

# **CAN - COULD - BE ABLE TO**

You use CAN to describe an ability in the present.

**Annie can swim, but she can't ride a bike.**

You can also use BE ABLE TO to describe an ability in the present or future.  
(Attention : CAN is used much more frequently than BE ABLE TO in the present tense)

**He's able to park a car, but he's not able to drive in traffic yet.**

**I'll be able to speak French in a couple of months.**

You use either COULD or WAS/WERE ABLE TO to describe a general ability in the past.

**I could swim when I was 5 years old.**

**My brother was able to drive cars when he was 12 years old.**

You must use WAS/WERE ABLE TO to describe a special achievement or a single event in the past.

**Finally, she was able to visit her birthday place.**

You can use either COULDN'T or WASN'T/WEREN'T ABLE TO for any negative sentence describing past ability.

**My friend couldn't speak Italian.**

**He wasn't able to speak Italian.**

For forms and tenses other than the present or past, you must use BE ABLE TO .

**We haven't been able to play tennis for a long time**

Use CAN and COULD to say that something is possible, to make guesses and polite requests, to make suggestions, and to ask for and give permission.

**Could we use our dictionaries ?**

**Can I have five more minutes to answer this question ?**

**Could you drive me to the hospital, please ?**

**Maybe we could go to San Francisco.**

**It could rain tomorrow.**

**COMPLETE THE PARAGRAPHS WITH : CAN / CAN'T / COULD / and COULDN'T .**

1) For a long time, Alec and Iris \_\_\_\_\_ play tennis together. Alex loves it.  
Iris has just started taking lessons, but she still \_\_\_\_\_ play well.

2) - I heard there was a fire in your building yesterday. Was anyone hurt ?  
- No, the firefighters \_\_\_\_\_ get everyone out of the building .

**WRITE SENTENCES USING THE IDEAS IN BRACKETS.**

- 1) (something your best friend was able to do)
- 2) (something you have never been able to do)
- 3) (something you can do very well)

**WORK WITH A PARTNER. ASK WHAT YOUR PARTNER COULD DO WHEN HE OR SHE WAS 4 YEARS OLD AND WHAT HE OR SHE CAN DO NOW.**

Example : - YOU :            Could you draw pictures ?  
              - Partner :        Yes, I could. / No, I couldn't .

- 1) - ride a horse
- 2) - use a computer
- 3) - take photographs
- 4) - count to a thousand
- 5) - climb trees

**COMPLETE THE SENTENCES USING : COULD / COULDN'T / WAS - WERE ABLE TO.**

1 - My uncle was very clever. He \_\_\_\_\_ speak 4 languages.

2 - My father wasn't at home when I phoned , but I \_\_\_\_\_ contact him later.

3 - A little boy fell into the river but some men \_\_\_\_\_ rescue him.

4 - He had forgotten to bring his camera so he \_\_\_\_\_ take any photos of the wedding.

Exercise 1 : - 1) couldn't // can't  
              - 2) could

**ANSWERS**

Exercise 4 : - 1) could  
              - 2) was able to  
              - 3) were able to  
              - 4) couldn't