

Can and can't: ability and permission

Using can and can't to say what someone is able to do, and what someone is or isn't allowed to do.

Fill each gap with one of the words below it. Answers and the rule for every sentence are on the next page.

1. My grandmother _____ speak three languages fluently, so she often translates for us.

a can b can't c cans d could

2. I couldn't ride a bike before, but I _____ ride one now, after lots of practice.

a can't b can c cans d could

3. Our new colleague is very quick — she _____ learn any new task in a day.

a can't b cans c can d could

4. My grandfather is quite old now, and he _____ hear very well anymore.

a can b cans c could d can't

5. The signal is too weak here, so my phone _____ connect to the internet.

a can't b can c cans d could

6. This box is far too heavy — I _____ lift it on my own.

a cans b can't c can d could

7. You _____ borrow my umbrella if you need it — I won't use it today.

a can't b could c can d cans

8. In this office, staff _____ bring their own laptops, as long as they keep them locked away at night.

a can't b cans c could d can

9. Photography is not allowed, so visitors _____ take pictures inside the museum.

a can't b can c cans d could

10. Dogs _____ come into the restaurant — there's a sign on the door that says 'No pets'.

a cans **b** can't **c** could **d** can

11. _____ I borrow your pen for a minute?

a Do **b** Does **c** Can **d** Is

12. _____ your brother swim well?

a Does **b** Is **c** Do **d** Can

Answer key

1. My grandmother **can** speak three languages fluently, so she often translates for us.
We use can to talk about something a person is able to do.
2. I couldn't ride a bike before, but I **can** ride one now, after lots of practice.
We use can for something you are able to do now, even if you could not do it before.
3. Our new colleague is very quick — she **can** learn any new task in a day.
We use can to say someone is able to do something easily.
4. My grandfather is quite old now, and he **can't** hear very well anymore.
We use can't when someone is not able to do something.
5. The signal is too weak here, so my phone **can't** connect to the internet.
We use can't when something is not possible right now.
6. This box is far too heavy — I **can't** lift it on my own.
We use can't when something is too difficult to do.
7. You **can** borrow my umbrella if you need it — I won't use it today.
We use can when someone is allowed to do something.
8. In this office, staff **can** bring their own laptops, as long as they keep them locked away at night.
We use can to say something is allowed, if a rule is followed.
9. Photography is not allowed, so visitors **can't** take pictures inside the museum.
We use can't when a rule does not allow something.
10. Dogs **can't** come into the restaurant — there's a sign on the door that says 'No pets'.
We use can't when a sign or rule stops people doing something.
11. **Can** I borrow your pen for a minute?
We put Can at the start of a question to ask for permission.
12. **Can** your brother swim well?
We put Can at the start of a question to ask about ability.