Will
Hello, and welcome to today’s Grammar Gameshow! I’m your host, Will! If a toucan can cancan, then two toucans can cancan too! And of course, let’s not forget Leslie, our all-knowing voice in the sky.

Leslie
Hello, everyone!

Will
Tonight we’re going to ask you three questions about…

Leslie
Can! That tiny modal verb with such a range of meanings!

Will
OK! Now, let’s meet our contestants!

Bill
Hello, all. My name is Bill!

Will
And contestant number two?

Denise
It’s nice to meet you. I’m Denise!

Will
OK, let’s get going, and don’t forget you can play along at home too. Round one. Can is a modal verb with many uses. I’m going to give you the use and you have to give me an example. Ready? Can for permission.

Bill
You can sit wherever you like.
Leslie
Correct!

Will
Can for a request.

Denise
Can Dad pick me up from school today?

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Can for a possibility.

Bill
We can’t be lost! We’ve got a map!

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Can for an ability.

Denise
I can hold my breath for two minutes.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
Wow! Two minutes, eh? Well, go ahead. Prove it!

Denise
What?

Will
Two minutes you said. If you want any points, you’re going to have to prove it. Ready? Go! And now for a surprise bonus question. True or false: ‘Can’ can be used to talk about typical or common behaviour, just like the present simple. It’s not two minutes yet!

Bill
True.
Leslie
Correct!

Will
Use this sentence to give us an example: John is often quite rude.

Bill
John can be quite rude at times.

Leslie
Correct!

Will
It’s not two minutes yet! Leslie?

Leslie
Good job! Can and can’t are modal verbs meaning they’re always followed by an infinitive and don’t change to show person or time. They are useful verbs, and can be used to talk about permissions, requests and offers, possibility and impossibility, abilities and typical behaviour. It all depends on the context!

Will
Three…two…one! Well, now that’s… two minutes! Well, well done. 40 quarters of a point for you. On to round two. ‘Can’ is not often used to refer to an action happening at the moment of speaking, but it can be done! Which type of verb when combined with ‘can’ allows us to talk about certain actions happening at the moment of speaking?

Denise
I need to sit down. I can see stars. Can you hear ringing?

Will
Two very good examples, but I’m still waiting for a verb form.

Bill
Oh! Verbs of the senses!

Will
Leslie?

Leslie
Correct! The sense verbs see, hear, smell, taste and feel, are not usually used in the continuous form when referring to perception. When we want to talk about seeing or hearing at the moment of speaking, we use ‘can’. For example, I can see my house from here!
Will
That’s why we put you there, Leslie. Always seeing, never reaching! It keeps you hungry. Well done, Bill. Have 60 points divided by 60. Let’s move on to our third round. And this question is worth a thousand points. So if you get this one, you’ll probably win the game! Which word combines with ‘can’ to produce a verb phrase which means that a person is unable to control themselves even though they want to?

Denise
Help!

Will
No, I’m afraid that’s not allowed. No matter what, I can’t help.

Denise
Not ‘help’. Can’t help!

Will
Exactly! Bill?

Bill
The verb phrase is ‘can’t help’

Will
Excellent! Can you give us an example?

Bill
I can’t help eating the occasional slice of cake.

Will
Gosh! I haven’t had cake since… but that was such a long time ago. Leslie?

Leslie
Well done! The verb phrase ‘can’t help’ means that despite trying, a person is unable to resist doing something. For example, I can’t help calling towards my house, even though I know, they can’t hear me.

Will
You do make a racket Leslie! It’s like music to my ears. And that brings us to the end of today’s Grammar Gameshow. Let’s count out the points. And the winner is… Bill! Well done! Here’s what you’ve won!

Leslie
It’s a candy cane!
Will
We'll see you again next week, where you can play for another prize. And Denise, your can-do attitude almost saw you through. Anything to say?

Denise
Help?

Will
Sorry. I can’t help. Fire the cannons! It looks like we’ll need another contestant. Thanks for joining us. Say goodbye, Leslie.

Leslie
Na shledanou, Leslie.

Will
See you next time.