

## Expressing ABILITY

1. To talk about **an ability in the present**, we use "**can**" or "**be able to**"

- I **can** / **am able to** speak two languages.
- He **can** / **is able to** swim.
- My brother **can't** / **isn't able to** drive a car.

2. To talk about **a general ability in the past**, we use "**could**" or "**was / were able to**".

- I **could** / **was able to** run very fast.
- I **could** / **was able to** jump so high.

3. If we talk about **a specific success in the past**, we should only use "**was / were able to**".

Since the exam was difficult only a few students **could** / **were able to** pass it. (**managed to pass it**)

Mozart \_\_\_\_\_ compose little pieces of music even when he was five.  
(General ability)

We \_\_\_\_\_ reach to the top of the hill before it got dark yesterday.  
(Specific success in the past)

### **Attention:**

There is **no difference** between them when used **in a negative sentence**.

Because of the great financial difficulties, John **couldn't** / **wasn't able to** finish his university education.

4. We use "**can**" instead of "**be able to**" **in passive forms**.

This game \_\_\_\_\_ (play) by two or more players.

## Exercises

Complete the sentences with the correct form of either "can" or "be able to".

Only use "be able to" if absolutely necessary!

1. I haven't \_\_\_\_\_ concentrate recently at work. I don't know what it is.
  2. My brother \_\_\_\_\_ cook very well. He is a chef in a French restaurant.
  3. When he was only 2, my friend Lee \_\_\_\_\_ speak quite well.
  4. I have to go to a business dinner tomorrow night so I \_\_\_\_\_ (not) come to the party. I'm very sorry.
  5. Kevin lived in Italy for six years, so he must \_\_\_\_\_ speak Italian quite well. He will help you with your homework.
  6. This telephone is terrible. I \_\_\_\_\_ (not) hear you at all.
  7. When the car drove into the lake, one of the passengers \_\_\_\_\_ (not) open the door and had to be rescued.
  8. Despite the arrival of the storm, they \_\_\_\_\_ finish the football match.
  9. When I was very young, I used to \_\_\_\_\_ touch my toes, but I can't now!!
  10. The house was totally empty all day yesterday and I \_\_\_\_\_ finish that book I was reading.
  11. My mother tells me that her grandfather was one of the best musicians of his time in the city and \_\_\_\_\_ play the piano like a professional.
  12. I hope to \_\_\_\_\_ speak English very well after this course finishes.
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## Match the expressions and their meanings.

- a. We managed to score a goal in the last minute and win the match!
- b. We succeeded in scoring two goals in the first term. Now we just have to keep the match under control.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ = to accomplish an aim, especially in the manner desired
2. \_\_\_\_\_ = to accomplish an aim, especially with difficulty

## Structure

managed to score → manage + infinitive

succeeded in scoring → succeed + in + gerund

Talk to your classmates and share with them something you managed to do and something you succeeded in doing.