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?*