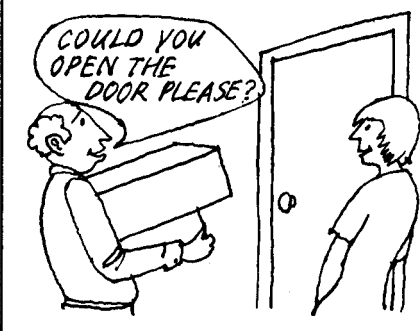


UNIT 31

Can, could, may and would: requests, permission, offers and invitations

a) Asking people to do things (requests)



We often use **can** or **could** when we ask someone to do something:

- Can you wait a moment, please?
- Ann, can you do me a favour?
- Excuse me. **Could** you tell me how to get to the station?
- Do you think you **could** lend me some money?
- I wonder if you **could** help me.

To ask for something you can say **Can I have ...? / Could I have ...? / May I have ...?:**

- (in a shop) Can I have these postcards, please?
- (at table) Could I have the salt, please?

b) Asking for and giving permission

We often use **can**, **could** or **may** to ask permission to do something:

- (on the telephone) Hello, **can** I speak to Tom, please?
- 'Could I use your telephone?' 'Yes, of course.'
- 'Do you think I **could** borrow your bicycle?' 'Yes, help yourself.'
- 'May I come in?' 'Yes, please do.'

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

- You **can** (or **may**) smoke if you like.

Use **can/can't** to talk about what is *already allowed or not allowed*:

- You **can** drive for a year in Britain with an international licence.
- If you're under 17, you **can't** drive a car in Britain.

c) We sometimes use **can** when we offer to do things:

- 'Can I get you a cup of coffee?' 'That's very nice of you.'
- (in a shop) 'Can I help you, madam?' 'No thank you. I'm being served.'

d) For offering and inviting we use **Would you like ...?** (*not* 'do you like'):

- **Would you like** a cup of coffee? (*not* 'do you like')
- **Would you like to come** to the cinema with us tomorrow evening? (*not* 'do you like to come')

I'd like (= I would like) is a polite way of saying what you want, or what you want to do:

- I'd like some information about hotels, please.
- I'd like to try on this jacket, please.

UNIT 31 Exercises

31.1 Read the situation and write what you would say. Use the words given in brackets.

Example: You've got a pound note but you need some change. You ask somebody to help you. (Can you ...?) Can you change a pound?

- 1 You want to borrow your friend's camera. What do you say to him/her? (Could I ...?)
- 2 You have a car and you want to give somebody a lift. What do you say? (Can I ...?)
- 3 You have to go to the airport but you don't know how to get there. You ask a passer-by. (Could you ...?)
- 4 You are telephoning the owner of a flat which was advertised in a newspaper. You are interested in the flat and you want to come and see it today. (Do you think I ...?)
- 5 You are at an interview. You want to smoke a cigarette. What do you ask first? (May I ...?)
- 6 You want to leave work early because you have some important things to do. What do you ask your boss? (Do you think I ...?)
- 7 You want to invite someone to come and stay with you for the weekend. (Would you like ...?)
- 8 The person in the next room has some music on very loud. How do you ask him politely to turn it down? (Do you think you ...?)

31.2 This time you have to decide how to say what you want to say.

Example: You have to carry some heavy boxes upstairs. Ask someone to help you.
Do you think you could give me a hand with these boxes?

- 1 A friend has just come to see you in your flat. Offer him something to drink.
- 2 You want your friend to show you how to change the film in your camera. What do you say to him/her?
- 3 You're on a train. The woman next to you has finished reading her newspaper. Now you want to have a look at it. What do you say?
- 4 You need a match to light your cigarette. You haven't got any but the man sitting next to you has some. What do you ask him?
- 5 There is a concert on tonight and you are going with some friends. You think Tom would enjoy it too. Invite him.
- 6 You're in the post office. You want three stamps for Japan. What do you say?
- 7 You are sitting in a crowded bus. There is an old lady standing. Offer her your seat.
- 8 You're in a car with a friend, who is driving. He is going to park the car but there is a No Parking sign. You see the sign and say: