



Can, Could, Be Able To

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- ✎ Can
- ✎ Could
- ✎ Be able to

Ability

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Can

	Positive	Negative	Question	Short, Yes	Short, No
I	can	can't	Can I ...?	Yes, I can	No, I can't
You	can	can't	Can you ...?	Yes, you can	No, you can't
He / She / It	can	can't	Can he/she/it ...?	Yes, he can	No, he can't
We	can	can't	Can we ...?	Yes, we can	No, we can't
They	can	can't	Can they ...?	Yes, they can	No, they can't

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1. To have an ability to do something (skill)

I can dance

You can speak English

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2. To ask for/ give permission

Can I visit my friend?

Yes, you can visit your friend

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3. To talk about the possibility of something

Can I come to the party?

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4. To offer/ask for help

Can I help you?

Can you open the door for me?

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5. Demands

Can you please be quiet!

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Could

	Positive	Negative	Question	Short, Yes	Short, No
I	could	couldn't	Could I ...?	Yes, I could	No, I couldn't
You	could	couldn't	Could you ...?	Yes, you could	No, you couldn't
He / She / It	could	couldn't	Could he/she/it ...?	Yes, he could	No, he couldn't
We	could	couldn't	Could we ...?	Yes, we could	No, we couldn't
They	could	couldn't	Could they ...?	Yes, they could	No, they couldn't

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1. A past ability to do something
(skill)

I could dance

You could speak English

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2. To ask for permission politely

Could I visit my friend?

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3. To talk about the future possibility
of something (hypothetical)

We could visit a friend.

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4. To ask for help

*Could you help me?
Could you open the door for me?*

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5. Demands (polite)

Could you please be quiet!

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Be able to

	Positive	Negative	Question	Short, Yes	Short, No
I	am able to	am not able to	Am I able to...?	Yes, I am	No, I'm not
You	are able to	aren't able to	Are you able to ...?	Yes, you are	No, you aren't
He / She / It	is able to	isn't able to	Is he/she/it able to ...?	Yes, he is	No, he isn't
We	are able to	aren't able to	Are we able to...?	Yes, we are	No, we aren't
They	are able to	aren't able to	Are they able to...?	Yes, they are	No, they aren't

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1. To have an ability to do something (success/failure)

I have been able to learn English
We will be able to go out

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2. Ability with verb structures

I might be able to help you
I want to be able to help you

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Can	Could	Be able to
Present tense	Past tense	All tenses

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Can	Could	Be able to
Present tense	Past tense	All tenses Modal verbs

Can	Could	Be able to
Present tense Skill	Past tense Skill	All tenses Modal verbs Success/failure

Can	Could	Be able to
Present tense Skill General	Past tense Skill General / specific	All tenses Modal verbs Success/failure Specific

I _____ play the guitar.

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I _____ play the guitar.

Present tense, skill, general

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I **can** play the guitar.

Present tense, skill, general

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I _____ to get a ticket for the
concert yesterday.

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I _____ to get a ticket for the
concert yesterday.

Past tense, specific, success

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I **was able** to get a ticket for the
concert yesterday.

Past tense, specific, success

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I _____ (not) open the file on my
computer yesterday.

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I _____ (not) open the file on my
computer yesterday.

Past tense, specific, failure

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I *wasn't able to/ couldn't* open the
file on my computer yesterday.

Past tense, specific, failure

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