Speaking: routines, plans and asking for things

English A2

What this topic teaches

A2 speaking runs on three engines: the routine engine (present simple), the plan engine (present continuous or going to), and the **request engine** (can, could, would). This topic teaches you to change engines mid-conversation without stalling.

- Routines: *I usually play basketball on Saturdays.*
- Plans: *I am meeting Li on Sunday. / I am going to visit my grandparents.*
- Requests: *Can I borrow your pen? Could you open the window?*
- Memory hook: **three engines**, one conversation.

The routine engine: present simple

Talk habits with the present simple, and dress them with frequency words.

- *I get up at seven on school days. I never skip breakfast.*
- Third person -s: *My sister practises the piano every evening.*
- Follow-up questions keep the engine warm: *Really? What time do you start?*

The plan engine: two futures that live in the present

A2 plans ride two forms, and both are built on present words.

Form	Sound	Use it for
I am meeting Li on Sunday.	am/is/are + verb-ing	fixed arrangements with a time
I am going to visit Grandma.	am going to + verb	intentions decided before speaking

- The arrangement form carries its time with it: *on Sunday, at six, tomorrow.*
- The going-to form carries its decision: you already made up your mind.
- Answer plans with plans: *Great! I am going to bring my camera.*

A first try

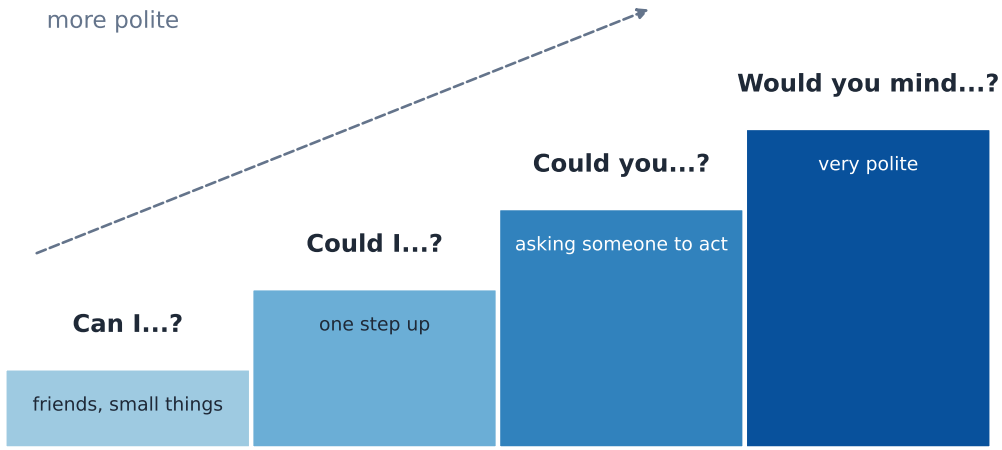
Change engines: routine to plan.

- A: I usually play basketball on Saturdays. (routine)
- B: Me too! This Saturday I am joining the school team. (plan)
- A: Nice. Could I watch? (request)

The request engine: the politeness ladder

Requests climb a ladder of politeness. Climb one step for strangers, two for big asks.

Rung	Example	When
Can I...?	Can I borrow your pen?	friends, small things
Could I...?	Could I ask a question?	one step up
Could you...?	Could you open the window?	asking someone to act
Would you mind...?	Would you mind closing it?	the top rung, very polite



Each step up the request ladder is more polite

- *Can I* asks for permission; *Could you* asks for action. Different engines, same family.
- The answer to *Would you mind?* is upside down: *Not at all* means yes, I will.

Keeping the conversation alive

The A2 fuel kit: answer plus one extra piece, then a question back.

- A: What are you doing this weekend? B: I am visiting my grandparents. What about you?

- A: Could you help me with this exercise? B: Sure. Which part don't you understand?
- One-word answers stall all three engines.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- Do not use will for fixed plans: *I will meet Li on Sunday* sounds like a promise just made; the arrangement is *I am meeting Li on Sunday.*
- Requests need a question mark in writing and a rising voice in speech.
- Do not answer Would you mind with Yes meaning yes-I-will-do-it; *Yes* means you do mind; to agree, say *No, not at all.*

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. Routine or plan: *She goes swimming every Friday / She is going swimming this Friday.* – **The first is a routine** (present simple, *every*); **the second is a plan** (present continuous, *this Friday*).
2. Climb the ladder: ask a stranger for the time. – ***Could you tell me the time, please?*** (or *Excuse me, do you know what time it is?*)
3. Turn the engine: answer *What are you doing on Saturday?* with a plan. – For example: ***I'm meeting my cousin in town. What about you?***
4. Answer politely: *Would you mind opening the window?* – ***Not at all.*** (= yes, I'll do it) / ***Sure, no problem.*** If you can't: *Sorry, I'm afraid it's stuck.*

■ Practice: three short exchanges

Say your part aloud first, then read the model.

1. A friend asks: *What do you usually do after school?* – Model: *"I usually play basketball with my friends, and then I do my homework. What about you?"* (routine + one extra + a question back)
2. Your teacher asks: *What are you doing in the holidays?* – Model: *"I'm going to Hangzhou with my family. We're staying with my aunt for a week."* (a plan in the present continuous + one extra)
3. You need to borrow a stranger's pen at the post office. – Model: *"Excuse me, could I borrow your pen for a moment, please?"* … *"Thank you very much."* (one rung up for a stranger)