

## Chinese Modal Verbs 能(néng) VS 会(huì)

<https://youtu.be/d98Cxe59aIA>

### Dialogue

Nǐ néng chī là ma?

1. A: 你能吃辣吗?

*Can you eat spicy food?*

Wǒ bú tài néng chī là, nǐ ne?

B: 我不太能吃辣, 你呢?

*I can't eat too spicy food. And you?*

Wǒ hěn néng chī là.

A: 我很能吃辣。

*I can eat very spicy food.*

Nǐ néng zuò zhè ge gōngzuò ma?

2. A: 你能做这个工作吗?

*Can you do this job?*

Wǒ néng.

B: 我能。

*Yes, I can.*

Māma, nǐ huì shuō Yīngyǔ ma?

3. A: 妈妈, 你会说英语吗?

*Mum, can you speak English?*

Wǒ bú tài huì shuō.

B: 我不太会说。

*I am not good at it.*

## Explanation

néng

一. To express **Can**, we can also use the modal verb **能**.

1. **能+ verb: to express ability**

to be able to do

Wǒ néng chī là.

1) 我 能 吃 辣。

I can eat spicy food.

2. **能+verb+ quantity word +object:**

One's ability is able to achieve that "quantity" degree

Wǒ néng chī liǎng ge hànǎo.

1) 我 能 吃 两 个 汉堡。

I can eat two hamburgers.

Wǒ néng hē yì píng hóng jiǔ.

2) 我 能 喝 一 瓶 红 酒。

I can drink one bottle of red wine.

huì néng

二. Making comparison between **会** and **能**

1. **会: a skill obtained by a learning process**

Wǒ huì shuō Hànyǔ.

1) 我 会 说 汉语。

I can speak Chinese.

Wǒ huì zuò fàn.

2) 我 会 做 饭。

I can cook.

Niǎor huì fēi.

3) 鸟儿 会 飞。

Birds can fly.

niǎor

fēi

鸟儿

n. bird

飞

v. fly

## 2. 能: an ability which one doesn't need to acquire

Wǒ néng chī là.

1) 我 能 吃 辣。

I can eat spicy food.

Wǒ néng chī liǎng ge hànǎo.

2) 我 能 吃 两 个 汉堡。

I can eat two hamburgers.

Wǒ néng hē yì píng hóng jiǔ.

3) 我 能 喝 一 瓶 红 酒。

I can drink one bottle of red wine.

bú huì      bù néng

## 三. Making comparison between 不会 and 不能

### 1. 不会: one doesn't possess a certain skill.

Bǎobao bú huì shuō huà.

1) 宝宝 不会 说话。

The baby doesn't know how to speak.

Bǎobao

shuō huà

宝宝

n. baby

说话

v. to speak

Bǎobao bú huì zǒu lù.

2) 宝宝 不会 走路。

The baby doesn't know how to walk.

zǒu lù

走路 v. to walk

2. 不能: it indicates that the temporary condition doesn't allow you to do it, but you can recover this ability afterwards.

Wǒ bù néng shuō huà.

1) 我 不 能 说 话。

I can't talk. (maybe now you are in a library)

Tā bù néng zǒu lù.

2) 她 不 能 走 路。

She can't walk. (maybe her leg got injured)

hěn/fēicháng

四. To use 很/非常 before the modal verb to intensify the degree

1. 很/非常 + 能: the amount one can handle is a lot.

Wǒ hěn néng chī là.

1) 我 很 能 吃 辣。

I can eat very spicy food.

Wǒ fēicháng néng chī là.

2) 我 非常 能 吃 辣。

I can eat extremely spicy food.

2. 很/非常+ 会: someone is good at sth.

Māma hěn huì zuò fàn.

1) 妈妈 很 会 做 饭。

Mum is very good at cooking.

Bàba fēicháng huì kāi chē.

2) 爸爸 非常 会 开 车。

Dad is really good at driving a car.

chē                      kāi chē  
车      n. car      开 车      v. to drive a car

bú tài

五. To use 不太 before the modal verb to intensify the degree

1. To use 不太 before 能 to stress the amount you can handle is few.

Wǒ bú tài néng chī là.

1) 我 不 太 能 吃 辣。

I can't eat too spicy food.

Wǒ bú tài néng hē jiǔ.

2) 我 不 太 能 喝 酒。

I can't drink too much alcohol.

	bái jiǔ	hóng jiǔ	píjiǔ	liè jiǔ
Tips:	白 酒	红 酒	啤 酒	烈 酒
	Chinese liquor	red wine	beer	liquor

bái jiǔ

白 酒

lit. Chinese liquor

≠

bái pú tao jiǔ

白 葡 萄 酒

lit. white grape wine

Wǒ bú tài néng hē bái jiǔ.

1) 我 不 太 能 喝 白 酒。

I can only drink a little bit Chinese liquor.

Wǒ bú tài néng hē hóng jiǔ.

2) 我 不 太 能 喝 红 酒。

I can only drink a little bit red wine.

Wǒ bú tài néng hē píjiǔ.

3) 我 不 太 能 喝 啤 酒。

I can only drink a little bit beer.

Wǒ bú tài néng hē liè jiǔ.

4) 我 不 太 能 喝 烈 酒。

I can only drink a little bit liquor.

## 2. To use 不太 before 会 to indicate that someone is not good at sth.

Wǒ bú tài huì chī xiā.

1) 我 不 太 会 吃 虾。

I'm not good at eating shrimp.

Wǒ bú tài huì shuō Hànyǔ.

2) 我 不 太 会 说 汉语。

I'm not good at speaking Chinese.

néng

## 六. Using 能 in a question.

### 1. To ask if someone has ability to do sth., we can use:

**Sb./sth. + 能 + verb 吗?**

Can sb./sth. do?

Nǐ néng chī là ma?

1) 你 能 吃 辣 吗?

Can you eat spicy food?

Nǐ néng hē yì píng hóng jiǔ ma?

2) 你 能 喝 一 瓶 红 酒 吗?

Can you drink one bottle of red wine?

Nǐ néng zuò zhè ge gōngzuò ma?

3) 你 能 做 这 个 工 作 吗?

Can you do this job?

### 2. To answer this question, we can use:

Wǒ néng.

我 能。

I'm able to.

Wǒ bù néng. / Bù néng.

我 不 能。 / 不 能。

I'm not able to do it.

Nǐ néng chī là ma?

1) A: 你能吃辣吗?

Can you eat spicy food?

Wǒ néng.

B: 我能。

Yes, I can.

Wǒ bù néng.

C: 我不能。

No, I can't.

Nǐ néng hē yì píng hóng jiǔ ma?

2) A: 你能喝一瓶红酒吗?

Can you drink one bottle of red wine?

Wǒ néng.

B: 我能。

Yes, I can.

Wǒ bù néng.

C: 我不能。

No, I can't.

Nǐ néng zuò zhè ge gōngzuò ma?

3) A: 你能做这个工作吗?

Can you do this job?

Wǒ néng.

B: 我能。

Yes, I can.

Wǒ bù néng.

C: 我不能。

No, I can't.

## Review

### 1. Be able to

能

vs

会

Wǒ néng chī là.

我 能 吃 辣。

I can eat spicy food.

Wǒ néng hē yì píng hóngjiǔ.

我 能 喝 一 瓶 红 酒。

I can drink one bottle of red wine.

Wǒ néng zuò zhè ge gōngzuò.

我 能 做 这 个 工 作。

I can do this job.

Wǒ huì shuō Hànyǔ.

我 会 说 汉 语。

I can speak Chinese.

Māma huì zuò fàn.

妈 妈 会 做 饭。

Mum can cook.

Bàba huì kāi chē.

爸 爸 会 开 车。

Dad can drive a car.

### 2. 很/非常 (very/extremely)+modal verb

Wǒ hěn néng chī fà.

1) 我 很 能 吃 辣。

I can eat very spicy food.

Māma fēicháng huì zuò fàn.

2) 妈 妈 非 常 会 做 饭。

Mum is very good at cooking.

### 3. 不太 (not really)+ modal verb

Wǒ bú tài néng hē jiǔ.

1) 我 不 太 能 喝 酒。

I can't drink too much alcohol.

Wǒ bú tài huì shuō Hànyǔ.

2) 我 不 太 会 说 汉 语。

I'm not good at speaking Chinese.