

## CAN – COULD

	USES	EXAMPLES
<b>CAN</b>	General ability in the present or future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request (informal)</li> <li>• Impossibility (negative only)</li> <li>• Permission (informal)</li> </ul>	I <b>can speak</b> Spanish. I <b>can help</b> you later. <b>Can I use</b> your car? You <b>can't see</b> the dentist now. (Can't = cannot) You <b>can take</b> the car tomorrow.
<b>COULD</b>	General ability in the past <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possibility (not certain)</li> <li>• Polite request</li> <li>• Impossibility (in the past)</li> </ul>	She <b>could swim</b> well at the age of four. The keys <b>could be</b> in the car. <b>Could I have</b> a word with you? I <b>couldn't open</b> the door.

### • CAN

We use **can** to say that something is possible or allowed, or that somebody has the ability to do something.

We use **can+ infinitive (can do / I can see etc.)**:

*We can see the lake from our hotel.*

*'I don't have a pen.' 'You can use mine.'*

*Can you speak any foreign languages?*

*I can come and see you tomorrow if you like.*

Use **can** with the following verbs: *see, hear, smell, taste, feel, remember, understand.*

*I can hear you!*

*I can't see anything*

*I can remember him!*

The negative is **can't (= cannot)**:

*I'm afraid I can't come to the party on Friday.*

**Can** has only two forms: **can (present)** and **could (past)**. So sometimes it is necessary to use **to be able to** (also: **to manage to – to succeed in + -ing** can be used depending on the meaning of the sentence).

CAN	TO BE ABLE TO
I <b>can't</b> sleep.	I <b>haven't been able to</b> sleep recently.
Tom <b>can come</b> tomorrow.	Tom <b>might be able to</b> come tomorrow.
Maria <b>can speak</b> French, Spanish and English.	Applicants for the job <b>must be able to</b> speak 2 foreign languages.

### • COULD

Sometimes **could** is the past of **can**. We use **could** especially with the following verbs: *see, hear, smell, taste, feel, remember, understand.*

- *We had a lovely room in the hotel. We could see the lake.*
- *As soon as I walked into the room, I could smell gas.*
- *I was sitting at the back of the theatre and couldn't hear very well.*

**COULD** is **not used** to talk about **particular ability** (on one occasion) **in the past** (use: **to be able to – to manage to – to succeed in**)

*particular ability: When I was young I managed to climb Everest -I managed to get a good discount*

*general ability: He was a terrific liar he could make anybody believe him*

**COULDN'T** is used for **both general and particular ability**.

*When I was young I could not climb Everest (general) - I couldn't get the promotion (particular)*

**CONDITIONAL COULD** - Could is used in a conditional sense = **would be able to**:

*If I wanted I could break your neck-*

*If I had the time I could do it*

**To be able to / to manage to**

We tend to use **to be able to or to manage to**:

if we are talking about what happened in a particular situation or are referring to a specific achievement:

*Were you able to / Did you manage to speak to him before he left home?*

*No, I'm sorry, I wasn't able to / didn't manage to reach him.*

when we want to say that we are **able to cope with a difficult situation** or **find time for a particular task**.  
*It was very icy, but I **managed to** keep the car on the road.*  
*Veronica was very upset when Ben left her, but she **managed to** smile nevertheless.*  
*She didn't really want to go to Mexico, but Tony **managed to persuade** her somehow.*  
*Can I give you a hand with that? ~ No, it's all right. **I'll manage/ I can manage**.*

You can also use **manage to** and **succeed in + -ing** to talk about success (or lack of success) in a particular task or activity, but not to talk about general abilities:  
*Once the team **manage to** perfect their device, they will **be able to** put it on the market.*  
*Scientists have **succeeded in** creating a new device.*

### EXERCISE

**1. Complete the sentences using can if possible; otherwise use (be) able to.**

- 1 He ..... speak five languages.
- 2 I haven't ..... to sleep very well recently.
- 3 Nicole ..... drive, but she doesn't have a car.
- 4 I used to ..... stand on my head, but I can't do it any more.
- 5 I can't understand Mark. I've never ..... understand him.
- 6 I can't see you on Friday, but I meet you on Saturday morning.
- 7 Ask Katherine about your problem. She might .....help you.

**2. Write sentences about yourself using the ideas in brackets.**

Example: (something you used to be able to do) = *I used to be able to sing very well / I could sing very well when I was young*

- 2 (something you used to be able to do)  
I used .....
- 3 (something you would like to be able to do)  
I'd .....
- 4 (something you have never been able to do)  
I've .....

**3. Complete the sentences with can/can't/could/couldn't+ the following verbs: eat, hear, run, sleep, wait**

- 1 I'm afraid I ..... to your party next week.
- 2 When Dan was 16, he ..... 100 metres in 11 seconds.
- 3 'Are you in a hurry?' 'No, I've got plenty of time. I .....
- 4 I was feeling sick yesterday. I .....anything.
- 5 Can you speak a little louder? I.....you very well.
- 6 'You look tired.' 'Yes, I..... last night.'

**4. Complete the answers to the questions with was/were able to ....**

- 1 **A:** Did everybody escape from the fire?  
**B:** Yes, although the fire spread quickly, everybody .....
- 2 **A:** Did you finish your work this afternoon?  
**B:** Yes, there was nobody to disturb me, so I .....
- 3 **A:** Did you have problems finding our house?  
**B:** Not really. Your directions were good and we .....
- 4 **A:** Did the thief get away?  
**B:** Yes. No-one realised what was happening and the thief .....

**5. Complete the sentences using could, couldn't or managed to.**

- 1 My grandfather travelled a lot. He ..... speak five languages.
- 2 I looked everywhere for the book, but I ..... find it.
- 3 They didn't want to come with us at first, but we ..... persuade them.
- 4 Laura had hurt her leg and ..... walk very well.
- 5 I ran my first marathon recently. It was very hard, but I ..... finish.
- 6 I looked very carefully and I ..... see somebody in the distance.
- 7 I wanted to buy some tomatoes. The first shop I went to didn't have any, but I ..... get some in the next shop.
- 8 My grandmother loved music. She ..... play the piano very well.

- 9 A girl fell into the river, but fortunately we ..... pull her out.  
 10 I had forgotten to bring my camera, so I ..... take any pictures.

## KEY

### EXERCISE

#### 1. Complete the sentences using **can** if possible; otherwise use **(be) able to**.

- 1 He .....**can**..... speak five languages.  
 2 I haven't .....**been able**..... to sleep very well recently.  
 3 Nicole .....**can**..... drive, but she doesn't have a car.  
 4 I used to .....**be able to**..... stand on my head, but I can't do it any more.  
 5 I can't understand Mark. I've never .....**been able to**..... understand him.  
 6 I can't see you on Friday, but I **can** meet you on Saturday morning.  
 7 Ask Katherine about your problem. She might .....**be able to**.....help you.

#### 2. Write sentences about yourself using the ideas in brackets.

Example: (something you used to be able to do) = *I used to be able to sing very well / I could sing very well when I was young*

2 (something you used to be able to do)

**I used to be able to** ..... / **I could** .....

3 (something you would like to be able to do)

I'd .....**like to be able to speak** .....

4 (something you have never been able to do)

I've .....**never been able to** .....

#### 3. Complete the sentences with **can/can't/could/couldn't**+ the following verbs: eat, hear, run, sleep, wait

- 1 I'm afraid I .....**can't come**..... to your party next week.  
 2 When Dan was 16, he .....**could run**..... 100 metres in 11 seconds.  
 3 'Are you in a hurry?' 'No, I've got plenty of time. I .....**can wait**.....  
 4 I was feeling sick yesterday. I .....**couldn't eat**.....anything.  
 5 Can you speak a little louder? I.....**can't hear**.....you very well.  
 6 'You look tired.' 'Yes, I.....**couldn't sleep**..... last night.'

#### 4. Complete the answers to the questions with **was/were able to** ....

1 **A:** Did everybody escape from the fire?

**B:** Yes, although the fire spread quickly, everybody .....**was able to escape**.....

2 **A:** Did you finish your work this afternoon?

**B:** Yes, there was nobody to disturb me, so I ..... **was able to finish it**.....

3 **A:** Did you have problems finding our house?

**B:** Not really. Your directions were good and we ..... **were able to find it**.....

4 **A:** Did the thief get away?

**B:** Yes. No-one realised what was happening and the thief .....**was able to get away**.....

#### 5. Complete the sentences using **could, couldn't or managed to**.

- 1 My grandfather travelled a lot. He .....**could**..... speak five languages.  
 2 I looked everywhere for the book, but I .....**couldn't**..... find it.  
 3 They didn't want to come with us at first, but we .....**managed to**..... persuade them.  
 4 Laura had hurt her leg and .....**couldn't**..... walk very well.  
 5 I ran my first marathon recently. It was very hard, but I .....**managed to**..... finish.  
 6 I looked very carefully and I .....**could/managed to**..... see somebody in the distance.  
 7 I wanted to buy some tomatoes. The first shop I went to didn't have any, but I.....**managed to** get some in the next shop.  
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