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to be able to: have the ability, power, or skill to.She can solve the problem easily, I'm sure to know how to.He can play chess, although he's not particularly good at it to have the power or means to.A dictator can impose his will on the people to have the right or qualifications to.He can change whatever he wishes in the script.may: have permission to.Can I speak to you for a moment?to have the possibility.A coin can land on either side. can, can, canst, can, can, could, could, couldst, could, could, can, can, could, cunning, a sealed container for food, beverages, etc., as of aluminum, sheet iron coated with tin, or other metal.a receptacle for garbage, ashes, etc..a bucket, pail, or other container for holding or carrying liquids.a drinking cup; tankard.a metal or plastic container for holding film on cores or reels.Slang: Usually Vulgar. toilet; bathroom.Slang, jail.He's been in the can for a week.Slang: Sometimes Vulgar. buttocks.Slang, cans, a set of headphones designed to cover the ears.Military Slang, a depth charge.a destroyer.to preserve by sealing in a can, jar, etc.Slang. to dismiss; fire.Slang. to throw (something) away.Slang. to put a stop to.to record, as on film or tape.a container, esp for liquids, usually of thin sheet metal.another name (esp US) for tinAlso called: canful. the contents of a can or the amount a can will holda slang word for prisona slang word for toilet or buttocks See toiletnavy a slang word for destroyerslang navy a depth chargea shallow cylindrical metal container of varying size used for storing and handling filminformal a complicated problemSee carry(of a film, piece of music, etc) having been recorded, processed, edited, etcinformal arranged or agreedthe contract is almost in the can"Collins English Dictionary — Complete & Unabridged" 2012 Digital Edition © William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 © HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012to put (food, etc) into a can or cans; preserve in a canslang (tr) to dismiss from a jobinformal (tr) to stop (doing something annoying or making an annoying noise) (esp in the phrase can it! informal (tr) to reject or discard"Collins English Dictionary — Complete & Unabridged" 2012 Digital Edition © William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 © HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012used as an auxiliary to indicate ability, skill, or fitness to perform a taskI can run a mile in under four minutesused as an auxiliary to indicate permission or the right to somethingused as an auxiliary to indicate knowledge of how to do somethinghe can speak three languages fluentlyused as an auxiliary to indicate the possibility, opportunity, or likelihoodmy trainer says I can win the race if I really work hard"Collins English Dictionary — Complete & Unabridged" 2012 Digital Edition © William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 © HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012Can but and cannot but are formal and now somewhat old-fashioned expressions suggesting that there is no possible alternative to doing something. Can but is equivalent to can only: We can but do our best. Cannot but is the equivalent of cannot help but: We cannot but protest against these injustices. See also help.Can1 and may1 are frequently but not always interchangeable in senses indicating possibility: A power failure can (or may) occur at any time. Despite the insistence by some, that can means only "to be able" and may means "to be permitted," both are regularly used in seeking or granting permission: Can (or May) I borrow your glue gun? You can (or may) use it tomorrow. Sentences using can occur chiefly in spoken English. May in this sense occurs more frequently in formal contexts: May I address the court, Your Honor? In negative constructions, can't or cannot is more common than may not : You can't have it today. I need it myself. The contraction mayn't is rare.Origin of can1First recorded before 900; Middle English, Old English, present indicative singular 1st, 3rd person of cunnan "to know, know how"; cognate with German, Old Norse, Gothic kann; ken, know 1Origin of can2First recorded before 1000; Middle English canne, can(e), Old English canne, cognate with German Kanne, Old Norse kanna, all perhaps from West Germanic; compare Late Latin canna "small vessel" Origin of can1Old English canne; related to Old Norse, Old High German kanna, Irish gann, Swedish kana sledOrigin of can2Old English cunnan; related to Old Norse kunna, Old High German kunnan, Latin cognoscere to know, Sanskrit jñāti he knows; see ken , uncouthExamples have not been reviewed.There will also be an interactive experience based on pirate series "One Piece," where visitors can dodge villains to reach the Devil Fruit.It is important to note, however, that the constitutional definition of censorship establishes that only the government - not citizens or businesses - can be censors.Political scientist Erica Chenoweth, co-author of "Why Civil Resistance Works," has argued that if just 3.5 percent of a country's population actively and peacefully opposes the government, the protesters can begin to force some concessions.But people can unite to lead so that leaders will follow, and justice can prevail.The opening of Belfast's new maternity hospital could be delayed by another 28 months.bottle bucket canister jar package Definitions and idiom definitions from Dictionary.com Unabridged, based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, © Random House, Inc. 2023Idioms from The American Heritage® Idioms Dictionary copyright © 2002, 2001, 1995 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.camwoodCanaBrowse#aabbccddeeffghhijjklmmnnooppqrrsstuuvvwwxyzzAboutCareersContact usCookies, terms, & privacyHelpFollow usGet the Word of the Day every day!© 2025 Dictionary.com, LLC "Can" is one of the most commonly used modal verbs in English. It can be used to express ability or opportunity, to request or offer permission, and to show possibility or impossibility. Examples: I can ride a horse. We can stay with my brother when we are in Paris. She cannot stay out after 10 PM. Can you hand me the stapler? Any child can grow up to be president. Most modal verbs behave quite irregularly in the past and the future. Study the chart below to learn how "can" behaves in different contexts. Modal Use Positive Forms1. = Present 2. = Past 3. = Future Negative Forms1. = Present 2. = Past 3. = Future Also use: can 1. I can speak Chinese. 2. SHIFT TO "COULD" I could speak Chinese when I was a kid. 3. SHIFT TO "BE ABLE TO" I will be able to speak Chinese by the time I finish my course. 1. I can't speak Swahili. 2. SHIFT TO "COULD" I couldn't speak Swahili. 3. SHIFT TO "BE ABLE TO" I won't be able to speak Swahili. be able to can 1. With a burst of adrenaline, people can pick up cars. 2. SHIFT TO "BE ABLE TO" With a sudden burst of adrenaline, he was able to lift the car off the child's leg. 3. SHIFT TO "BE ABLE TO" With a sudden burst of adrenaline, he will be able to lift the car. 1. Even with a burst of adrenaline, people can't pick up something that heavy. 2. SHIFT TO "BE ABLE TO" Even the weight lifter, wasn't able to lift the car off the child's leg. 3. SHIFT TO "BE ABLE TO" Even three men working together won't be able to lift the car. be able to can 1. I have some free time. I can help her now. 2. SHIFT TO "BE ABLE TO" I had some free time yesterday. I was able to help her at that time. 3. I'll have some free time tomorrow. I can help her then. 1. I don't have any time. I can't help her now. 2. SHIFT TO "BE ABLE TO" I didn't have time yesterday. I wasn't able to help her at that time. 3. I won't have any time later. I can't help her then. be able to can 1. I can drive Susan's car when she is out of town. 2. SHIFT TO "BE ALLOWED TO " I was allowed to drive Susan's car while she was out of town last week. 3. I can drive Susan's car while she is out of town next week. 1. I can't drive Susan's car when she is out of town. 2. SHIFT TO "BE ALLOWED TO " I wasn't allowed to drive Susan's car while she was out of town last week. 3. I can't drive Susan's car while she is out of town next week. may can Can I have a glass of water? Can you give me a lift to school? Can't I have a glass of water? Can't you give me a lift to school? could, may can Anyone can become rich and famous if they know the right people. Learning a language can be a real challenge. It can't cost more than a dollar or two. You can't be 45! I thought you were about 18 years old. could Can Exercises Learn English at Englishpage.com! 1 : to be able to (do something) I don't need any help. I can do it myself. I can't decide what to do. All we can do [=the only thing we can do] now is wait. : to know how to (do something) : to have the power or skill to (do something) A weight lifter can lift a very heavy weight. Only Congress can do that. : to be designed to (do something) a car that can hold five people [=a car that has enough room for five people] How fast can [=does, will] the car go? — sometimes used without a following verb I visit her whenever I can. I don't know if I'll be able to fix the problem, but I'll do what I can. Please help us if you can. 2 — used to describe what someone sees, feels, thinks, etc. "Can you see him yet?" "Yes, I can see him clearly." Can [=ed] you remember/understand how to do it? 3 a — used to say that something is or is not possible Do you think he can still be alive? [=do you think it is possible that he is still alive?] I don't think he can still be alive. [=I think he must be dead] These problems can be dealt with more easily at the local level. You can't always get what you want in life. At this time of year many birds can be found on the island. [=there are many birds on the island at this time of year] If you don't tell me what the problem is, I can't help you. You can't be very smart [=you aren't very smart] if you believe that! He was supposed to be here an hour ago. Where can he (possibly) be? [=where is he?] [+] more examples [-] hide examples [+] Example sentences [-] Hide examples — sometimes used in the emphatic phrase as...as can be I can be a cake as big as can be! [=I want the biggest cake possible] They seemed as happy as can be [=they seemed extremely happy] when I last saw them. b — used in speech to express surprise or disbelief You must be joking! You can't/cannot (possibly) be serious! He can't really have meant that. [=I don't believe that he meant that] You can't (possibly) believe that! The price is \$50? That can't be right. [=that must be wrong] 4 a : to have permission to (do something) You can do it tomorrow if you like. "Can I leave now?" "No, you can't." You can't leave until you finish washing the dishes. — compare may 4 5 a — used to say what should or should not be done You can't leave now! The party is just getting started! Why can't you be more polite? [=you should be more polite; why aren't you more polite?] b — used in angry speech to tell someone to do something If you don't like it here, you can just leave! 6 a — used to describe the way a person sometimes behaves She can be very rude at times. [=she is sometimes very rude] b — used to describe something that sometimes or often happens In this part of the country the weather can change quickly. [=the weather often changes quickly] Usage Could is used as the past tense of can to describe an ability that someone had in the past or to say that something was possible in the past. I could run fast when I was young, but I can't run fast now. It used to be that you could drive for miles here without seeing another person, but now there are houses and people everywhere. To describe a specific occurrence in the past, use was/were able to instead of could. By working long hours, we were able to finish the project on time. In the future tense, will be able to is used. If you keep practicing, you'll be able to play the piano someday. She believes that someday people will be able to vote at home on their computers. Can can be used to suggest something that might happen in the future. If we save enough money, we can go to Hawaii for our vacation next year. no can do informal + humorous — used in speech to say that you cannot do something that you have been asked or told to do "Can you give me a ride to work tomorrow?" "Sorry—no can do. My car is in the shop."