

1 You use *can* (negative *cannot* or *can't*):

a to say that something is possible:

- Swimming after eating can be dangerous.
- Making mistakes can be a good way of learning.
- Smoking cannot be good for you!

b to say that someone knows how to do something:

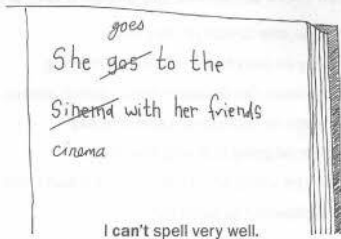
- My brother can drive.
- Can you speak French?

c to say that someone has the ability to do something:

- She's a great driver: she can drive almost any car.
- I can't eat fish.
- Anyone can become a qualified teacher.

d with verbs like *see, hear, feel, smell, remember, recognise and imagine*:

- She can't remember the name of the book.
- I can't see the reason for doing that.
- Can you imagine living in a palace?



"Don't shout! We can all hear you!"

You can use *be able to* instead of *can* except in category a, but *can* is more common, and less formal:

- My brother is able to drive. I am not able to eat fish.
- She isn't able to remember the name of the book.

2 You use *could* (negative *could not* or *couldn't*):

a to talk about someone's ability in the past:

- He could run faster than any of us. She could tell the most incredible jokes.
- A lot of them couldn't read or write.

b with verbs like *see, hear, smell, feel, remember, recognise and imagine* in the past:

- You could see they weren't happy. The policeman could smell gas.
- He couldn't see them, but he could hear them in the dark.

c to say you are not completely sure if something is possible:

- There's a lot of traffic. That could explain why he's late.
- There could be a storm tonight: look at the clouds!

3 You use *be able to* instead of *can*:

a after another modal verb (*will/must/might* etc):

- I might be able to help you later on. You should be able to buy some cheese in that shop.

b if you want to use an *-ing* form or a *to-infinitive*:

- It's nice to be able to get some exercise. He complained about not being able to go to London.
- I enjoy being able to get up late at the weekend.

c to talk about something someone managed to do in a particular situation in the past (negative *wasn't/weren't able to* or *couldn't*):

- Were you able to buy everything on the list? They were able to save enough money to buy a car.
- I wasn't able to finish the meal. (=I couldn't finish it)

A Rewrite these questions replacing know how to with can or can't:

- 1 Do you know how to drive? _____
- 2 Do you know how to play the piano? _____
- 3 Where could we find someone who knows how to repair clocks? _____
- 4 Do any of your friends know how to use a word processor? _____

Now give your real answers to these questions.

B**1 Look at the picture, then use the verbs in the box to write sentences about what Jack can do, like this:**

Jack can drive. I don't know if he can cook.

drive cook play chess sing play the guitar paint ski
speak Spanish play tennis type skate ride a horse

2 Now write sentences about the activities you can and can't do, like this:

I can ski, but I can't cook.

3 Now write sentences about when you learnt to do these things, like this:

I can drive now, but I couldn't two years ago.

**C Complete the sentences using:**

can could can't couldn't were able to will be able to won't be able to

- 1 I don't think we _____ travel to Mars before 2010.
- 2 Luckily the weather was great, so we _____ have a picnic.
- 3 My cousin _____ swim when he was three, but I still _____.
- 4 The music was so loud that I _____ hear what you were saying.
- 5 If we don't finish early, we _____ see the programme on TV.
- 6 Anyone _____ do that!

Which sentence has more than one possible answer?

D Rewrite these sentences using be able to, like this:

I can get up late. I enjoy being able to get up late.

The reasons I enjoy holidays ...

- 1 I can wear casual clothes. *I enjoy* _____
- 2 I can watch TV when I want. _____
- 3 I can see my friends. _____
- 4 I can travel abroad. _____
- 5 I can stay up late. _____