

English grammar

Can - be allowed to

Grammar rules with examples

Be allowed to is used to express permission to do something. It is also possible to use *can*, but only in the present tense, past tense and conditional tense.

Compare:

I can use my dad's car today. = I am allowed to use my dad's car today.

I could use my dad's car yesterday. = I was allowed to use my dad's car yesterday.

I could use my dad's car if I bought petrol. = I would be allowed to use my dad's car if I bought petrol.

In other tenses, we can only use *be allowed to*.

Present tense: *I am allowed, you are allowed, he is allowed*

Past tense: *I was allowed, you were allowed, he was allowed*

Future tense: *I will be allowed*

Present perfect: *I have been allowed, he has been allowed*

Past perfect: *I had been allowed*

Future perfect: *I will have been allowed*

Questions and negative forms are made in the following way.

Questions:

Are you allowed? Were you allowed? Will he be allowed? Has she been allowed? Had we been allowed? Will they have been allowed?

Negative questions:

Are you not allowed? (Aren't you allowed?)

Were you not allowed? (Weren't you allowed?)

Will he not be allowed? (Won't he be allowed?)

Has she not been allowed? (Hasn't she been allowed?)

Had we not been allowed? (Hadn't we been allowed?)

Will they not have been allowed? (Won't they have been allowed?)

Negative statements:

I am not allowed, You were not allowed, He will not be allowed, She has not been allowed, We had not been allowed, They will not have been allowed

Present

We use *can* or *be allowed to* if we talk about a permission in the present, but *can* is more common.

Daniel can go out with us.

Daniel is allowed to go out with us.

Past

We use *could* or *was/were allowed* to if we talk about a general permission in the past.

We could use the computer at any time.
We were allowed to use the computer at any time.

If we talk about a specific permission in the past, we must use *was/were allowed to*.

As I felt much better on Monday, I was allowed to go for a walk.

In negative sentences, however, both forms are possible.

She couldn't leave her office at lunch time.
She wasn't allowed to leave her office at lunch time.

Future

We use *can* or *be allowed to* for future actions in the following way.

We can take a holiday next week.
We are allowed to take a holiday next week.
We'll be allowed to take a holiday next week.

Notes

1. If we ask for a permission, we do not use *be allowed to*.

Can I join you?
Could I join you?

2. If we ask someone whether he or she got a permission, we use *can* or *be allowed to*.

Can you stay up late?
Are you allowed to stay up late?

Could you do what you wanted?
Were you allowed to do what you wanted?