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Also found in: Thesaurus, Medical, Financial, Acronyms, Idioms, Encyclopedia, Wikipedia. to be able to, have the power or skill to: I can take a bus to the airport. She can paint very well.Not to be confused with:may – to have permission to: you may go in now; to express possibility: The storm may turn into a hurricane.Abused, Confused, & Misused Words by Mary Embree Copyright © 2007, 2013 by Mary Embree (kăn; kən when unstressed)aux.v. past tense could (kŏod) 1. a. Used to indicate physical or mental ability: I can carry both suitcases. Can you remember the war?b. Used to indicate possession of a specified power, right, or privilege: The president can veto congressional bills.c. Used to indicate possession of a specified capability or skill: I can tune the harpsichord as well as play it.2. a. Used to indicate possibility or probability: I wonder if my long lost neighbor can still be alive. Such things can and do happen.b. Used to indicate that which is permitted, as by conscience or feelings: One can hardly blame you for being upset.c. Used to indicate probability or possibility under the specified circumstances: They can hardly have intended to do that.3. Usage Problem Used to request or grant permission: Can I be excused?[Middle English, first and third person sing. present tense of connen, to know how, from Old English cunnan; see gnō- in Indo-European roots.]Usage Note: Generations of grammarians and teachers have insisted that can should be used only to express the capacity to do something, and that may must be used to express permission. But children do not use can to ask permission out of a desire to be stubbornly perverse. They have learned it as an idiomatic expression from adults: After you clean your room, you can go outside and play. As part of the spoken language, this use of can is perfectly acceptable. This is especially true for negative questions, such as Can't I have the car tonight? probably because using mayn't instead of can't sounds unnatural. While the distinction between can and may still has its adherents in formal usage, the number appears to be falling. In our 2009 survey, 37 percent of the Usage Panel rejected can instead of may in the sentence Can I take another week to submit the application? But more than half of these said can was only "somewhat (rather than completely) unacceptable" in this use, and the overall percentage of disapproval fell from more than 50 percent in an earlier survey. · The heightened formality of may sometimes highlights the speaker's role in giving permission. You may leave the room when you are finished implies that permission is given by the speaker. You can leave the room when you are finished implies that permission is part of a rule or policy rather than a decision on the speaker's part. For this reason, may sees considerable use in official announcements: Students may pick up the application forms tomorrow. · Like may, can is also used to indicate what is possible: It may rain this afternoon. Bone spurs can be very painful. In this use, both can and may often have personal subjects: You may see him at the concert. Even an experienced driver can get lost in this town. (kăn)n.1. A usually cylindrical metal container.2. a. An airtight container, usually made of tin-coated iron, in which foods or beverages are preserved.b. The contents of such a container: ate a can of beans.3. Slang A jail or prison.4. Slang A toilet or restroom.6. Slang A naval destroyer.v. canned, can·ning, cans v.tr.1. To seal in an airtight container for future use; preserve: canning peaches.2. Slang To make a recording of: can the audience's applause for a TV comedy show.3. Slang a. To end the employment of; fire. See Synonyms at dismiss.b. To put an end or stop to: canned the TV show after one season; told the students to can the chatter.v.intr. To solicit cash donations for a charity or other organization such as a club or amateur sports team by holding out a can or other container in a public place.Idioms: can of corn Sports Something that is easily accomplished, especially a routine catch of a fly ball in baseball. can of worms A complex or difficult problem. in the can Completed and ready for release, as a film or scene of a film.[Middle English canne, a water container, from Old English.]American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright © 2016 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved. (kæn; unstressed kən) vb (intr) , past could1. used as an auxiliary to indicate ability, skill, or fitness to perform a task: I can run a mile in under four minutes. 2. used as an auxiliary to indicate permission or the right to something: can I have a drink?. 3. used as an auxiliary to indicate knowledge of how to do something: he can speak three languages fluently. 4. used as an auxiliary to indicate possibility, opportunity, or likelihood: my trainer says I can win the race if I really work hard. [Old English cunnan; related to Old Norse kunna, Old High German kunnan, Latin cognōscere to know, Sanskrit jānāti he knows; see ken, uncouth] (kæn) n1. a container, esp for liquids, usually of thin sheet metal: a petrol can; a beer can. 2. another name (esp US) for tin23. Also called: canful the contents of a can or the amount a can will hold4. a slang word for prison5. US and Canadian a slang word for toilet or buttocks. See toilet6. (Military) navy US a slang word for destroyer7. (Military) navy slang a depth charge8. (Film) a shallow cylindrical metal container of varying size used for storing and handling film9. can of worms informal a complicated problem10. carry the can See carry3711. (Film) (of a film, piece of music, etc) having been recorded, processed, edited, etc12. informal arranged or agreed: the contract is almost in the can. vb, cans, canning or canned13. to put (food, etc) into a can or cans; preserve in a can14. (tr) slang US to dismiss from a job15. (tr) informal US to stop (doing something annoying or making an annoying noise) (esp in the phrase can it!)16. (tr) informal to reject or discard[Old English canne; related to Old Norse, Old High German kanna, Irish gann, Swedish kana sled]Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged, 12th Edition 2014 © HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2014 (kæn; unstressed kən) auxiliary verb. 1. to be able to; have the ability, power, or skill to: She can solve the problem easily. 2. to know how to: I can play chess, but not very well. 3. to have the power or means to: a dictator who can impose his will on the people. 4. to have the right or qualifications to: He can change whatever he wishes in the script. 5. may; have permission to: Can I speak to you for a moment? 6. to have the possibility: A coin can land on either side. v.t., v.i. Idioms: can but, to be able to do nothing else except; can only: We can but try. [before 900; Middle English, Old English, present indic. singular 1st, 3rd person of cunnan to know, know how] usage: can and may are often interchangeable in the sense of possibility: A power failure can (or may) occur at any time. Despite the traditional insistence that only may conveys permission, both words are regularly used in this sense: Can (or May) I borrow your tape recorder? can occurs this way chiefly in spoken English; may occurs more frequently in formal speech and writing. In negative constructions, can't or cannot is more common than may not; the contraction mayn't is rare: You can't park in the driveway. can but and cannot but are somewhat formal expressions suggesting that there is no alternative to doing something. See also cannot, help. (kæn) n., v. canned, can•ning. n. 1. a sealed container for food, beverages, etc., as of aluminum, sheet iron coated with tin, or other metal. 2. a receptacle for garbage, ashes, etc. 3. a bucket or other container for holding or carrying liquids. 4. a metal or plastic container for holding film on cores or reels. 5. Slang: Sometimes Vulgar. toilet; bathroom. 7. Slang: Sometimes Vulgar. buttocks. 8. Mil. Slang. v.t. 9. to preserve by sealing in a can, jar, etc. 10. Slang. to dismiss; fire. 11. Slang. to put a stop to: Can that noise! 12. to record, as on film or tape. Idioms: in the can, (of a commercial film, scene, etc.) completed. [before 1000; Middle English, Old English canne, c. Old High German channa, Old Norse kanna] Can. can. Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary, © 2010 K Dictionaries Ltd. Copyright 2005, 1997, 1991 by Random House, Inc. All rights reserved. – could – be able toThese words are used to talk about ability, awareness, and possibility. They are also used to say that someone has permission to do something. These uses are dealt with separately in this entry. Can and could are called modals.Both can and could are followed by an infinitive without to.I envy people who can sing.I could work for twelve hours a day.1. negative formsThe negative form of can is cannot or can't. Cannot is never written 'can not'. The negative form of could is could not or couldn't. To form the negative of be able to, you either put not or another negative word in front of able, or you use the expression be unable to.Many elderly people cannot afford telephones.It was so dark you could not see anything.We were not able to give any answers.We were unable to afford the entrance fee.2. ability: the presentCan, could, and be able to are all used to talk about a person's ability to do something. You use can or be able to to talk about ability in the present. Be able to is more formal than can.You can all read and write.The animals are able to move around, and they can all lie down.Lisa nodded, unable to speak.Could is also used to talk about ability in the present, but it has a special meaning. If you say that someone could do something, you mean that they have the ability to do it, but they don't in fact do it.We could do much more in this country to educate people.3. ability: the pastYou use could or a past form of be able to to talk about ability in the past.He could run faster than anyone else.A lot of them couldn't read or write.I wasn't able to answer their questions.If you say that someone was able to do something, you usually mean that they had the ability to do it and they did it. Could does not have this meaning.After two weeks in bed, he was able to return to work.The farmers were able to pay their employees' wages.If you want to say that someone had the ability to do something but did not in fact do it, you say that they could have done it.You could have given it all to me.You could have been a little bit more careful.If you want to say that someone did not do something because they did not have the ability to do it, you say that they could not have done it.I couldn't have gone with you, because I was in London at the time.If you want to say that someone had the ability to do something in the past, although they don't now have this ability, you say that they used to be able to do it.I used to be able to sleep anywhere.You used to be able to see the house from here.4. ability: the futureYou use a future form of be able to to talk about ability in the future.I shall be able to answer that question tomorrow.5. ability: reporting structuresCould is often used in reporting structures. For example, if a woman says 'I can speak Arabic', you usually report this as 'She said she could speak Arabic'.She said I could bring it back later.6. ability: 'be able to' after other verbsBe able to is sometimes used after modals such as might or should, and after verbs such as want, hope, or expect.I might be able to help you.You may be able to get extra money.You should be able to see that from here.She would not be able to go out alone.Do you really expect to be able to do that?Don't use can or could after any other verbs.7. 'being able to'You can use an -ing form of be able to.He liked being able to discuss politics with Veronica.There is no -ing form of can or could.8. awarenessCan and could are used with verbs such as see, hear, and smell to say that someone is or was aware of something through one of their senses.I could see a few stars in the sky.9. possibility: the present and the futureCould and can are used to talk about possibility in the present or future.You use could to say that there is a possibility that something is or will be true.Don't eat it. It could be a toadstool.He was jailed in February, and could be released next year.Might and may can be used in a similar way.Kathy's career may be ruined.Be Careful!Don't use 'could not' to say that there is a possibility that something is not true. Instead you use might not or may not.It might not be possible.If you want to say that it is impossible that something is true, you use cannot or could not.You cannot possibly know what damage you caused.It couldn't possibly be true.You use can to say that something is sometimes possible.Sudden changes can sometimes have a negative effect.10. possibility: the pastYou use could have to say that there is a possibility that something was true in the past.He could have been in the house on his own.Might have and may have can be used in a similar way.She might have found the information online.It may have been a dead bird.You also use could have to say that there was a possibility of something being true in the past, although it was not in fact true.It could have been worse.He could have made a fortune as a lawyer.Be Careful!Don't use 'could not have' to say that there is a possibility that something was not true. Instead you use might not have or may not have.She might not have known the password.If you want to say that it is impossible that something was true, you use could not have.The decision couldn't have been easy.The man couldn't have seen us at all.11. permissionCan and could are used to say that someone is allowed to do something.You can take out money at any branch of your own bank.He could come and use my computer.Cannot and could not are used to say that someone is or was forbidden to do something.You can't bring strangers in here.Her dad said she couldn't go out during the week.Collins COBUILD English Usage © HarperCollins Publishers 1992, 2004, 2011, 2012Past participle: cannedGerund: canningImperativePresentPreteritePresent ContinuousPresent PerfectPast ContinuousPast PerfectFutureFuture PerfectFuture ContinuousPast Perfect ContinuousPast Perfect ContinuousConditionalPast ConditionalCollins English Verb Tables © HarperCollins Publishers 2011 Noun1.can - airtight sealed metal container for food or drink or paint etc.beer can - a can that holds beercaddy, tea caddy - a can for storing teacoffee can - a can for storing ground coffeecontainer - any object that can be used to hold things (especially a large metal boxlike object of standardized dimensions that can be loaded from one form of transport to another)milk can - large can for transporting milkoilcan - a can with a long nozzle to apply oil to machinerysoda can - a can for holding soft drinks2.can - the quantity contained in a cancontainerful - the quantity that a container will hold3.can - a buoy with a round bottom and conical topbuoy - bright-colored; a float attached by rope to the seabed to mark channels in a harbor or underwater hazards4.can - the fleshy part of the human body that you sit on; "he deserves a good kick in the butt"; "are you going to sit on your fanny and do nothing?"arse, ass, behind, buttocks, derriere, fanny, hind end, hindquarters, keister, nates, posterior, prat, buns, rear end, tooshie, tush, seat, fundament, backside, bottom, rump, stern, tail end, tail, butt, rear, bumbody part - any part of an organism such as an organ or extremitytorso, trunk, body - the body excluding the head and neck and limbs; "they moved their arms and legs and bodies"5.can - a plumbing fixture for defecation and urinationcommode, crapper, potty, pot, throne, toilet, stoolbathroom, bath - a room (as in a residence) containing a bathtub or shower and usually a washbasin and toiletflushless toilet - a toilet that relies on bacteria to break down waste matter (instead of using water)plumbing fixture - a fixture for the distribution and use of water in a buildingtoilet bowl - the bowl of a toilet that can be flushed with watertoilet seat - the hinged seat on a toilet6.can - a room or building equipped with one or more toiletsjohn, lav, lavatory, privy, toilet, bathroomhead - (nautical) a toilet on board a boat or shiproom - an area within a building enclosed by walls and floor and ceiling; "the rooms were very small but they had a nice view"washroom - a lavatory (particularly a lavatory in a public place)loo, W.C., water closet, closet - a toilet in BritainVerb1.can - preserve in a can or tin; "tinned foods are not very tasty"cookery, cooking, preparation - the act of preparing something (as food) by the application of heat; "cooking can be a great art"; "people are needed who have experience in cookery"; "he left the preparation of meals to his wife"preserve, keep - prevent (food) from rotting; "preserved meats"; "keep potatoes fresh"2.can - terminate the employment of; discharge from an office or position; "The boss fired his secretary today"; "The company terminated 25% of its workers"retire - make (someone) retire; "The director was retired after the scandal"pension off - let go from employment with an attractive pension; "The director was pensioned off when he got senile"clean out - force out; "The new boss cleaned out the lazy workers"furlough, lay off - dismiss, usually for economic reasons; "She was laid off together with hundreds of other workers when the company downsized"squeeze out - force out; "Some employees were squeezed out by the recent budget cuts"remove - remove from a position or an officeBased on WordNet 3.0, Farlex clipart collection. © 2003-2012 Princeton University, Farlex Inc.nounSlang. A place for the confinement of persons in lawful detention:brig, house of correction, jail, keep, penitentiary, prison.Chiefly Regional: calaboose.verb1. To prepare (food) for storage and future use;conserve, preserve, put up.2. Slang. To end the employment or service of:cashier, discharge, dismiss, drop, release, terminate.Informal: ax, fire, pink-slip.Slang: boot, bounce, sack. The American Heritage® Roget's Thesaurus. Copyright © 2013, 2014 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved. عُلْبَة مُعَلَّبَة مَشْمُوم, plechovkamocismětumětkonevDosekönnenkönnteKonserveKonserventbüchseμπορώκονσέρβακονσερβοποιώκουτάκιenladigiladskatolomaldunginecesejopispotopoderlatasaberenlatarboteosatapurkittaapurkkipystyäsaadapouvoirbidonboîte de conservecanettecannetteקופסת שימורים מתכת מיכל מזון מסוגל לשמירה מיכל מזון מסוגל לשמירה מיכל מזון מסוגל לשמירה