

CANNOT OR CAN NOT?

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Both **cannot** and **can not** are acceptable spellings, but the first is far more common and is therefore recommended, especially in any kind of formal writing.

- I cannot predict what will happen next year. (**more common**)
- I can not predict what will happen next year.

CANNOT (formal)

In question form when the auxiliary is not contracted, "not" comes after the inverted subject; therefore, "cannot" doesn't work there:

- Can you not see that I'm busy?
 - Can't you see that I'm busy?
- NOT **X** Cannot you see that I'm busy?
- Can he not see the obvious?
 - Can't he see the obvious?
- NOT **X** Cannot he see the obvious?

CAN NOT

We can use **can not** when the "not" form is part of another construction such as "not only." For example:

- These green industries **can not** only create more jobs, but also promote sustainable development of the land.

We can also use **can not** when we want to be emphatic (**stress on not**):

- "No, you **can not** borrow my car."

CANNOT BUT (formal)

used to say that sth will certainly happen, or that you feel you have to do sth.

- If we persevere, we cannot but succeed.
- One cannot but admire her determination.

CAN'T (informal)

Can't is simply a contraction of cannot, and therefore not always suitable for formal writing. It is often found in everyday speaking and writing:

- I can't go out tonight. I'm busy.
- You can't park here.

CAN YOU NOT

We can use "can you not" to make requests and to ask questions. The exact same question can have a different meaning depending on where the stress is placed.

REQUEST (stress on not)

Can you **not** play the guitar?
(Negative request- Please, do not play the guitar)

Can you **not** do that?
(Negative request- Can you refrain from doing that?)

QUESTION (stress on can)

Can you not play the guitar?
(Negative ability- I thought you could play the guitar and I'm surprised you can't.)

Can you not do that?
(Negative ability - Aren't you able to do that?)

Cambridge English exams - Contractions. **CAN'T COUNTS AS ONE WORD.**

In the key word transformation task (use of English part 4), contracted forms (isn't, I'm, I'll, didn't, etc.) count as two words. The only exception is can't, which counts as one word, since it is the contracted form of one word: cannot.