

GRAMMAR Modal verbs for ability

Present

She **can/can't** paint.

They're **able to/aren't able to** read quickly.

Past

I **could/couldn't** follow the plot.

Jack **was/wasn't able to** go to the library.

He **managed/didn't manage to** read the book in a day.

Future

I'll **be/won't be able to** finish this today.

Questions

Can/Could he paint? No, he **can't/couldn't**.

Is/Was she **able to** read quickly? Yes, she **is/was**.

Will you be able to read more books? No, I **won't**.

Did he **manage to** finish the book? Yes, he **did**.

Use

We use **could** to describe general ability in the past.

We use **managed to** to describe specific achievements in the past.

1 ● Match the sentence halves.

- 1 ☒ I couldn't
- 2 ☐ Sheila can
- 3 ☐ Unfortunately, Keith won't
- 4 ☐ Will you be able
- 5 ☐ We can't
- 6 ☐ I managed
- a read in five languages!
- b offer you a place at our college, I'm afraid.
- c ~~understand the French film — they all spoke very fast.~~
- d to find the book you wanted.
- e to finish the book this week?
- f be able to come to the party.

2 ● Choose the correct option.

- 1 **Were** / Did you able to ride a bike when you were five?
- 2 Ben and Eve won't **be able** / **able** to come to the play.
- 3 Can you **write** / **to write** poetry?
- 4 I **managed to read** / **reading** fifteen books over the summer!
- 5 The theatre was so full of people that I **couldn't** / **could** see the stage.
- 6 I started writing a novel, but I didn't **manage** / **manage to** finish it.

3 ●● Choose the word or phrase which does NOT fit each sentence.

- 1 ____ to speak to your mum last night?
a Did you manage b Were you able
c **Could** you
- 2 I ____ post that package for you – sorry.
a can't b managed to
c won't be able to
- 3 I ____ read when I was three, but only slowly.
a can b could
c was able to
- 4 I ____ drive, but I'm taking lessons.
a can't b 'm not able to
c managed to
- 5 The book was difficult to follow, but I ____ finish it.
a couldn't b **was able to**
c managed to

4 ●●● Complete the text with one word in each gap.

Thank you, Ms Palmer!

When I was younger, I wasn't very good at anything. I couldn't swim, I wasn't ¹**able** to read very well and I ²_____n't ride a bike on my own until I was twelve! People used to ask me things like, '3_____ you say "thank you" in French?' and I just looked down and felt embarrassed. The problem was I just didn't have any confidence. I ⁴_____ able to do these things if I really tried, but I didn't believe I could.

Then a new French teacher came to our school. Her name was Ms Palmer and she gave me lots of attention. She really encouraged me and said things like, 'If you ⁵_____ to read this text, I'll let you play that French game on your tablet for ten minutes.' It worked, and not only did my French improve, but now I ⁶_____ able

to do lots of other things and I feel more confident too. Next year, I'm hoping I will ⁷_____ able to learn Spanish and Italian too. Merci beaucoup, Ms Palmer!