

MAKING POLITE REQUESTS AND ASKING FOR PERMISSION (Can, Could, May, would, might, would you mind)

Requests

A request is a way of politely asking someone to do something. The kind of request we use depends on where we are, who we are talking to and want the person to do. Some forms are considered to be more polite than others.



We use **could you** and **would you** as polite ways of telling or asking someone to **do something**:

- **Could you** take a message please?
- **Would you** carry this for me please?
- **Could I** have my bill please?

can and **will** are less polite:

- **Can you** take a message please?
- **Will you** carry this for me please?
- **Can I** borrow your car?

A request is when you **ask for** something:

Informal: (we are often informal with our family and friends.)

- **Can I** borrow your book?

Formal: (we are usually formal with everyone else, like: teachers, doctors, boss, and anyone else we do not know well)

- **Could I** borrow your book?

Polite requests with I

Informal	Can I have another cookie?
Formal	Could I leave early today?
Formal	May I take this magazine?
Very Formal	Might I borrow some money?*

* Might is very formal. We don't use might often.

Permissions





We use **can** to ask for permission to do something:

- **Can I** ask a question, please?
- **Can we** go home now?

Could is more formal and polite than **can**:

- **Could I** ask a question please?
- **Could we** go home now?

may is another more formal and polite way of asking for permission:

- **May I** ask a question please?
- **May we** go home now?

We use **can** to give permission:

- **You can** go home now if you like.
- **You can** borrow my pen if you like.

may is a more formal and polite way of giving permission:

- **You may** go home now, if you like.

We use **can** to say that someone has permission to do something:

- **We can** go out whenever we want.
- **Students can** travel for free.

may is a more formal and polite way of saying that someone has permission:

- **Students may** travel for free.

When you ask for permission, you have to do your best to be polite. It is desirable to use the word "please."

Asking for Permission:

- Can I go out, please?
- May I open the window, please?
- Please, can I have a look at your photo album?
- Please, may I taste that hot spicy couscous dish?
- Do you mind if I smoke?
- Would you mind if I asked you something?
- Is it okay if I sit here?
- Would it be all right if I borrowed your mobile Phone?

Giving Permission:

- Yes, please do.
- Sure, go ahead.
- Sure.
- No problem.
- Please feel free.
- Refusing to give permission:
 - No, please don't.
 - I'm sorry, but that's not possible.
 - I'm afraid, but you can't

TIPS FOR POLITE LANGUAGE WHEN SAYING "NO"

1. Make a statement of regret

- ✓ I'm sorry, I'd really like to, but...
- ✓ I appreciate the offer, but, etc.

2. Explain why the answer is no.

- ✓ I'm really busy right now.
- ✓ We aren't available that weekend.

3. Offer an alternative, if possible.

- ✓ I might be able to do it next week.
- ✓ John might be able to help you with that.

Exercise 1

➤ Ask permission or make a request to your classmates.

Ask permission	Make a request
✓ Can I?	✓ Can you please?
✓ May I?	✓ Could you please?
✓ Could I?	✓ Would you please?
✓ Would you mind if?	✓ Would you mind if you?

Exercise 2

Try to make polite requests or asking for permission to other participants.

Examples:

- ✓ Would you mind looking after my dog?
- ✓ Could you help me carry this case?

- look after dog
- water plants
- lend \$20
- pass the salt
- open the window/hot
- not disturb me this evening
- help find my passport
- get book off shelf

- carry case
- open door
- help with English homework
- close the window/cold
- make less noise
- help cook dinner
- My English teacher speaks too fast!
- go buy some bread