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From Longman Dictionary of Contemporary Englishcannan1 /kɒn; strɒŋk n/ S1 W1 modal verb (negative short form cant) 1 CANAbility to be able to do something or to know how to do something You can swim. cant you? Even a small personal computer can store vast amounts of information. Gabriella can speak French fluently. Im afraid Mr Harding cant see you now hes busy. The police are doing all they can to find her.2 requesting spokenASK FOR something/ASK somebody TO DO something used to ask someone to do something or give you something Can I have a drink, please? Can you help me lift this box? 3 LET/ALLOWallowed to be allowed to do something or to have the right or power to do something You cant park here its a no parking zone. Can we go home now? No we cant. A police officer can insist on seeing a drivers license.4 POSSIBLEpossibility used to say that something is possible I am confident a solution can be found. There can be no doubt that he is guilty. The boxes can be stored flat. Can he still be alive after all this time? 5 CANseeing/hearing etc used with the verbs see, hear, feel, taste, and smell, and with verbs connected with thinking, to mean that someone sees something, hears something etc Here they are I can see their car. Can you smell something burning? I cant understand why youre so upset. He cant remember where he put the tickets. 6 not true [in negatives] used to say that you do not believe that something is true This cant be the right road. It cant be easy caring for someone elses children. 7 should not [in questions and negatives] used to say that someone should not or must not do something You cant expect the world to change overnight. We cant go on like this. Jills left her husband, but can you blame her after the way he treated her?8 SURPRISEdisurprise/anger [usually in questions and negatives] spoken used when you are surprised or angry You cant be serious! They cant have arrived already, surely! How can you be so stupid! 9 SOMETIMESometimes used to say what sometimes happens or how someone sometimes behaves It can be quite cold here at night. Peter can be really annoying. 10 MUSTgiving orders spoken used to tell someone in an angry way to do something And you cant stop that quarrelling, the pair of you. If you wont keep quiet, you can get out. 11 no can doTHESAURUSto be able to do somethingcan do something to have the ability, opportunity, time, or equipment that you need in order to do something. Could is used as the past form, and is also used to say what is or may be possibleI dont think Mike can drive. Yes, he can.He can run faster than me.Can you see the TV, or should I move?This program can translate your e-mail into other languages.How many hamburgers do you think you can eat? Adrian could read when he was four.If we had a boat we could row across to the island.Why didnt they ask me? I could have done it for them for half the price.She could win.be able to do something used when talking about ability or success in the past or ability in the future, or when you need to use an infinitive. It is also used instead of can in more formal EnglishI was able to get a good job (=I got one).Will you be able to carry those bags on your own?If I want to join the expedition, you must be able to speak Spanish.The young birds are now able to fly.be capable of something to have the ability, energy, or qualities needed to do something, especially something very difficult or unusual use this about people or machinesShes perfectly capable (=completely capable) of dealing with the situation.The car is capable of a top speed of 200 mph.No one thought he was capable of murder- have the ability to do something to be able to do something, especially something that is unusual or that most people cannot doShe seemed to have the ability to make people do anything she wanted.I believe the team definitely has the ability to win the championship.be in a position to do something to be able to do something because you have enough knowledge, power, money, or equipment to do itWe will have to run more tests before we are in a position to say whether the document is authentic or not.They expect to be in a position to begin construction within two years.manage to do something to succeed in doing something difficult, especially after trying very hardHe finally managed to find an apartment near his office.At least three of the hostages managed to escape to be unable to do somethingcant/cannot do something to be unable to do something because you do not have the ability, opportunity, time, or equipment that you need. Couldnt/could not is used as the past form.Louise cant see anything without her glasses.He couldnt remember where he had left the car.Will you help me move this? Im sorry, I cant my backs still giving me trouble.I couldnt have done it without your help.I could never have climbed that ridge Im too out of shape.Scientists still cannot explain exactly how the virus reproduces.Sarah could not understand why anyone would want to hurt her: not be able to do something used when talking about inability in the past or the future, when you need to use an infinitive, and in more formal EnglishUnfortunately, I wasnt able to help them.I dont think Ill be able to come to the meeting after all.The doctor told Tina she wouldnt be able to have children.Ive looked all over the house but I havent been able to find my keys anywhere.be unable to do something especially written to not be able to do something, especially something important that you want to do or need to doHe was unable to sleep and lay awake all night.Many passengers were unable to reach the lifeboats in time.not be in a position to do something (also be in no position to do something) formal to not be able to do something because you do not have enough knowledge, power, money, or equipment to do itIm afraid Im not in a position to answer your questions.Having committed military force there, America is in no position to repeat this strategy elsewhere.not be capable of something (also be incapable of something) to not have the physical strength or mental ability to do something often used when criticizing someoneMy son seems to be incapable of keeping a job.Shes not capable of looking after herself anymore.Her father was a man who was utterly incapable of pity or sympathy. GRAMMAR: Patterns with can Like other modal verbs, you use can before the base form of the main verb (=the infinitive without to): We can hear the birds singing. You can go home now.Sharks can be dangerous. Dont say: We can to go home. I We can going home. The past tense of can is could: We could hear the birds singing.The teacher said we could go home. You also use was/were able to when talking about the ability to do something in the past, especially something that was difficult: He was able to walk a few steps. In questions you say Can I/he/she etc: Can we go home? In negatives you say cant (spoken) or cannot (written): I cant hear you! He cannot leave prison. You also use is/are unable to when saying that someone does not have the ability to do something: He is unable to walk. Examples from the Corpus:ca The police still havent found her but theyre doing all they can. That kind of plastic can be molded into any shape. He can be such a jerk sometimes. Im sure we can finish in time. The word "bill" can have several different meanings. Can I have the check, please? If you dont want to learn, you can leave right now. There's hardly any traffic and you can really go fast. Jean can speak French fluently. That's really nice of you, but I really can't accept it. That can't be right. I can't swim. In soccer, you can't touch the ball with your hands. If you have a complaint, you can talk to the manager. Oh, I can taste the lemon grass! I told her she can watch TV till bedtime. Can we turn the air conditioner on? Sure she's mad, can you blame her? Can you hear all right in the back row? Daily life, Technologydoce 041\_eccan2 /kɒn/ S2 noun [countable] 1 Da metal container in which food or drink is preserved without air a Coke cancan of All weve got is a couple of cans of soup.2 TDa special metal container that keeps the liquid inside it under pressure. The liquid is released as a spray when you press the buttoncan of a can of hairspray3 especially American English4 a metal container with a lid that can be removed, used for holding liquid Two large cans of paint ought to be enough. 4 can of worms5 in the can6 the can? cans carry the canExamples from the Corpus:ca He ostentatiously orders a can of Worthington with his lunch, to show where his sympathies lie. Rachaela put the portions into a dish and upended a can of Heinz tomato soup over them to make a casserole. a can of deodorant soft drink cans She was carrying an armful of cat-food cans and smirking to herself. You'll need three large cans of paint. We are conserving our resources for we are down to our last few candles and have only one can of paraffin left. I could scour the trash cans! Four pilots, each holding an unopened can of beer, marched around the bunker. can of a can of tuna fishFoodcannan3 verb (canned, canning) [transitive] American English 1 DTo preserve food by putting it into a metal container from which all the air is removed SYN tin British English2 LEAVE A JOB OR ORGANIZATION informal to dismiss someone from a job SYN sack/can it! See Verb tableExamples from the Corpus:ca As long as you live in my house I can. I kept saying, I think I can. It is in our vital interest to do it as properly and as thoroughly as we can. Scripts in different windows, meanwhile, can access each others' variables and objects, and even call remote functions. Thus many Great Groups are in a canslang(tr) to dismiss from a jobinformal(tr) to stop (doing something annoying or making an annoying noise) (esp in the phrase can it! informal(tr) to reject or discardCollins English Dictionary Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012)to put (food, etc) into a can or cans, preserve in a can2 Used as an auxiliary to indicate ability, skill, or fitness to perform a taskI can run a mile in under four minutesused as an auxiliary to indicate permission or the right to do somethingused as an auxiliary to indicate knowledge of how to do somethingca can speak three languages fluentlyused as an auxiliary to indicate the possibility, opportunity, or likelihoodmy trainer says I can win the race if I really work hardCollins English Dictionary Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012)Can but and cannot but are formal and now somewhat old-fashioned expressions suggesting that there is no possible alternative to doing something. Can but is equivalent to can only: We can but do our best. Cannot but is the equivalent of cannot help but: We cannot but protest against these injustices. See also help.Can1 and may1 are frequently but not always interchangeable in senses indicating possibility: A power failure can (or may ) occur at any time. Despite the insistence by some, that can means only to be able and may means to be permitted, both are regularly used in seeking or granting permission: Can (or May ) I borrow your glue gun? You can (or may ) use it tomorrow. Sentences using can occur chiefly in spoken English. May in this sense occurs more frequently in formal contexts: May I address the court, Your Honor? In negative constructions, can't or cannot is more common than may not : You can't have it today. I need it myself. The contraction mayn't is rare. Origin of can1First recorded before 900; Middle English, Old English, present indicative singular 1st, 3rd person of cunnan to know, know how; cognate with German, Old Norse, Gothic kann; ken, know1 Origin of can2First recorded before 1000; Middle English came, can'te), Old English came, cognate with German kanna, Old Norse kanna, all perhaps from West Germanic; compare Late Latin canna small vesselOrigin of can1Old English canne; related to Old Norse, Old High German kanna, Irish gann, Swedish kana sledOrigin of can2Old English cunnan; related to Old Norse kunnna, Old High German kunnan, Latin cognoscere to know, Sanskrit jñti he knows; see ken , uncouth.Examples have not been reviewed.With the World Cup also expanding next summer, national team players such as Thuram could play more than 70 games in 44 weeks and more than 120 games over two seasons.A prolonged absence for Plum could spell serious trouble for a team already reeling.While the capture of Mr Boelter gave some measure of relief here, discussions on the airwaves in Minnesota have turned towards what can be done to cool the political temperature and prevent future attacks.Still, Carney said on Tuesday this summit "can begin a new era of co-operation that promotes long-term resilience over short-term efficiency".But some, including a clam that is the world's longest living animal, could struggle to adapt.bottlebucketcanisterjarpackageDefinitions and idiom definitions from Dictionary.com Unabridged, based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, Random House, Inc. 2023Idioms from The American Heritage Idioms Dictionary copyright 2002, 2001, 1995 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.camwoodCanaBrowse#aabbccddeeffggghhhijklmmnnooppqrrssttuuvvwxxyzzAboutCareersContact usCookies, terms, & privacyHelpFollow usGet the Word of the Day every day! 2025 Dictionary.com, LLC 1 : to be able to (do something) I don't need any help. I can do it myself. I can't decide what to do. All we can do [=the only thing we can do] now is wait. : to know how to (do something) : to have the power or skill to (do something) A weight lifter can lift a very heavy weight. Only Congress can do that. : to be designed to (do something) a car that can hold five people [=a car that has enough room for five people] How fast can [=does, will] the car go? sometimes used without a following verb I visit her whenever I can. I don't know if I'll be able to fix the problem, but I'll do what I can. Please help us if you can. 2 used to describe what someone sees, feels, thinks, etc. Can you see him yet? Yes, I can see him clearly. Can I [=do] you remember/understand how to do it? 3 a used to say that something is or is not possible Do you think he can still be alive? [=do you think it is possible that he is still alive?] I don't think he can still be alive. [=I think he must be dead] These problems can be dealt with more easily at the local level. You can't always get what you want in life. At this time of year many birds can be found on the island. [=there are many birds on the island at this time of year] If you don't tell me what the problem is, I can't help you. You can't be very smart [=you aren't very smart] if you believe that! He was supposed to be here an hour ago. Where can he (possibly) be? [=where is he?] [+] more examples [-] hide examples [+ ] Example sentences [-] Hide examples sometimes used in the emphatic phrase asas can be I want a cake as big as can be! [=I want the biggest cake possible] They seemed as happy as can be [=they seemed extremely happy] when I last saw them. b used in speech to express surprise or disbelief You must be joking! You can't/cannot (possibly) be serious! He can't really have meant that. [=I don't believe that he meant that] You can't (possibly) believe that! The price is \$50? That can't be right. [=that must be wrong] 4 a : to have permission to (do something) You can do it tomorrow if you like. Can I leave now? No, you can't. You can't leave until you finish washing the dishes. compare may 4 5 a used to say what should or should not be done You can't leave now! The party is just getting started! Why can't you be more polite? [=you should be more polite; why aren't you more polite?] b used in angry speech to tell someone to do something If you don't like it here, you can just leave! 6 a used to describe the way a person sometimes behaves She can be very rude at times. [=she is sometimes very rude] b used to describe something that sometimes or often happens In this part of the country the weather can change quickly. [=the weather often changes quickly] Usage Could is used as the past tense of can to describe an ability that someone had in the past or to say that something was possible in the past. I could run fast when I was young, but I can't run fast now. It used to be that you could drive for miles here without seeing another person, but now there are houses and people everywhere. To describe a specific occurrence in the past, use was/were able to instead of could. By working long hours, we were able to finish the project on time. In the future tense, will be able to is used. If you keep practicing, you'll be able to play the piano someday. She believes that someday people will be able to vote at home on their computers. Can can be used to suggest something that might happen in the future. 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