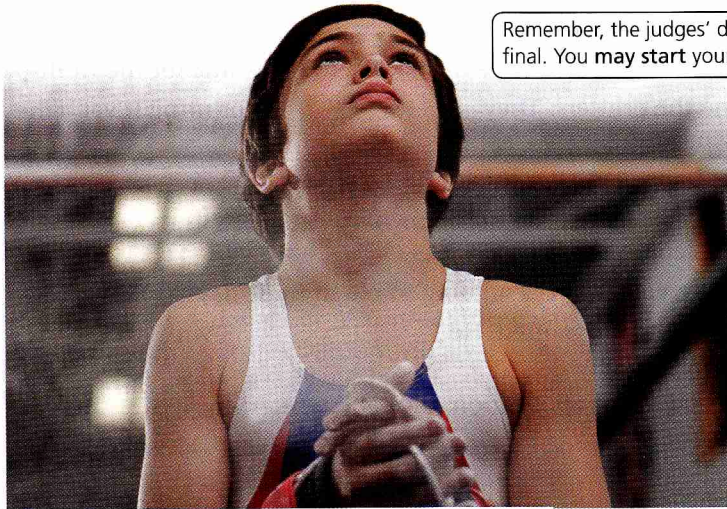


36 Other uses of modals



Remember, the judges' decision **will be** final. You **may start** your routine now.

1 Asking for and giving/refusing permission

The choice of modal verb for permission depends on the formality of the situation and how tentative or unsure the speaker is about the response.

	ASKING FOR PERMISSION	GIVING PERMISSION	REFUSING PERMISSION
less formal/ more sure	<i>Can I use your phone?</i>	Yes, <i>of course you can.</i>	No, I'm afraid you <i>can't</i> . No, I'm sorry.
	<i>Could I leave my coat here?</i>	Yes, you <i>can.</i>	No, I'm sorry. I'm afraid not.
more formal/ less sure	<i>May I interrupt?</i> <i>Might I ask the court for an adjournment?</i>	Yes, you <i>may.</i> Of course. Certainly.	No, you <i>may not.</i> No, I'm afraid not.

- We use *can't* to refuse permission that is subject to external authority (► Unit 34.1):
*You **can't** smoke in any public buildings.* (The law doesn't allow it.)
- To describe general permission in the past we use *could/couldn't*:
*In the 1950s British children **could** leave school at the age of fourteen.*
- But we use *was allowed to* for permission on a specific occasion in the past:
~~*X I could bring a friend with me.*~~ ✓ *I was allowed to bring a friend with me.*

2 Suggestions

We can make suggestions in several ways:

*We **can** try that new café. **Shall** we try that new café?*

*Let's try that new café, (shall we?) We **could** try that new café.*

- We can use *can/could* always for an alternative, or more tentative suggestion:
*We **could** always go to the Italian place.*
- We use *would* if we want to be more tentative or distant:
*It **would be** a good idea to get together one evening.*
*'Why don't you come to dinner on Sunday?' 'That **would be** nice. I'll let you know.'*
- We can use *could* to make a tentative suggestion that another person does something:
*You **could** lose a little weight, perhaps.* (tentative)

To mean 'there is no better choice available', we can use the phrase *might as well*:
*Now the children have left, we **might as well** sell the house and get something smaller.*

To ask for suggestions (or advice), we can use *shall* with a question word

(► Module 6 Before you start):

*What **shall** we do about Tom if he doesn't get into university?*