

Lesson 2 / Handout 2e

Complete the sentences with one of the words below:

impossibility (2x) for about general negatively present perfect polite present
can (2x) may might could (2x) may not (2x) extra quick reported achievement
ironically past success be able to

a) In asking PERMISSION, *may* is more than *can*.
They are replaced by *might* or *could* when the speaker is being polite.
Might can also be used

b) In asking PERMISSION,, not, is used:
..... you (= Are you allowed to) drive your parents' car?

c) For PROHIBITION, the use of instead of *cannot* is chiefly limited
to responses to *may*:

A: 'May I go there?' B: 'No, you!'

Could not expresses prohibition.

d) *Can* expressing ABILITY is replaced by when:

- there is NO reference to an actual, specific or **in the past**;

could only expresses **past ability (natural and learned)**, not related to any specific event

- in a context of **non-fact**: *I could come if I wanted. I wish I could come.*

- in speech: *He said he could see me next week.*

e) For **past ABILITY** which suggests **the successful completion of a specific action**
(actual achievement or success), *could* is replaced by the past or present perfect tense of
..... (or also *manage to, succeed in + -ing*).

f) **Past INABILITY**, whether or not reference is made to a specific action, can be
expressed by *couldn't* as well as by the past tense of *not be able to / be unable to*.

Nevertheless, like *could*, *couldn't* cannot replace the tense.

g) *May* is replaced by or to express less

POSSIBILITY. All three cover **possibility** with reference to the future,
present or past .

May not & might not express **possibility**

Could not expresses

h) *Can* covers **POSSIBILITY** without reference to past, present
or future. *Could* covers **past possibility** and possibility in a context of **non-fact**.

i) *Cannot* expresses **general** and *could not* expresses **past**
impossibility and impossibility in a context of **non-fact**.

j) *Could* is often used in **polite REQUESTS** x *couldn't* can be used in **not-so-polite**
REQUESTS:

Could you lend me this book? X *Couldn't you lend me this book?*