

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 minute, please? or
Could you wait a minute, please?
- Liz, can you do me a favor?
- 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 favor?
- Would you please be quiet? I'm trying to concentrate.

Could you open the door, please?



B

Asking for things

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

- (*in a gift 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 the salt, 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."

May is formal and less usual than **can** or **could**.

D

Offering to do things

We use **Can I . . . ?** or **May I . . . ?** when we offer to do things. (**May** is more formal.):

- "Can I get you a cup of coffee?" "Yes, that would be very nice."
- (*in a store*) "May I help you?" "No, thanks. I'm being helped."

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 go to the movies with us Saturday night?" "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 store*) I'd like to try on this jacket, please.

Exercises

34.1 Read the situations and write questions beginning with *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:
Can you open the door, please? OR 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 post office, but you don't know where it is. You ask at your hotel. You say: _____
4. You are in a department store. You see some pants you like, and you want to try them on. You say to the salesperson: _____
5. You need a ride home from a party. John drove to the party and lives near you. You say to John: _____

34.2 Read the situations and write questions beginning with *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 a friend to check it. What do you ask him? _____
4. You want to leave work early because you have something important 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 an apartment that was advertised in the newspaper. You are interested in the apartment and want to see it today. What do you say to the owner?

34.3 What would you say in these situations?

1. John has come to see you. You offer him something to eat.
You: Would you like something to eat?
John: No, thank you. I've just eaten.
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 plane. The woman next to you has finished reading her newspaper. You want to have a look at it. You ask her.
You: Excuse me, _____ ?
Woman: Yes, of course. I'm 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 nice 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.
Driver: Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize I was going so fast.
6. 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. _____