

can, could, be able to (ability and possibility)

can / could

I can speak three languages fluently.
 Jenny can't come tonight. She's sick.
 My cousin could play the violin when she was three.
 They couldn't wait because they were in a hurry.
 Could you open the door for me, please?

(2 34))

- *can* is a modal verb. It only has a present form (which can be used with future meaning) and a past or conditional form (*could*).
- For all other tenses and forms, we use *be able to* + base form.

be able to + base form

- 1 Luke has been able to swim since he was three.
 I'd like to be able to ski.
 I love being able to stay in bed late on Sunday morning.
 You'll be able to practice your English in the US.
 2 Fortunately, I am able to accept your invitation.
 My colleagues weren't able to come to yesterday's meeting.

(2 35))



- 1 We use *be able to* + base form for ability and possibility, especially where there is no form of *can*, e.g., future, present perfect, infinitive and gerund, etc.
- 2 We sometimes use *be able to* in the present and past (instead of *can / could*), usually if we want to be more formal.

- a Complete with the correct form of *be able to* (+, -, or ?).

I've never been able to scuba dive.

- 1 Her cell phone has been turned off all morning, so I _____ talk to her yet.
- 2 I don't like noisy restaurants. I like _____ have a conversation without shouting.
- 3 I _____ leave home when I get a job.
- 4 We're having a party next Saturday. _____ you _____ come?
- 5 You need _____ swim before you can go in a canoe.
- 6 I'm going to France next week, but I don't speak French. I hate _____ communicate with people.
- 7 Fortunately, firefighters _____ rescue all of the people trapped inside the burning house.
- 8 I'm very sorry, but we _____ go to your wedding next month. We'll be on vacation.
- 9 I'm feeling a little worse. _____ you _____ contact the doctor yet?
- 10 The manager _____ see you right now because he's in a meeting.

- b Circle the correct form. Check ✓ if both are possible.



I've always wanted to can / be able to perform.

- 1 My little boy couldn't / wasn't able to speak until he was almost two years old.
- 2 She's much better after her operation. She'll can / be able to walk again in a few months.
- 3 He hasn't could / been able to fix my bike yet. He'll do it tomorrow.
- 4 It's the weekend at last! I love can / being able to go out with my friends.
- 5 When we lived on the coast, we used to can / be able to go to the beach every day.
- 6 I can't / 'm not able to send any emails right now. My computer isn't working.
- 7 I could / was able to read before I started school.
- 8 We won't can / be able to go on vacation this year because we need to spend a lot of money on the house.
- 9 Linda hasn't been able to / couldn't find a job.
- 10 Alex can / is able to speak Korean fluently after living in Seoul for ten years.

◀ p.34