

Modal Verb – Can

The modal verb **can** is often used to express **ability** and **possibility**.

Ability - having the knowledge or skills to be able to do something.

Example:

*I **can** drive a car.*

*A chemist **can** advise you about symptoms and medicines.*

In these examples the modal verb **can** is positioned before the verbs **drive** and **advise** and indicates that the person we are talking about (the driver and the chemist) both have the **ability** to do these actions....they **can drive** a car, the chemist **can advise**.

Possibility - something being possible

Example:

*Traffic jams **can** annoy some drivers.*

*Often, you **can** get better by staying at home and resting in bed.*

In these examples the same modal verb **can** is positioned before the verbs **annoy** and **get**. The modal verb **can** now indicates a **possibility** rather than an **ability**.

Traffic jams **can** annoy some drivers BUT it doesn't mean that it annoys all drivers! Some drivers might not be annoyed.

Likewise, when we say '...you **can** get better by staying at home and resting in bed...', we mean that it is a possibility that you will 'get better' if you stay in bed. You **can** get better but it is not a 100% guaranteed - you may in fact continue to be ill and decide that you should see a doctor!

Can	
meaning	examples
ability	I can drive a car. A chemist can advise you about symptoms and medicines.
possibility	Traffic jams can annoy some drivers. Often, you can get better by staying at home and resting in bed.