

can and could

A



He **can play** the piano.



can + infinitive (**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.
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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.
- ☐ A: **Can you swim?**
B: Yes, but I'm not a very good swimmer.
- ☐ A: **Can you change** twenty pounds?
B: 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 Britain, 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 moment, please? or **Could you** wait ... ?

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

- ☐ **Can I have** a glass of water, please? or **Can I get** ... ?

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

- ☐ **Can I** sit here?
- ☐ Tom, **could I** borrow your umbrella?

Exercises

30.1 Ask Steve if he can do these things:



10 kilometres

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

10

8

11

9

12

30.2 Complete these sentences. Use **can** or **can't** + one of these verbs:~~come~~ find hear see speak

- I'm sorry, but we can't come to your party next Saturday.
- I like this hotel room. You can see the mountains from the window.
- You are speaking very quietly. I can't hear you.
- Have you seen my bag? I can't find it.
- Catherine got the job because she can speak five languages.

30.3 Complete these sentences. Use **can't** or **couldn't** + one of these verbs:decide eat find go go ~~sleep~~

- I was tired, but I couldn't sleep.
- I wasn't hungry yesterday. I couldn't eat my dinner.
- Kate doesn't know what to do. She can't decide.
- I wanted to speak to Mark yesterday, but I couldn't find him.
- James can't go to the concert next Saturday. He has to work.
- Paula couldn't go to the meeting last week. She was ill.

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

① (open/door)



② (pass/salt)



③ (have/postcards)



④ (turn off /radio)



⑤ (borrow/newspaper)



⑥ (use/pen)

