

Modals of Permission: CAN/COULD, MAY, and BE ALLOWED TO

A) General points

- There cannot be more than one 'real' modal verb in a single clause or verb group.
- Real modal verbs have fewer forms than other verbs. If we need a form that is not available, we use phrases such as BE ALLOWED TO.
- MAY NOT is practically never contracted.
- Formality: CAN < COULD < MAY.
- To ask about general rules, rather than particular permission, we cannot use MAY (see below).

<p>Future with WILL, Combinations with other modals, Perfect Tenses, All uses of the -ing form, To-infinitive.</p>	<p>BE ALLOWED TO</p>
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- **Examples:**
 - *If I move in, will I **be allowed to** bring my dog?* NOT ~~*...will I **can** bring my dog?~~
 - *She might **be allowed to** bring her dog.* NOT ~~*She might **may** bring her dog.~~
 - *I'd never **been allowed to** stay up as late as that day.* NOT ~~*I'd never **mayed**.~~
 - ***Being allowed to** smoke doesn't mean you have to.* NOT ~~***Maying** smoke.~~
 - *I'd like **to be allowed to** do things my way.* NOT ~~*I'd like **canning**.~~

B) Asking Permission: *Can, Could, May*

- All of these can be used to ask permission. The difference is in politeness and formality. *Could* tends to sound more polite than *can*, and *may* is more formal.
- **Examples:**
 - ***Can** I borrow your pen for a moment? - Sorry, I need it. Is the pencil OK?*
 - ***Could** I take a look at your notes? - Yeah, sure.*
 - ***May** I go to the toilet, sir? - It's only ten minutes to go. You'll have to wait.*

C) Granting and Refusing Permission: *Can/May* and *Can't/May Not*

- **Could/Couldn't** cannot be used to give or refuse permission -only to ask it and to talk about permission in the past.
- **May** is much less common than **can** in both granting and refusing permission orally, as it is more formal. **May not**, in particular, smells of authority.
- To express prohibition, **must not** may also be used
- **Examples:**
 - You **can** wait in the living room if you want.
 - Could I borrow your rubber? - Sure you **can**.
 - You **may** leave as soon as you finish the exam.

 - Could we have a barbecue up in the park? - I'm afraid you **can't** -it's too dangerous.
 - Candidates **may not** bring dictionaries.
 - You **mustn't** leave your bags around on the airport.

D) Talking about Permission: *Can/Could, Be Allowed To*

- If we want to talk about permissions and rules made by third parties, by someone else, we cannot use **may**.
- **Can/Could** can only be used in the Simple tenses (past and present). The other possible time forms (Future, Perfect) require **be allowed to**.
- If we talk about permission, politeness is irrelevant: We are just stating facts. Thus, **can** and **could** are just different time forms, nothing more.
- If a specific past permission led to a specific past action, we have to use **be allowed to**. Else, **could** and **be allowed to** are synonymous.
- For past non-permission, **wasn't/weren't allowed to** is more common than **couldn't**: It is less ambiguous.

→ Consider:

- I **could** go home early yesterday. = I finished early, so I was able to...
- I **was allowed** to go home early yesterday. = The boss said it was OK for me to...

- I was **allowed to / could** stay up till ten when I was a kid.
- Sometimes, she **can / is allowed to** take home some food from the restaurant she works in.
- **Can** you take photos in here?
- **Could** you enter the crypt? - No, visitors **weren't allowed** there back then. Nowadays, you **can** enter it if you're with a guide.

E) Exercises:

- You are visiting the Taj Mahal. You want to know the rules about taking photos.
- You need to make a phone call, but your mobile is out of battery. You enter a bar and say... (use).
- Your pencil's tip has broken. You ask your neighbour for his/her sharpener (borrow).
- _____ cross the road here?
- _____ ask you a question?
- _____ smoke here?
- _____ read your magazine?
- _____ drive without an insurance in 1911?
- _____ have parties at home when you were living in the old flat?
- _____ go on that trip in summer if you get good marks, or is your parents' refusal definite?