

can and could

A



can + base form (can do / can play / can come, etc.):

I/we/you/they he/she/it	can can't (cannot)	do play see come, etc.	can	I/we/you/they he/she/it	do? play? see? come?, etc.
----------------------------	-----------------------	---------------------------------	-----	----------------------------	-------------------------------------

B

I can do something = I know how to do it, or it is possible for me to do it:

- I **can play** the piano. My brother **can play** the piano, too.
- Sarah **can speak** Italian, but she **can't speak** Spanish.
- "Can you swim?" "Yes, but I'm not a very good swimmer."
- "Can you change a twenty-dollar bill?" "I'm sorry, I **can't**."
- I'm having a party next week, but Paul and Rachel **can't come**.

C

For the *past* (yesterday / last week, etc.), we use **could/couldn't**:

- When I was young, I **could run** very fast.
- Before Maria came to the United States, she **couldn't understand** much English. Now she **can understand** everything.
- I was tired last night, but I **couldn't sleep**.
- I had a party last week, but Paul and Rachel **couldn't come**.

D

Can you ... ? Could you ... ? Can I ... ? Could I ... ?

We use **Can you ... ?** or **Could you ... ?** when we ask people to do things:

- **Can you** open the door, please? or **Could you** open the door, please?
- **Can you** wait a minute, please? or **Could you** wait ... ?

We use **Can I have ... ?** or **Could I have ... ?** to ask for something:


- (in a store) **Can I have** change for a dollar, please? or **Could I have ... ?**

Can I ... ? or **Could I ... ?** = is it OK to do something?:

- Tom, **can I** borrow your umbrella? or Tom, **could I** borrow your umbrella?
- (on the phone) Hello, **can I** speak to Gary, please? or ... **could I** speak ... ?

31.1 Ask Steve if he can do these things:



You  Steve

1. *Can you swim?*
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Can you do these things? Write sentences about yourself. Use *I can* or *I can't*.

7. I _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____

31.2 Complete these sentences. Use *can* or *can't* + one of these verbs:

~~come~~ find hear see speak

1. I'm sorry, but we can't come to your party next Saturday.
2. I like this hotel room. You _____ the mountains from the window.
3. You are speaking very quietly. I _____ you.
4. Have you seen my suitcase? I _____ it.
5. Catherine got the job because she _____ five languages.

31.3 Complete these sentences. Use *can't* or *couldn't* + one of these verbs:

decide eat find go go ~~sleep~~

1. I was tired, but I couldn't sleep.
2. I wasn't hungry yesterday. I _____ my dinner.
3. Kate doesn't know what to do. She _____.
4. I wanted to speak to Martin yesterday, but I _____ him.
5. James _____ to the concert next Saturday. He has to work.
6. Paula _____ to the meeting last week. She was sick.

31.4 What do you say in these situations? Use *can* or *could*.

