

can

English Grammar · A1

Ability and Requests

can

can	can't	Can ...?
ability / request	negative	question
<i>I can swim</i>	<i>she can't drive</i>	<i>Can you help?</i>

can: reference card grid

can expresses **ability** (“know how to / be able to”) or is used for **requests**. It is followed by the **base form of the verb**, and remains the same for all persons.

I can swim.

I can swim.

Can you help me?

Can you help me?

Note: Use the **base form** after can: *~~can to swim~~* ×, *~~can swims~~* × → can swim ✓.

Negation and Interrogative

Negative: **cannot** (abbreviation **can't**) + base form of the verb.

She can't drive.

She cannot drive.

Question: Place **Can** before the subject.

Can he cook?

Can he cook?

Short answer: **Yes, I can.** / **No, I can't.**

Note: can has no -s and does not use do/does: ask directly with **Can he...?**, not *~~Does he can...?~~*

Common Errors

- × *~~She cans drive.~~* → ✓ She **can** drive. — can has no third-person singular -s; it is the same for all persons.
- × *~~I don't can swim.~~* → ✓ I **can't** swim. — The negative of can is formed directly with not (can't), without using don't.
- × *~~He can sings very good.~~* → ✓ He can **sing** very **well**. — Use the base form of the verb after can; use the adverb well to modify a verb, not good.
- × *~~You can help me?~~* → ✓ **Can** you help me? — When making a request, place can before the subject.