


# 44 Polite requests

Use “can,” “could,” and “may” to ask permission to do something, or to ask someone to do something for you. Some constructions are more formal than others.

 **New language** “Can,” “could,” and “may”

**Aa Vocabulary** Good manners

 **New skill** Asking permission

## 44.1 KEY LANGUAGE “CAN,” “COULD,” AND “MAY”

Use “can I” plus the verb to make a request. “Can” is mostly used in informal situations.

Ben, **can** I have some popcorn?



Yes, you **can**.

Informal answers use “can” as well.

“Could” replaces “can” for more formal situations, such as in business or to talk to strangers.

Excuse me, **could** I sit here, please?

Include “please” in polite requests.



I’m sorry, but that seat is taken.

Make negative answers more polite by adding “I’m sorry” or “I’m afraid.”

“May” can also be used in formal situations.

**May** I take your coat?



Yes, thank you.



## 44.2 FURTHER EXAMPLES “CAN,” “COULD,” AND “MAY”

**Can** I borrow your pen?



Sure! Here you go.

Excuse me, **could** I have a glass of water?



Of course.

Good evening. **May** I reserve a table for 7pm?



I’m afraid we’re completely full this evening.

### TIP

“Could” and “may” are rarely used in short answers to polite questions.





### 44.3 MARK THE BEST REPLY TO EACH REQUEST

All of these replies are correct, but some are more appropriate for formal or informal situations.

Can I borrow your car, Harry?

No you can't, Joe. I need it today. ☒

No, you may not. ☐

1 Excuse me, do you know where the station is?

I'm afraid I don't know. ☐

No, I don't. ☐

2 Can we go soon? The show starts at 8pm.

Yes, when I've finished my coffee. ☐

I'm afraid that won't be possible. ☐

3 May I suggest we meet in the restaurant at 7pm?

Yes, see you later! ☐

Yes, that sounds perfect Ms. Elier. ☐

4 Could we postpone our meeting until tomorrow?

I'm sorry, but I have meetings all day. ☐

No, we can't. ☐



### 44.4 RESPOND OUT LOUD TO THE AUDIO USING THE WORDS IN THE PANEL

Can I have some cake, Auntie Mel?

Yes, you can.



1 Could I please order a dozen red roses?

\_\_\_\_\_, but I've sold out.



2 Could I please have the last sandwich?

\_\_\_\_\_. Enjoy it.



3 Can I borrow your laptop?

No, you \_\_\_\_\_. I need it.



4 Excuse me, may I sit next to you?

Yes, you \_\_\_\_\_.



5 Could I speak to Rangit Singh, please?

\_\_\_\_\_ he's busy.



6 May I offer you a cup of coffee, Mrs. Soto?

Yes, \_\_\_\_\_.



~~can~~ I'm afraid may can't  
I'm sorry please Of course



### 44 CHECKLIST

⚙️ "Can," "could," and "may" ☐

Aa Good manners ☐

🧩 Asking permission ☐