Modals of Permission:

CAN/COULD, MAY, and BE ALLOWED TO

A) General points

- There cannot be more than one 'real' modal verb in a single clause or verb group.
- Real modal verbs have fewer forms than other verbs. If we need a form that is not available, we use phrases such as BE ALLOWED TO.
- MAY NOT is practically never contracted.
- Formality: CAN < COULD < MAY.
- To ask about general rules, rather than particular permission, we cannot use MAY (see below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future with WILL, Combinations with other modals, Perfect Tenses, All uses of the -ing form, To-infinitive.</th>
<th>BE ALLOWED TO</th>
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- Examples:
  - *If I move in, will I be allowed to bring my dog?* NOT *...will I can bring my dog?*
  - *She might be allowed to bring her dog.* NOT *She might may bring her dog.*
  - *I'd never been allowed to stay up as late as that day.* NOT *I'd never mayed...*
  - *Being allowed to smoke doesn't mean you have to.* NOT *Maying smoke...*
  - *I'd like to be allowed to do things my way.* NOT *I'd like canning...*

B) Asking Permission: Can, Could, May

- All of these can be used to ask permission. The difference is in politeness and formality. Could tends to sound more polite than can, and may is more formal.

- Examples:
  - *Can I borrow your pen for a moment?* - Sorry, I need it. *Is the pencil OK?*
  - *Could I take a look at your notes?* - Yeah, sure.
  - *May I go to the toilet, sir?* - It's only ten minutes to go. You'll have to wait.
C) Granting and Refusing Permission: Can/May and Can't/May Not

- **Could/Couldn't** cannot be used to give or refuse permission -only to ask it and to talk about permission in the past.
- **May** is much less common than **can** in both granting and refusing permission orally, as it is more formal. **May not**, in particular, smells of authority.
- To express prohibition, **must not** may also be used

**Examples:**
- You can wait in the living room if you want.
- Could I borrow your rubber? - Sure you can.
- You may leave as soon as you finish the exam.
- Could we have a barbecue up in the park? - I'm afraid you can't -it's too dangerous.
- Candidates may not bring dictionaries.
- You mustn't leave your bags around on the airport.

D) Talking about Permission: Can/Could, Be Allowed To

- If we want to talk about permissions and rules made by third parties, by someone else, we cannot use **may**.
- **Can/Could** can only be used in the Simple tenses (past and present). The other possible time forms (Future, Perfect) require **be allowed to**.
- If we talk about permission, politeness is irrelevant: We are just stating facts. Thus, **can** and **could** are just different time forms, nothing more.
- If a **specific** past permission led to a **specific** past action, we have to use **be allowed to**. Else, **could** and **be allowed to** are synonymous.
- For **past non-permission**, wasn't/weren't allowed to is more common than couldn't: It is less ambiguous.

➔ Consider:
- I could go home early yesterday. = I finished early, so I was able to...
- I was allowed to go home early yesterday. = The boss said it was OK for me to...

- I was allowed to / could stay up till ten when I was a kid.
- Sometimes, she can / is allowed to take home some food from the restaurant she works in.
- Can you take photos in here?
- Could you enter the crypt? - No, visitors weren't allowed there back then. Nowadays, you can enter it if you're with a guide.
E) Exercises:

• You are visiting the Taj Mahal. You want to know the rules about taking photos.

• You need to make a phone call, but your mobile is out of battery. You enter a bar and say... (use).

• Your pencil's tip has broken. You ask your neighbour for his/her sharpener (borrow).

• _________________________ cross the road here?
• _________________________ ask you a question?
• _________________________ smoke here?
• _________________________ read your magazine?
• _________________________ drive without an insurance in 1911?
• _________________________ have parties at home when you were living in the old flat?
• _________________________ go on that trip in summer if you get good marks, or is your parents' refusal definite?