



COULD / COULDN'T

Past abilities

165

Could and couldn't



We use **could** or **couldn't** + base form to talk about ability in the past. **Could** and **couldn't** are the past forms of **can** and **can't**.

The children **could** speak two languages when they were five.

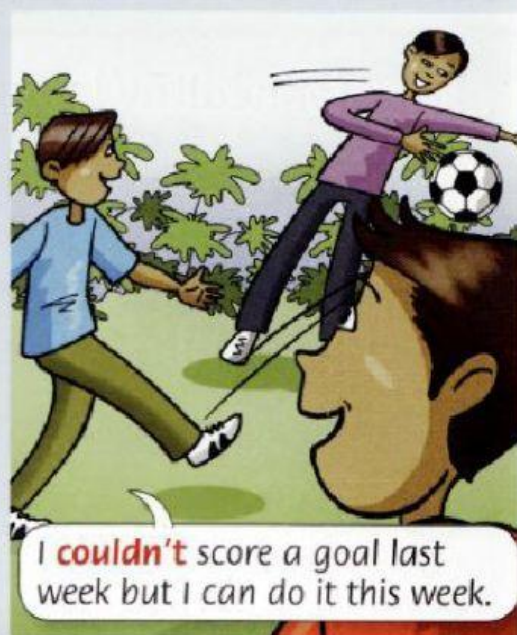
He **couldn't** see the board because he needed glasses.

We can use **can** to compare a situation or ability in the past with one now.

Max **couldn't** speak French when he was young, but he **can** now.

A few months ago, Irina **couldn't** swim. She **can** now.

Oliver **could** swim very fast when he was little, but he **can't** now.



Complete the dialogue using:

could

couldn't

can

Sue And this is me when I was four.

Mai ¹ Could you swim when you were four?

Sue No, I ² _____, but I ³ _____ now. And you?

Mai Yes, I ⁴ _____. I learnt to swim when I was two.

Sue ⁵ _____ you send emails when you were four?

Mai No, I ⁶ _____. But my brother showed me how to send emails last year.

Sue And how many languages ⁷ _____ you speak when you were four?

Mai Only one. But now I ⁸ _____ speak two!





A cartoon illustration of a young boy with orange hair, wearing a green long-sleeved shirt, blue pants, and brown boots. He is sitting on a wooden stool and playing a large, light-brown acoustic guitar. He has a surprised or excited expression on his face, with wide eyes and an open mouth. The guitar is positioned vertically, with the body on the left and the neck extending to the right.

1. Yasmin drive a car.
2. Rob and I use a computer.
3. Edward speak Spanish.
4. Ted and Leo pitch a tent.
5. Lewis run ten kilometres
6. Kim and I light a fire
7. Sidney play the guitar
8. Seb climb trees