

Ability: *can, could, be able to*

GRAMMAR ZONE

can, able to

- we use **can** or **am/are/is able to** + verb for an ability to do something now

Martha **can speak** Russian and German.
She **is also able to speak** French.

- we also use this for a certain future ability

Tom **can come** camping with us next week.

could

- we use **could** or **was/were able to** + verb for an ability to do something in the past

Jack **couldn't understand** why he had failed the exam.

will be able to

- we use **will be able to** + verb for a possible ability in the future

I hope I **will be able to finish** in time.

to be able to

- we use **to be able to** for the infinitive form. We often use this after verbs like **want, hope, would like, etc.**

Selena **hoped to be able to see** you before you left.
It's important **to be able to forgive**.

Grammar File, page 170



'When I was young I **could do** a back flip too!'

- 1 Choose the best form of the verb to complete the sentences.

- 1 Mrs Davis *can/be able to* give us a lift now her car's been repaired.
- 2 Barbara hopes *being/to be able to* practise her German while she's in Austria.
- 3 When the children were in the fifth year they *couldn't/can't* use the school shop at lunch time.
- 4 *Will/Are* you be able to record the show on Saturday for me?
- 5 I looked everywhere this morning, but I *can't/couldn't* find that book that I borrowed from you.
- 6 John's mother *couldn't/didn't* afford to pay for the skiing trip.
- 7 Helen knows how to knit pretty well, but she *couldn't/can't* crochet.
- 8 After trying three times, at last the climber *was/could be able to* reach the summit.

- 2 Write the missing word in the second sentence so it means the same as the first.

- 1 It wasn't possible for girls to go to school in Ancient Roman times.
Girls go to school in ancient Roman times.
- 2 Tina will be allowed to take her English exam a year early.
Tina take her English exam a year early.
- 3 Jack learned how to tie his shoe laces when he was only three.
When he was only three, Jack tie his shoelaces.
- 4 The library always opens at nine o'clock in the morning.
You use the library until nine o'clock in the morning.
- 5 Sam is asking if he can have Friday off school this week.
Sam asks: '..... I be able to have Friday off school this week?'
- 6 Oliver wants to play football much better.
Oliver wants to able to play football much better.
- 7 It was just not possible for Ian to win the trophy this year.
Ian just able to win the trophy this year.
- 8 Now we use carbon dating in archaeology we can tell how old things are.
We now able to tell how old things are, using carbon dating in archaeology.