

Can and could for ability



Can and **could** are modal verbs. We use them to talk about possibility, ability and permission. We use **can** and **can't** to talk about our present abilities.

Subject	can / can't	Base form
I / he / she / it / we / you / they	can can't	swim 1000 metres. dance.

Can	Subject	Base form
Can	I / we / she / it / we / you / they	swim 1000 metres? dance?

We use **could** and **couldn't** to talk about our abilities in the past. We often use a past time phrase.

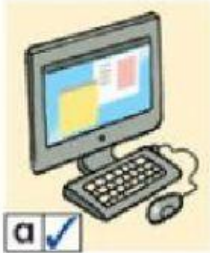
Subject	could / couldn't	Base form	Past time phrase
I / he / she / it / we / you / they	could couldn't	swim	when I was eight. when she was three. this morning. yesterday. in 2006.

We often use **can** and **could** for ability to talk about our senses.

I can smell smoke. I can't taste it.
Can you hear me? I couldn't see it.

14.1 Listen and tick ✓ the correct picture.

► What can Sarah do?



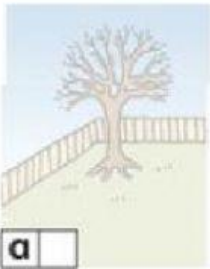
1 Why is Max late?



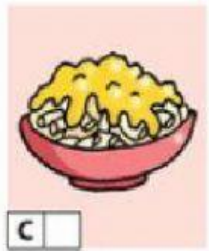
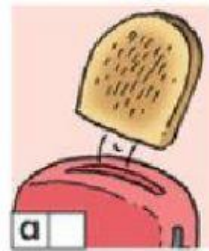
4 How far can Emily's dad run?



2 What was the weather like this morning?



5 What can Edward cook?



3 Where's Sarah?





Complete the conversations with *can*, *can't*, *could* or *couldn't*. Then act the conversations in pairs.

- ▶ How far can you run?
 About two kilometres.
- 1 _____ you dance?
 No, but I _____ when I was young.
- 2 How did you know there was a fire?
 I _____ see lots of smoke.
- 3 Does Leo know how to cook?
 No, he _____ even make a sandwich!
- 4 Did you ride your bike yesterday?
 No, I didn't. It was broken and I _____ fix it.
- 5 What's that noise?
 What noise? I _____ hear anything.
- 6 Does Libby like playing the piano?
 Yes, she loves it. She _____ play some songs when she was three.

Can and could for permission



We use **can** and **can't** to give and refuse permission.

You	can	go ...
	can't	have ...



We use **can** and **could** to ask for permission.
Could is more formal than **can**.

Can	I	have ...?
Could	we	go ...?



*6 Complete the sentences with **can** or **can't**.



► You can't use your phone here.



1 You _____ listen to music here.



2 You _____ take photos here.



3 You _____ play ball games here.

Tick ✓ the correct answer.



► Can I _____ it now?

- a ☐ to eat b ☒ eat

1 No, you _____ use your mobile phone in class.

- a ☐ can b ☐ can't

2 _____ say something, please?

- a ☐ I could b ☐ Could I

3 Yes, you _____ go to the party.

- a ☐ can b ☐ could

4 I'm sorry. You _____ play football here.

- a ☐ can't b ☐ couldn't

5 Excuse me, Mrs Bond, _____ I photocopy this?

- a ☐ could b ☐ can't

6 Could I take this book home, please?

- a ☐ I'm sorry but you couldn't.
b ☐ I'm sorry but you can't.