



CHAPTER 12

Modals, Part 1: Expressing Ability

Overview

English has many ways to express ability. This chapter begins with the most common, *can/can't*, and adds a brief study of their pronunciations. Less familiar in grammar books (but very useful) is a short section on the phrase *know how to*. *Could* is introduced as the past tense form of *can*, followed by the past and present of *be able to*. Two modifiers that often accompany statements of ability, *very* and *too*, are presented next. Meanings of the words *two*, *too*, and *to* are then explained. The chapter ends with more practice with the prepositions of place — *at* and *in*.

EXERCISE 1, p. 354. Let's talk: class activity.

This is a preview exercise to check your students' understanding of *can*. If this exercise proves to be too easy, you can move quickly through this section.

CHART 12-1: USING CAN

- Lead students through the examples, allowing them to notice and explain the meanings and important features.
- In listening to English speakers, learners often misunderstand the words *can* and *can't*. This is usually because of the pronunciation. In a short answer, *can* is pronounced /kæn/, as expected. However, in a statement or question, *can* is pronounced with no stress and almost no vowel sound: /kɪ/ or /kən/.
The negative form, *can't*, is pronounced with more stress but almost no final “t” sound: /kæɪn/. The final /n/ sound is very short, and many native speakers make a glottal stop here. A glottal stop is formed when the vocal chords close completely for a moment, stopping the air. This is the sound you hear in the negative expression “uh-uh.”
- WORKBOOK: For additional exercises based on Chart 12-1, see *Workbook* Practices 1–3.

EXERCISE 2, p. 355. Sentence practice. (Chart 12-1)

This exercise can be done orally in class. You may want students to write the sentences for homework. Remind your class not to stress the word *can* but to stress *can't*. Thus, item 1 will have stresses on *bird* and *fly*, and item 2 will have three stresses: *cow*, *can't*, and *fly*.

□ EXERCISE 3, p. 355. Let's talk: class activity. (Chart 12-1)

This exercise can be fun if students tell the truth about themselves. It also introduces some new vocabulary, so it's good for the whole class to discuss the items together. In their answers, make sure no one uses an infinitive with *to* after *can*. Discuss new vocabulary.

In item 1, *whistle* = make music by blowing air through the lips.

In item 6, *lift* = raise up in your arms.

In item 7, *stick-shift car* = an automobile that has a lever for changing (shifting) gears as the car goes faster or slower.

In item 10, *float* = lie on the water without moving arms or legs.

In item 11, *ski* = move over snow or water while standing on flat skis.

In item 12, *arithmetic* = basic adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing of numbers.

In item 14, *sew* = use a needle and thread.

In item 15, *wiggle* = move rapidly back and forth.

In item 16, *chopsticks* = two round sticks of wood held in the hand and used for putting food into one's mouth.

□ EXERCISE 4, p. 356. Game: small group activity. (Chart 12-1)

TEACHING SUGGESTION: You may need to go over some vocabulary before students begin this task. If you have pictures of the animals mentioned in the exercise, bring them to class.

EXPANSION: You might ask each group of students to create a few new sentences based on animal facts. Have them present the sentences for the other groups to figure out.

ANSWERS: 1. Yes. [Ostriches and penguins can't fly.] 2. No. 3. Yes. [They are very good swimmers.] 4. Yes. [They change colors when they are excited.] 5. No. [They jump.] 6. No. [It lives there until it grows up.] 7. Yes. [The Australian walking fish can climb trees.] 8. No. [Sometimes they stand for weeks.] 9. No. [Some turtles can live for 200 or more years.] 10. Yes. [They can hold their breath for a long time.]

CHART 12-2: PRONUNCIATION OF CAN AND CAN'T

- See Chart 12-2, p. 356, in the student book for the pronunciation of *can* and *can't*.
- **WORKBOOK:** There are no practices in the *Workbook* based on Chart 12-2.

□ EXERCISE 5, p. 356. Listening. (Chart 12-2)

Hearing the difference between *can* and *can't* may be difficult for your students. Model both pronunciations for your class slowly; then play the audio example several times. If your class is still having trouble hearing the difference, you may want to read the sentences slowly before playing the audio.

ANSWERS: 2. can't 3. can't 4. can 5. can't 6. can't 7. can
8. can't 9. can't 10. can

□ EXERCISE 6, p. 357. Listening. (Chart 12-2)

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS: Ask students to read the want ad; then ask them to call out the skills John will need to get the job. Write them on the board and then play the audio.

After students have circled the answer in their books (*yes* or *no*), check the skills list with them. Ask the class, “What can John do?” and check off the skills John has that would get him the job. Then discuss what John can’t do, crossing out the skills John doesn’t have. Finally, ask students again if John is a good person for the hotel job.

For follow-up practice, ask students to make sentences with *can* and *can’t* to describe John’s skills.

ANSWER: No. John would not be a good person for the hotel job.

[**Positives:** good computer and typing skills, friendly phone voice, can work on Saturdays and Sundays. **Negatives:** speaks poor English, can’t help hotel guests with their suitcases.]

CHART 12-3: USING CAN: QUESTIONS

- Ask students to compare these examples with those using *will* in Chart 10-7, p. 312, in the student book. They should be able to tell you the similarities in word order.
- *Can* refers either to the present or to the future. There is no difference in form. The context of the sentence or conversation gives the necessary information about the time.
- **WORKBOOK:** For additional exercises based on Chart 12-3, see *Workbook* Practices 4 and 5.

EXERCISE 7, p. 357. Question practice. (Chart 12-3)

This exercise can be done in class or assigned as homework. Remind students to pronounce *can* with no stress and almost no vowel sound.

NOTE: The words in parentheses should not be spoken; they only provide information for the response.

ANSWERS:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 3. A: Can Jim play the piano?
B: No, he can't. | 8. A: Can the students finish this exercise quickly?
B: Yes, they can. |
| 4. A: Can you whistle?
B: Yes, I can. | 9. A: Can the doctor see me tomorrow?
B: Yes, he/she can. |
| 5. A: Can you go shopping with me this afternoon?
B: Yes, I can. | 10. A: Can you stand on your head?
B: Yes, I can. |
| 6. A: Can Carmen ride a bicycle?
B: No, she can't. | 11. A: Can you have pets in the dormitory?
B: No, we can't. |
| 7. A: Can elephants swim?
B: Yes, they can. | |

EXERCISE 8, p. 358. Let's talk: pairwork. (Chart 12-3)

Walk around the room, helping pairs as necessary.

EXERCISE 9, p. 359. Let's talk: pairwork. (Chart 12-3)

In this exercise, students are combining repetitive pattern practice with the communication of real information to a classmate.

TEACHING SUGGESTION: Lead the class through the example; then let them work in pairs, changing roles after item 9. Discuss new vocabulary.

In items 2, 4, 12, 14, and 15, *get* = buy, obtain.

In item 3, a *fan* = an electric fan that sits on a floor or desktop to move air and cool a room's temperature.

In item 10, a *hammer* = a metal tool for pounding nails into a hard substance (wood or plaster) in order to fasten something else to it.

In item 11, a *tiger* = a big, powerful, brown and black-striped cat from Asia.

In item 15, a *sandwich* /sændwɪtʃ/ = (usually) some meat, cheese, or fresh greens between two slices of bread.

In item 16, *cash a check* = get money from a bank or a shop by writing a check.

In item 17, a *DVD* = a "digital versatile disk"; a disk containing a movie or other video material, usually for home entertainment.

In item 18, *cold medicine* = medicine taken to treat the symptoms of a head or chest cold.

□ EXERCISE 10, p. 360. Listening. (Chart 12-3)

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS: Play the audio for the first conversation and ask students to write the words they hear. Then review the correct answers with the class. Afterward, play the other two conversations and have students complete the answers on their own.

NOTE: You might want to play the audio twice before you go over the answers with the class.

EXPANSION: You could ask different pairs of students to take the parts of Speakers A and B and read their completed conversations aloud.

ANSWERS:

- | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. B: Can I | 2. A: Can you help | 3. A: I can't hear . . . |
| A: He can't come . . . | B: I can try | Can you |
| Can I . . . He can | A: we can do | B: I can't . . . can't |
| | | A: Can you do |

CHART 12-4: USING *KNOW HOW TO*

- Using *Do you know how to* to express ability in a question is much more common than using *can*.
- The basic pattern for using the helping verb *do* in questions is presented in Chart 3-10, p. 74, in the student book.
- **WORKBOOK:** For additional exercises based on Chart 12-4, see *Workbook* Practices 6 and 7.

□ EXERCISE 11, p. 360. Let's talk: pairwork. (Chart 12-4)

Lead the class through the example; then let them work in pairs, changing roles after item 8. Pairs that finish early can switch roles so that Partner A becomes Partner B and vice-versa. Discuss new vocabulary.

In items 4, 10, and 13, *get to* (a place) = find your way there.

In item 12, a *screwdriver* = a slender metal tool for turning screws into wood or metal in order to fasten two things together.

In item 16, *the square root of* (a number) = a second number that, multiplied by itself, produces the original number (e.g., the square root of 9 is 3 because $3 \times 3 = 9$, or $3^2 = 9$). Note: The symbol for *the square root of* is called a “radical.”

EXERCISE 12, p. 361. Let’s talk: find someone who (Chart 12-4)

TEACHING SUGGESTION: Students should answer the questions truthfully. When they report their answers, have them use complete sentences with *know how to* and *don’t know how to*.

EXERCISE 13, p. 362. Let’s write: small groups. (Chart 12-4)

This should be a fun, relaxed communicative practice of the target structure *know how to*. Some of the answers will be funny, and others will surprise everyone in the class. Keep the tone light, especially when you get to item 8!

CHART 12-5: USING COULD: PAST OF CAN

- This is only one of many meanings for the word *could*. *Could* is a complicated word; in fact, all of the modals are complicated words, with nuances and idiomatic usages that do not lend themselves to easy explanations.
- When *could* is used to mean “past ability,” it is usually used in the negative. Other expressions are more commonly used to express affirmative past ability (e.g., *managed to* or *was/were able to*):

*I managed to finish my homework before midnight last night.
Fred was able to fix my radio for me.*

For this reason, Exercises 15 and 16 focus on negative *could*. It’s good to avoid the affirmative *could* for ability at this stage in the learners’ experience.

- It’s important to show how the time/tense relationship is established in each pair of examples. A period of time in the past must be established (e.g., *last month*, *yesterday*, or another verb in the past tense) so that the word *could* can be used appropriately.
- **WORKBOOK:** For additional exercises based on Chart 12-5, see *Workbook* Practices 8–11.

EXERCISE 14, p. 362. Let’s talk: pairwork. (Chart 12-5)

Students practice *could* while revisiting their pasts. Open up the discussion to other things they could or couldn’t do as children.

EXERCISE 15, p. 363. Sentence practice. (Chart 12-5)

This exercise can be done in class or assigned as homework. Students are gaining experience with *because*-clauses as well as the target structure of *couldn’t*. This exercise prepares learners for Exercise 16, in which they have to make up their own *because*-clauses.

ANSWERS: 2. couldn’t call you 3. couldn’t watch TV 4. couldn’t light the candles 5. couldn’t come to class 6. couldn’t listen to music 7. couldn’t wash his clothes 8. couldn’t go swimming 9. couldn’t get into my car 10. couldn’t go to the movie

□ EXERCISE 16, p. 363. Sentence practice. (Chart 12-5)

TEACHING SUGGESTION: You might have students work in pairs to create sentences; then ask for volunteers to write them on the board.

□ EXERCISE 17, p. 364. Let's talk: class activity. (Chart 12-5)

This is a teacher-led activity.

TEACHING SUGGESTION: Give students enough time to think of good responses. You may want them to work in small groups and come up with three or four responses for each item.

□ EXERCISE 18, p. 364. Review: error analysis. (Charts 12-1 → 12-5)

TEACHING SUGGESTION: Students can work individually or with partners. You might make it a contest to see who can find and correct all the mistakes first.

ANSWERS: 1. Could you ~~to~~ drive a car when you were thirteen years old? 2. If your brother goes to the graduation party, he can meet my sister. 3. I couldn't open the door because I didn't have a key. 4. Please turn up the radio. I can't ~~to~~ hear it. 5. When Ernesto arrived at the airport last Tuesday, he couldn't find the right gate. 6. Mr. Lo was born in Hong Kong, but now he lives in Canada. He could not understand spoken English before he moved to Canada, but now he speaks and understands English very well.

CHART 12-6: USING BE ABLE TO

- The modal *can* has the same form for present and future. *Be able to* has different forms for the tenses.
- **WORKBOOK:** For additional exercises based on Chart 12-6, see *Workbook* Practices 12–15.

□ EXERCISE 19, p. 365. Sentence practice. (Chart 12-6)

You could work through a few of the items in class and assign the rest as homework. This exercise asks students to see the relationship between *can/could* and *be able to*. Students need to pay special attention to the tense forms of *be* used in the new sentences.

ANSWERS: 3. Mark is bilingual. He is able to speak two languages. 4. Sue will be able to get her own apartment next year. 5. Animals aren't able to speak. 6. Are you able to touch your toes without bending your knees? 7. Jack wasn't able to describe the thief. 8. Were you able to do the homework? 9. I wasn't able to sleep last night because my apartment was too hot. 10. My roommate is able to speak four languages. He's multilingual. 11. I'm sorry that I wasn't able to call you last night. 12. I'm sorry, but I won't be able to come to your party next week. 13. Will we be able to take vacations on the moon in the 22nd century?

□ EXERCISE 20, p. 366. Sentence practice. (Chart 12-6)

Encourage students to use their imagination to make interesting sentences. Perhaps they could work in pairs; afterward, you could ask each pair to tell the class their most interesting answers.

□ EXERCISE 21, p. 367. Listening review: CAN / BE ABLE TO / KNOW HOW TO.
(Charts 12-1 → 12-6)

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS: Play the audio and ask students to complete the exercise sentence by sentence. You could go over the answers after each conversation, or try this option: Divide the class into groups. Ask each group to discuss their answers and choose the correct ones. Then choose two members of a group to read a dialogue to the class. Correct their answers as necessary.

ANSWERS:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. A: Were you able to talk
B: I couldn't . . . can try | 4. A: will you be able to
B: wasn't able to . . . 'll try . . .
I will be able to |
| 2. A: Do you know how to make
B: can make
A: Can you teach
B: I can | 5. B: I can
A: can see . . . Can you come
B: I can . . . don't know |
| 3. A: Are you able to understand
B: couldn't understand . . .
can understand
A: can't understand | |

CHART 12-7: USING *VERY* AND *TOO* + ADJECTIVE

- The words *very* and *too* are often called “intensifiers.” They give a stronger meaning to the adjectives that follow them.
- It is difficult for some learners to remember that the intensifier *too* gives a negative meaning to the adjective. You might demonstrate the natural tendency for a speaker to frown and shake his or her head from side to side negatively when using *too* in this way.
- The drawings illustrate the meanings of examples (a) and (b).
- **WORKBOOK:** For additional exercises based on Chart 12-7, see *Workbook* Practices 16–18.

□ EXERCISE 22, p. 368. Class activity. (Chart 12-7)

TEACHING SUGGESTION: Do this exercise in class with your students. Ask for volunteers to give the answers orally. Write each pair of answers on the board.

ANSWERS: 1. The soup is too hot. Jack can't eat it. The soup is very hot, but Ricardo can eat it. 2. The coat is very small, but Tom can wear it. The coat is too small. Susan can't wear it. 3. The shoes are too tight. Marika can't wear them. The shoes are very tight, but Mai can wear them. 4. The problem is too hard. Robert can't do it. The problem is very hard, but Talal can do it.

□ EXERCISE 23, p. 370. Sentence practice. (Chart 12-7)

This exercise gives practice with the negative meaning of *too* + adjective. If done in class, give students a few minutes to work out the answers; then lead the class through all the items.

ANSWERS: 1. eat it. 2. buy it. 3. go swimming. 4. take a break.
5. do his homework. 6. reach the cookie jar. 7. sleep. 8. lift it.

□ EXERCISE 24, p. 371. Sentence practice. (Chart 12-7)

This exercise can be done in class or assigned as homework.

ANSWERS: 1. too heavy. 2. too young. 3. too noisy. 4. too cold.
5. too tired. 6. too expensive. 7. too small. 8. too tall.

□ EXERCISE 25, p. 371. Sentence practice. (Chart 12-7)

This exercise can be done in class or assigned as homework. After Exercises 23 and 24, learners should know that *too* before an adjective implies a negative result. In this exercise, they must decide whether *too* or *very* is correct. Items 11 and 12 provide a good contrast in meaning.

ANSWERS: 3. too 4. very . . . very 5. too 6. very 7. very 8. too
9. too 10. very 11. very 12. too 13. too 14. very 15. too
16. very 17. too 18. too

CHART 12-8: USING *TWO*, *TOO*, AND *TO*

- Point out the positions of *too* in examples (b) and (c). When *too* means “also,” the word is usually at the end of the sentence or clause. (In formal speech, you might hear “I too saw the movie”; however, *also* is more common in that particular word order: “I also saw the movie.”)
- In speaking, the word *to* is not stressed. It may sound more like /tə/. The words *two* and *too* are stressed (spoken with a higher pitch and more sound).
- **WORKBOOK:** For additional exercises based on Chart 12-8, see *Workbook* Practices 19 and 20.

□ EXERCISE 26, p. 373. Sentence practice. (Chart 12-8)

This exercise can be done in class.

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS: It’s impossible to tell which word students are saying when they read their answers to this exercise aloud, so you might have them spell the words. Or, pass out index cards and have them write one word on each of three cards in large letters: **TOO**, **TWO**, and **TO**. You could ask all students to hold up the correct answer card so that you can scan the room and quickly check their answers.

ANSWERS: 2. two 3. too . . . too . . . to 4. to . . . to . . . to . . . too
5. to . . . to . . . too 6. to . . . to 7. to . . . to 8. too 9. too . . . to . . . to
10. two . . . to . . . two . . . too

CHART 12-9: MORE ABOUT PREPOSITIONS: *AT* AND *IN* FOR PLACE

- These are idiomatic uses for *at* and *in*. They must be memorized because there is no clear logic to predict their forms.
- In (a) no article (*a/an/the*) is used. However, with other nouns an article is usually necessary: *at the office, sitting at a table, working at his desk*.
- In example (d) you might point out that proper nouns (names) do not usually have an article (*a/an/the*) in English. In example (c) *the* is used to identify a unique or specific room. (See Charts 7-6 and 7-7, pp. 199 and 203, in the student book.)
- The difference between *at* and *in* is not easy to understand, so take some time to discuss (e) and (f) with your class.
- Perhaps review prepositions of place in Charts 1-7, 5-7, and 5-8, pp. 18, 134, and 135, in the student book.
- **WORKBOOK:** For additional exercises based on Chart 12-9, see *Workbook* Practices 21 and 22.

EXERCISE 27, p. 375. Sentence practice. (Chart 12-9)

This exercise can be done in class or assigned as homework. Call attention to the footnote for item 1, and make sure students understand that *at* is not correct in item 2.

ANSWERS: 3. at 4. in 5. in . . . at 6. in . . . in 7. in 8. in
9. at . . . at 10. in 11. in 12. in 13. at 14. in . . . in 15. in
16. at 17. at 18. At 19. in 20. in

EXERCISE 28, p. 376. Let's talk: class activity. (Chart 12-9)

This exercise is teacher-led; it is a quick check of students' use of *at* and *in*.

EXERCISE 29, p. 377. Let's talk: pairwork. (Chart 12-9)

Ask pairs to share some of their partner's answers with the class.

EXERCISE 30, p. 377. Review: let's talk. (Chapter 12)

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS: Divide the class into small groups. Everyone should contribute to the group's answers, and one person should write them down. The same person (or another) can report to the class. After all groups have finished the exercise, go through the items, eliciting at least two different responses for each. Ask students to give only the most interesting responses that do not duplicate those of another group. Discuss new vocabulary.

In item 8, *illiterate* = unable to read or write at all or beyond a very basic level.

EXERCISE 31, p. 378. Chapter review: error analysis. (Chapter 12)

TEACHING SUGGESTION: Use this exercise as a game. Divide the class into small groups. Call out any item number (not in order). Have students work together to figure out the answer. The first group to give the correct sentence (orally or written on the board) gets a point.

ANSWERS: 1. We will ~~can~~ go to the museum tomorrow afternoon. OR We ~~will~~ can go to the museum tomorrow afternoon. 2. We can't count all of the stars in the universe. There are too many. 3. Can you ~~to~~ stand on your head? 4. I saw a beautiful vase at a store yesterday, but I couldn't buy it. 5. The shirt is very small. I can wear it. OR The shirt is too small. I can't wear it. 6. Sam knows how to count to 1000 in English. 7. When I was on vacation, I could swim every day. 8. When we lived in Tokyo, we took the subway every day. 9. Honeybees are not able to live in very cold climates. 10. Where can we go in the city for an inexpensive meal? 11. James can read newspapers in five languages. 12. Sorry. I wasn't able to get tickets for the concert. 13. I can't finish my homework because I'm too tired.