

Can/Could/Would you ...? etc. (Requests, offers, permission and invitations)

A. Asking people to do things (requests)

We often use can or could to ask people to do things:

- * Can you wait a moment, please? or Could you wait a moment, please?
- * Liz, can you do me a favour?
- * Excuse me, could you tell me how to get to the airport?
- * I wonder if you could help me.

Note that we say 'Do you think (you) could ...?' (not usually 'can'):

- * Do you think you could lend me some money until next week?

We also use will and would to ask people to do things (but can/could are more usual):

- * Liz, will you do me a favour?
- * Would you please be quiet? I'm trying to concentrate.

B. Asking for things

To ask for something we use Can I have ...? or Could I have ...?:

- * (in a shop) Can I have these postcards, please?
- * (during a meal) Could I have the salt, please?

May I have ...? is also possible (but less usual):

- * May I have these postcards, please?

C. Asking for and giving permission

To ask for permission to do something, we use can, could or may:

- * (on the phone) Hello, can I speak to Tom, please?
- * 'Could I use your phone?' 'Yes, of course.'
- * Do you think I could borrow your bike?
- * 'May I come in?' 'Yes, please do.'

To give permission, we use can or may.

- * You can use the phone. or You may use the phone.

May is formal and less usual than can or could.

D. Offering to do things To offer to do something, we sometimes use Can I ...?:

* 'Can I get you a cup of coffee?' 'Yes, that would be very nice.'

* 'Can I help you?' 'No, it's all right. I can manage.'

You can also use I'll ... to offer to do things (see Unit 21C):

* You look tired. I'll get you a cup of coffee.

E. Offering and inviting

To offer or to invite we use Would you like ...? (not do you like)

* 'Would you like a cup of coffee?' 'Yes, please.'

* 'Would you like to come to dinner tomorrow evening?' 'Yes, I'd love to.'

I'd like... is a polite way of saying what you want:

* (at a tourist information office) I'd like some information about hotels, please.

* (in a shop) I'd like to try on this jacket, please.

EXERCISES

1. Read the situations and write questions beginning Can ... or Could ...

1. You're carrying a lot of things. You can't open the door yourself. There's a man standing near the door. You say to him: _Could you open the door, please?_

2. You phone Ann but somebody else answers. Ann isn't there. You want to leave a message for her. You say: ---

3. You are a tourist. You want to go to the station but you don't know where it is. You ask at your hotel. You say: ---

4. You are in a clothes shop. You see some trousers you like and you want to try them on. You say to the shop assistant: ---

5. You have a car. You have to go to the same place as John, who hasn't got a car. You want to give him a lift. You say to John: ---

2 Read the situations and write questions beginning Do you think ...

1. You want to borrow your friend's camera. What do you say to him?

Do you think _I could borrow your camera?_

2. You are at a friend's house and you want to use her phone. What do you say?

3. You've written a letter in English. Before you send it, you want an English friend to check it. What do you ask him?

4. You want to leave work early because you have some things to do. What do you ask your boss?

5. The woman in the next room is playing music. It's very loud. You want her to turn it down. What do you say to her?

6. You are phoning the owner of a flat which was advertised in a newspaper. You are interested in the flat and you want to come and see it today. What do you say to the owner?

3 What would you say in these situations?

1. John has come to see you in your flat. You offer him something to eat.

YOU: ---

JOHN: No, thank you. I'm not hungry.

2. You need help to change the film in your camera. You ask Ann.

You: Ann, I don't know how to change the film. ---

ANN: Sure. It's easy. All you have to do is this.

3. You're on a train. The woman next to you has finished reading her newspaper. Now you want to have a look at it. You ask her.

YOU: Excuse me ---

WOMAN: Yes, of course. I've finished with it.

4. You're on a bus. You have a seat but an elderly man is standing. You offer him your seat.

YOU: ---

MAN: Oh, that's very kind of you. Thank you very much.

5. You're the passenger in a car. Your friend is driving very fast. You ask her to slow down.

YOU: You're making me very nervous. ---

Answers

- 1.2. can/could I leave a message?
- 1.3. can/could you tell me how to get to the station?
- 1.4. can/ could I try on these trousers?
- 1.5. can I give you a lift?

- 2.2. do you think I could use your phone?
- 2.3. do you think you could check this letter for me?
- 2.4. do you think I could leave work early?
- 2.5. do you think you could turn the music down?
- 2.6. do you think I could come and see the flat?

- 3.1. would you like something to eat?
- 3.2. can/could/would you show me?
- 3.3. can/could/ may I have a look at your newspaper?
- 3.4. would you like to sit down?
- 3.5. can/could/would you slow down?
- 3.6. can/could may I have the bill, please?
- 3.7. would you like to borrow it?

DRIVER: Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realise I was going so fast.

6. You've finished your meal in a restaurant and now you want the bill. You ask the waiter:

YOU: ---

WAITER: Right. I'll get it for you now.

7. A friend of yours is interested in one of your books. You invite him to borrow it.

FRIEND: This book looks very interesting.

YOU: Yes, it's very good. ---