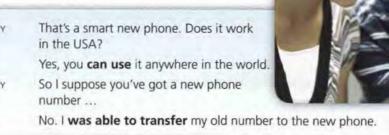
## 46 Ability and possibility can, could, be able to

		P. Carlo
CATHY	That's a smart new phone. Does it work in the USA?	
TIM	Yes, you can use it anywhere in the world.	
CATHY	So I suppose you've got a new phone number	
TIM	No. I was able to transfer my old number to the	e new phone.



## 1 can and other modal verbs

We use a modal verb with another verb to show that an action is possible, necessary or certain. We also use modal verbs to ask permission or to give advice.

POSITIVE	I can swim. You must leave. She should go.	
NEGATIVE	I cannot (can't) dance. He must not (mustn't) stop. We could not (couldn't) leave.	
QUESTIONS	Can you speak French? (No, I can't) Should they leave? (Yes, they should.) What can you do? Where should we go?	

Modal verbs (can, could, may, might, should, must, would, will and shall) are different from other verbs.

- We use them + infinitive without to:
  - X You can to use it anywhere. \( \sqrt{You can use} \) it anywhere.
- They have the same form for all subjects:
  - X My brother cans swim. I My brother can swim.
- We form negatives with not or n't (not doesn't or don't):
  - X I don't can speak Japanese. ✓ I can't speak Japanese.
- We put the modal verb in front of the subject for questions. We don't use do/does/did: X Does she can play tennis? ✓ Can she play tennis?
- They don't have infinitive or -ing forms. If we need to use an infinitive or -ing form, we use a form with a similar meaning, e.g. for can we use be able to:
  - X I want to can play the guitar. I want to be able to play the guitar.
  - X I love can stay up late. ✓ I love being able to stay up late.
- They don't have participle (-ed, -ing) forms, so we can't make continuous or perfect tenses with them. Instead we change the main verb:
  - They can't be waiting for us. They can't have used it yet.

## 'Modal perfects', e.g. He must have done it. > Units 51.3 and 84.1

• We can make modals passive. We use a modal verb + a form of be + past participle (➤ Unit 84.1): Members can use this car park. → This car park can be used by members.

## 2 can for present ability and possibility

We use can or be able to to say that it is possible to do something, or that somebody/ something has an ability to do something:

You can use this phone anywhere in the world. Can you speak Japanese?

We usually pronounce can as /kən/ in statements and Wh- questions:

Karl can speak Japanese. When can we play tennis?

We sometimes use the strong form /kæn/ in yes/no questions and always in short answers: Can Karl play tennis? Yes, he can.

The negative can't is /ku:nt/ in most varieties of British English: I can't read music.

Pronunciation ➤ 1.22