



# 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 <sup>1</sup> Could you swim when you were four?

Sue No, I <sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, but I <sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ now. And you?

Mai Yes, I <sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. I learnt to swim when I was two.

Sue <sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ you send emails when you were four?

Mai No, I <sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. But my brother showed me how to send emails last year.

Sue And how many languages <sup>7</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ you speak when you were four?

Mai Only one. But now I <sup>8</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ speak two!





Look at the list. Complete the sentences with **could or couldn't**



Ten years ago ...	
drive a car	✓
use a computer	✗
speak Spanish	✓
pitch a tent	✗
run ten kilometres	✗
light a fire	✓
write computer programs	✓
play the guitar	✗
climb trees	✓



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