

Modals for Polite Requests

When we make a request, we ***ask someone for something***, or we ***ask someone to do something***.

There are different ways of making requests. We usually make them in a *polite* and *indirect* way, for example, using the modal verbs ***can***, ***could***, and ***may***.



Asking for something

Can I have the salt?

Could I speak to Rose?

May I have the bill?

Asking someone to do something

Can you take a message?

Could you call a taxi for me?

can	<i>more informal</i>
could	<i>more polite</i>
may	<i>more polite</i>

Could and May

Could has the same meaning as **may** when making requests. It is equally polite to say '*Could I have the bill?*' or '*May I have the bill?*'.

We use **could** with any subject for requests, for example, '**Could I have the bill?**', '**Could you open the window?**'.

Be careful with **may**. When making a request using *may*, only *I* can be the subject, for example, '**May I help you?**', '**May I ask a favor?**'.

Word Order

We use the word ***please*** to make a request more polite. We usually put *please* at the end of a request, but we can also put it at the beginning or in the middle.

- *Could you say that again, **please**?*
- ***Please*** *could you say that again?*
- *Could you **please** say that again?*

Possible positions of *please* in requests:

<i>Could you say that again, please?</i>	At the end	This is the most common position.
<i>Please could you say that again?</i>	At the beginning	This can make the request sound stronger, like an order.
<i>Could you please say that again?</i>	In the middle (between <i>you</i> and <i>the verb</i>)	This makes the request stronger.