

# can/could/would you ... ? etc. (Requests, offers, permission and invitations)

## A Asking people to do things (requests)

We use **can** or **could** to ask people to do things:

- ☐ **Can you** wait a moment, please?
- or ☐ **Could you** wait a moment, please?
- ☐ Helen, **can you** do me a favour?
- ☐ Excuse me, **could you** tell me how to get to the bus station?

You can say **Do you think you could** ... ? :

- ☐ **Do you think you could** take me to the airport?  
(not Do you think you can)

Could you open the door, please?



## B Asking for things

To ask for something, we use **Can (I) have ... ? / Could (I) have ... ?** or **Can (I) get ... ?**:

- ☐ (in a shop) **Can I have** these postcards, please? or **Can I get** these postcards, please?
- ☐ (in a restaurant) **Could we have** the menu, please? or **Can we have** the menu, please?

**May I have ... ?** is also possible:

- ☐ **May I have** these postcards, please?

## C Asking to do things

We use **can I** or **could I** to ask to do something:

- ☐ (on the phone) Hello, **can I** speak to Steve, please?
- ☐ **'Could I** use your phone charger?' 'Sure.'
- ☐ **Do you think I could** borrow your bike?

**May** is also possible:

- ☐ **May I ask you a question?**

**May** is more formal than **can** or **could**.

You can also say:

- Do you mind if I ... ?**
- Is it all right if I ... ? / Is it OK if I ... ?**
- ☐ **Do you mind if I** use your phone charger?
- ☐ **'Is it all right if I** sit here?' 'Yes, of course.'

Could I use your phone charger?



## D Offering and inviting

You can use **Can I ... ?** to offer to do something:

- ☐ **'Can I** help you?' 'No, it's OK. I can manage, thanks.'
- ☐ **'Can I** get you some coffee?' 'That would be nice.'

To offer or to invite, we use **Would you like ... ?** (not Do you like):

- ☐ **'Would you like** some coffee?' 'No, thanks.'
- ☐ **'Would you like** to eat with us tonight?' 'That would be great.'

**I'd like ...** (= I would like) is a polite way to say what you want:

- ☐ (at a tourist information office) **I'd like** some information about hotels, please.
- ☐ (in a shop) **I'd like** to try on this jacket, please.

## Exercises

## 37.1 Which goes with which?

- 1 Could you pass the sugar?
- 2 Would you like to go to the cinema?
- 3 Can I use your toilet?
- 4 Do you mind if I leave work early?
- 5 Can you do me a favour?
- 6 Would you like something to eat?
- 7 Can I give you a hand?
- 8 I'd like some fresh air.

- a It depends what you want me to do.
- b No, that's fine.
- c Me too. Let's go out for a walk.
- d Sure. It's the door on the left.
- e ~~Yes, here you are.~~
- f No, it's all right. I can manage, thanks.
- g Maybe. What's on?
- h No, thanks. I'm not hungry.

- 1 ..... e .....
- 2 .....
- 3 .....
- 4 .....
- 5 .....
- 6 .....
- 7 .....
- 8 .....

## 37.2 Complete the sentences. Choose from:

I'd like  
~~Can I give~~

Would you like to try  
Would you like to come

Do you mind  
Would you like

Can I take  
I'd like to

- 1 You're driving and you see a friend walking along the road. You stop and say:  
Hi Joe. .... Can I give ..... you a lift?
- 2 You're making a cold drink for your friend. Perhaps he wants ice. You ask:  
..... ice in your drink?
- 3 You're ordering something to eat in a cafe. You say:  
..... a chicken salad, please.
- 4 You have an extra ticket for a concert. Maybe your friend will come. You ask:  
..... to a concert tomorrow night?
- 5 You answer the phone. The caller wants to speak to Lisa. You say:  
Lisa's not here. .... a message?
- 6 You need to see a dentist. You phone for an appointment. You say:  
Hello. .... make an appointment, please.
- 7 You work in a shoe shop. A customer asks you about some shoes. You ask:  
..... them on?
- 8 You go into a cafe and see some people you know. You ask:  
..... if I join you?

## 37.3 What would you say in these situations?

- 1 You're carrying a lot of things. You can't open the door yourself. There's a man near the door.  
You say to him: .... Could you open the door, please? .....
- 2 You've finished your meal in a restaurant and now you want the bill.  
You ask the waiter: .....
- 3 You've filled in some forms in English. You want your friend to check them for you.  
You ask your friend: .....
- 4 The woman in the next room is playing music. It's very loud. You want her to turn it down.  
You say to her: .....
- 5 You're on a train. The window is open and you're cold. You'd like to close it.  
You ask the man next to you: .....
- 6 You're on a bus. You have a seat, but an elderly man is standing. You offer him your seat.  
You say to him: .....
- 7 You're a tourist. You want to go to the station, but you don't know how to get there.  
You ask at your hotel: .....
- 8 You are in a clothes shop. You see some trousers you like and you want to try them on.  
You say to the shop assistant: .....
- 9 You meet a very famous person. You want to get his/her autograph.  
You ask: .....