.* (= Perhaps it is a bomb.)

*I **may/might** go to the disco tomorrow.* (= Perhaps I will go to the disco.)

We can use **could** to say that something is possible.

*The story **could** be true, I suppose.* (= Possibly it is true.)

*You **could** win a million pounds!* (= Possibly you will win a million pounds.)

Sometimes **could** means only a small possibility. It is possible (but not likely) that you will win a million pounds.

In some situations we can use **may**, **might** or **could**.

*It **may/might/could** rain later.*

After **may**, **might** or **could** we can use a continuous form (be + an ing-form). *That man*

***may/might be watching** us.* (= Perhaps he is watching us.) *Sarah **may/might be working** late*

tonight. (= Perhaps she will be working late.) *I'm not sure where Matthew is. He **could be playing***
squash. (= Possibly he is playing squash.)

B May, might and could in the negative

The negative forms are **may not**, **might not/mightn't**, and **could not/couldn't**.

MAY NOT AND MIGHT NOT

Something negative is possible. *Daniel **may***

***not get** the job. Tom **might not** be in. I **mightn't** finish the marathon tomorrow.*

(It is possible that I will not finish it.)

COULDN'T

Something is impossible.

*Vicky is afraid of heights. She **couldn't** climb onto the roof.*

*I'm completely unfit. I **couldn't** run a marathon.*
(It is impossible for me to run it.)

C Must and can't

MUST

We use **must** when we realize that something is certainly true.

*She isn't answering the phone. She **must** be out. I had my keys a moment ago. They **must** be here somewhere.*

*Andrew isn't here. He **must** be working in the library.*

CAN'T

We use **can't** when we realize that something is impossible.

*We haven't walked far. You **can't** be tired yet. Life **can't** be easy when you have to spend it in a wheelchair.*

*Nick **can't** be touring Scotland. I saw him hat this morning.*

46 Exercises

1 Might be and might be doing (A)

Vicky and Rachel are at college. They're looking for their friend Natasha. Complete the conversation.

Use *may* or *might* and the verb in brackets. Sometimes you need to use the continuous.

Vicky: I can't find Natasha. Have you seen her?

Rachel: (▶) *She might be* (she / be) in the music room. (▶) *She may be practising* (she / practise).

Vicky: No, she isn't there. I thought (1).....(she / be) with you.

Rachel: It's a nice day. (2).....(she / be) on the lawn.

(3) (she / sit) out there reading the paper.

Or (4)(she / have) a coffee.

(5).....(you / find) her in the canteen.

Emma: No, I've looked there.

Rachel: Well, here comes Jessica. (6) (she / know).

2 May and might (A-B)

Add a sentence with *may* or *might* (both are correct).

? I'm not sure if it's going to rain. *It might rain.*

? I don't know if we'll see an elephant. *We may see one.*

1 I can't say whether Daniel will win

2 I haven't decided if I'm having a holiday.

3 I don't know if we'll get an invitation.

4 I've no idea whether Sarah will be late.....

3 I'm not sure if my friends are visiting me

3 Mightn't and couldn't (B)

Put in *mightn't* or *couldn't*.

? I've got one or two things to do, so I *mightn't have* time to come out tonight.

? David *couldn't* work as a taxi driver. He can't drive.

1 We're going to need lots of glasses. We have enough, you know.

2 Markbe in the office tomorrow. He thinks he's getting a cold.

3 We possibly have a dog, living in a small flat like this.

■1 How can you work with all this noise? Iwork in such conditions.

5 Don't ring tomorrow because I..... be in. I'm not sure what I'm doing.

4 Must, can't and might (A, C)

A reporter is interviewing Mrs Miles for a TV news programme.

Complete the conversation. Put in *must*, *can't* or *might*.

Mrs Miles: My name's Nora Miles, and I'm going to do a parachute jump.

Reporter: Mrs Miles, you're seventy-three, and you're going to jump out of an aeroplane.

You (▶) *must be* mad. You (1)be serious.

Mrs Miles: It really (2).....be wonderful to look down from the sky.

I've always wanted to try it.

Reporter: But anything could happen. You (3).....be injured or even killed.

I wouldn't take the risk.

Mrs Miles: Well, young man, your life (4) be much fun if you never take risks.

You ought to try it. You never know - you (5)enjoy it.

Reporter: Enjoy it? You (6) be joking!

47 Necessity: **must** and **have to**

A Present, past and future

We use **must** and **have to/has to** to say that something is necessary. *You'll be leaving college soon. You **must** think about your future. We're very busy at the office. I **have to** work on Saturday morning. Mark **has to** get the car repaired. There's something wrong with the brakes.*

When we use the past, or the future with **will**, we need a form of **have to**.

*Emma **had to** go to the dentist yesterday, NOT ~~She must go to the dentist yesterday.~~ That wasn't very good. We'll **have to** do better next time.*

And in other structures we also use a form of **have to**, not **must**.

To-infinitive: *I **don't want to have to** wait in a queue for ages.*

After a modal verb: *Emma has toothache. She **might have to** go to the dentist.*

Present perfect: *Mark **has had to** drive all the way to Glasgow.*

For negatives and questions with **have to/has to** and **had to**, we use a form of **do**.

*I **don't have to** work on Sundays. Why **does** Andrew **have to** study every evening?*

***Did** you **have to** pay for your second cup of coffee? ~ No, I didn't. I **don't have to** work means that it is not necessary for me to work (see Unit 48B).*

B **Must** or **have to**?

Both **must** and **have to** express necessity, but we use them differently.



MUST

We use **must** when the speaker feels that something is necessary.

*You **must** exercise. (I'm telling you.) We **must** be quiet. (I'm telling you.)*

I/we must can also express a wish.

*I **must** buy a newspaper. I want to see the racing results.*

*We **must** invite Claire. She's wonderful company.*



HAVE TO

We use **have to** when the situation makes something necessary.

*I **have to** exercise. (The doctor told me.) We **have to** be quiet. (That's the rule.)*

*I **have to** buy a newspaper. The boss asked me to get one.*

*We **have to** invite Trevor and Laura. They invited us last time.*

Have got to

Have got to means the same as **have to**, but **have got to** is informal. We use it mainly in the present. *I **have to/I've got to** make my sandwiches. My father **has to/has got to** take these pills. **Do** we **have to** apply/**Have** we **got to** apply for a visa?*

47 Exercises

1 Have to (A)

Complete the conversations. Use the words in brackets and a form of *have to*.

- Melanie: David's broken his leg. *He's had to go* (he's / go) to hospital.
Harriet: Oh no! How long *will he have to stay* (will / he / stay) there?
Melanie: I don't know.
- 1 Claire: I parked my car outside the hairdresser's, and while I was in there, the police took the car away. I've got it back now. But (I / pay) a lot of money.
Henry: How much (you / pay)?
Claire: Two hundred pounds!
- 2 Trevor: That door doesn't shut properly.... (you / slam) it every time.
Laura:(you / will / fix) it then, won't you?
- 3 Jessica: You're always taking exams. Why (you / take) so many?
Andrew:(I / will / take) a lot more if I want a good job.
- 4 Mike: We're in a new house now. (we / move). The old place was too small.
Nick: Did it take you long to find a house?
Mike: No, we found one easily.(we / not / look) very hard. But it was in bad condition..... (we've / do) a lot of work on it.
- 5 Nick: My brother (start) work at five o'clock in the morning.
Melanie: That's pretty early. What time(he / get) up?
Nick: Half past three.

2 Must and have to (B)

Write a sentence with *must*, *have to* or *has to*.

- The sign says: 'Passengers must show their tickets.'
So passengers have to show their tickets.
- The children have to be in bed by nine.
Their parents said: '*You must be in bed by nine.*'
- 1 Laura has to get to work on time.
Her boss told her:
- 2 The police told Nick: 'You must keep your dog under control.'
So Nick
- 3 The pupils have to listen carefully.
The teacher says:
- 4 The new sign says: 'Visitors must report to the security officer.'
So now

3 Must or have to? (B)

Put in *must* or *have to/has to*. Choose which is best for the situation.

- I *have to* go to the airport. I'm meeting someone.
- 1 Youlock the door when you go out. There've been a lot of break-ins recently.
- 2 Danielgo to the bank. He hasn't any money.
- 3 Iwork late tomorrow. We're very busy at the office.
- 4 You really make less noise. I'm trying to concentrate.
- 5 I think you pay to park here. I'll just go and read that notice.
- 6 You really hurry up, Vicky. We don't want to be late.
- 7 Iput the heating on. I feel really cold.

48 Necessity: **mustn't**, **needn't**, etc

A **Mustn't** or **needn't**?

We use **must** to say that something is necessary (see Unit 47).

*You **must** be careful with those glasses. I **must** remember my key.*

Now compare **mustn't** and **needn't**.

MUSTN'T

We use **mustn't** to say that something is a bad idea.

*You **mustn't** drop those glasses. They'll break.*

*I **mustn't** forget my key, or I won't get in.*

*You **mustn't** wear your best clothes. You'll get them dirty.*

NEEDN'T

We use **needn't** when something is not necessary,

*You **needn't** wash those glasses. They're clean.*

*We **needn't** make sandwiches. There's a cafe.*

*You **needn't** wear your best clothes. You can wear what you like.*

B **Don't have to** and **don't need to**

We can use **don't have to** and **don't need to** when something is not necessary.

The meaning is the same as **needn't**.

*You **don't have to** / **don't need to** wash those glasses. They're clean.*

*Mark **doesn't have to** / **doesn't need to** finish the report today. He can do it at the weekend.*

For American usage see page 379.

For the past we use *didn't*.

*The food was free. We **didn't have to** pay/We **didn't need to** pay for it.*

C **Didn't need to** or **needn't have**?



*Daniel hadn't booked a seat, but luckily the train wasn't full. He **didn't need to** stand.*

DIDN'T NEED TO

We use **didn't need to** when something was not necessary. Standing was not necessary because there were seats.

*Mark **didn't need to** hurry. He had lots of time.*

*He drove slowly along the motorway. We **didn't need to** go to the supermarket because we had plenty of food.*



*Trevor and Laura booked a table for dinner. But the restaurant was empty. They **needn't** have booked a table.*

NEEDN'T HAVE

We use **needn't have** + a past participle for something we did which we now know was not necessary, e.g. booking a table.

*Mark **needn't have** hurried. After driving at too speed, he arrived half an hour early. We*

***needn't have** gone to the supermarket. We already had a pizza for tonight.*

Sometimes we can use **didn't need to** when the action happened, even though it was not necessary. He likes driving fast.

*Mark **didn't need to** hurry, but he drove at top speed.*

48 Exercises

i Must, mustn't or needn't? (A)

Put in *must*, *mustn't* or *needn't*.

- ▶ Laura: You *needn't* take an umbrella. It isn't going to rain.
Trevor: Well, I don't know. It might do.
Laura: Don't lose it then. You *mustn't leave* it on the bus.
- 1 Vicky: Come on. Wehurry. We be late.
Rachel: It's only ten past. We hurry. There's lots of time.
- 2 Claire: My sister and I are going a different way.
Guide: Oh, yougo off on your own. It isn't safe.
We.....keep together in a group.
- 3 David: I'll put these cups in the dishwasher.
Melanie: No, you put them in there. It might damage them.
In fact, we wash them at all. We didn't use them.
- 4 Secretary: I forget to type this letter.
Mark: Yes, it..... go in the post today because it's quite urgent.
But the report isn't so important. You..... type the report today.

2 Don't have to (B)

An old woman is talking to a reporter from her local newspaper. She is comparing life today with life in the past. Complete her sentences using *don't have to*, *doesn't have to* or *didn't have to*.

- ▶ We had to make our own fun in the old days. There wasn't any television then. These days people *don't have to make their own fun*.
- 1 There's so much traffic now. You have to wait ages to cross the road. In those days you
- 2 I had to work long hours when I was young. But children today have it easy.
They.....
- 3 My father had to work in a factory when he was twelve. Just imagine! Today a twelve-year-old child
- 4 There's so much crime today, isn't there? People have to lock their doors now. It was better in the old days when people
- 5 We had to wash our clothes by hand. There weren't any washing-machines, you know. Nowadays people

3 Didn't need to or needn't have? (C)

Write the sentences using *didn't need to* or *needn't have*.

- ▶ The previous owners had already decorated the flat, so we *didn't need to decorate it ourselves* (we / decorate / it / ourselves).
- 1 Luckily we were able to sell our old flat before we bought the new one,
So..... (we / borrow/any money).
- 2 It was very hot yesterday, so I watered all the flowers.
And now it's pouring with rain (I / bother).
- 3 We've done the journey much more quickly than I expected.
..... (we / leave / so early).
- 4 K friend had already given me a free ticket to the exhibition,
So (I / pay / to go in).
- 5 Service was included in the bill, so..... (you / tip / the waiter).
It was a waste of money.