

Can and can't: abilities, questions, a and an

I can swim, but I can't ride a bike. Can expresses an ability. It stays the same with I, she, he and they. Practise outdoor activities and use a or an when naming one object.

Anglais 1AC - Supplementary practice - Updated 27/10/2026

Learning goals

- Talk about what someone can do
- Statements, questions and a/an
- Separate an ability from an object

1. How do I use can and can't to talk about abilities?

Use can or can't followed by the base verb: I can ride a bike; She can't skate. The form stays the same with every subject. Ask Can he swim? and answer Yes, he can or No, he can't. Do not add to or an s after can.



Can + base verb describes ability.

2. Talk about what someone can do

After can or can't, use the base verb without to: She can skate. He can't swim. For a question, put can first: Can she ride a bike? Give a short answer with can: Yes, she can. No, she can't.

Learn whole activity phrases: ride a bike, climb a tree, fly a kite, play football and skate. Choose a before a consonant sound and an before a vowel sound: a bike, an orange kite. The sound, rather than the first written letter alone, determines the article.

3. Statements, questions and a/an

Subject or object	Positive or example	Negative or example
I / she / they	can ride	can't ride
Can he swim?	Yes, he can.	No, he can't.
a kite	an orange kite	an umbrella

4. Read an activity-club profile



Make questions with Can + subject + verb?

Read and explain this example

At the activity club, Ines can skate. She can't climb a tree yet. Omar can ride a bike and fly a kite. Can they swim?
Yes, they can.

5. Separate an ability from an object

Compare I can ride with I have a bike. The first sentence tells us about a skill; the second tells us about a possession. A learner might have a bicycle but still be learning to ride it. When you describe an activity, keep the whole phrase together: ride a bike, fly a kite or play football. The article belongs to the noun phrase, while can controls the verb.



Use a or an according to the next sound.

Check this

Do not add s after can: She can swim, not She can swims. Use Can he...? rather than Does he can...? Keep an before a vowel sound: an orange ball.

Put the idea into practice

1. Choose an activity you can explain with a simple verb phrase.
2. Place can or can't before the base verb without changing it for he or she.
3. Make a question by moving can before the person, then practise a short answer.

Remember

- Can + base verb describes ability.
- Make questions with Can + subject + verb?
- Use a or an according to the next sound.

Practice - Try before checking

Answer in your notebook. Use evidence from the examples and check your sentences.

Exercise 1. Choose the verb

Complete: She can (rides / ride) a bike. They can't (swim / to swim).

Exercise 2. Ask and answer

Make a question from He can skate, then answer no.

Exercise 3. Write an activity profile

Write four sentences with can, can't, a and an.

Exercise 4. Keep can separate from have

A pupil owns a bike but cannot ride yet. Write one possession sentence, one ability sentence and one question.

Explained answers

Exercise 1. Choose the verb

Ride; swim. Can and can't take the base verb.

Exercise 2. Ask and answer

Can he skate? No, he can't. Move can before he and repeat can in the answer.

Exercise 3. Write an activity profile

Example: I can ride a bike. I can't skate. I have a kite. It is an orange kite. Your abilities may differ; keep the base verb after can.

Exercise 4. Keep can separate from have

Example: He has a bike. He can't ride it yet. Can he practise with a teacher? Ownership and ability are different pieces of information.

Frequently asked questions

How do I use can and can't to talk about abilities?

Use can or can't followed by the base verb: I can ride a bike; She can't skate. The form stays the same with every subject. Ask Can he swim? and answer Yes, he can or No, he can't. Do not add to or an s after can.

Why is Can she swims? incorrect?

Can already supplies the modal structure. The following verb stays in its base form, swim. Write Can she swim? and She can swim.

Does can change with he or she?

No. Say I can swim and She can swim. Never add an s to can or to the following verb.



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