



Ability (can/could): Can vs Could vs Be Able To

Fill in the blank with the correct option.

- I ___ play chess. Do you want a game?
a) can
b) could
c) was able to
d) will be able to
- When I was a child, I ___ run very fast.
a) can
b) am able to
c) could
d) will be able to
- After the surgery, she ___ walk again. (specific past achievement)
a) could
b) was able to
c) can
d) has been able to
- They ___ join us for dinner next Friday. They're going away.
a) can't able to
b) couldn't
c) don't can
d) won't be able to
- ___ you hear that noise? Something is beeping.
a) Can
b) Could
c) Are able to
d) Were able to
- My grandmother ___ make the most delicious cakes when she was alive.
a) can
b) is able to
c) could
d) was able
- He ___ speak any English before he moved to the UK, but now he speaks fluently.
a) can't
b) isn't able to
c) wasn't able
d) couldn't
- We ___ travel more freely since we bought a car.
a) can
b) have been able to
c) could
d) was able to
- The firefighters ___ rescue everyone from the building. (specific past achievement)
a) could
b) can
c) were able to
d) will be able to
- She ___ play the violin beautifully. She practises every day.
a) can
b) could
c) was able to
d) will be able to
- You'll ___ see the doctor at 3 p.m. He's free then.
a) can
b) could
c) able
d) be able to



Answers

1. a) can
2. c) could
3. b) was able to
4. d) won't be able to
5. a) Can
6. c) could
7. d) couldn't
8. b) have been able to
9. c) were able to
10. a) can
11. d) be able to
12. b) was able to
13. a) can
14. c) could
15. b) will be able to
16. d) were able to
17. c) Could
18. b) can
19. d) couldn't
20. a) be able to



Explanations

1. “can” (a)

This is about present ability — use 'can'. 'Do you want a game?' shows the offer is happening now.

2. “could” (c)

'When I was a child' is a past time period. Use 'could' for a general ability in the past.

3. “was able to” (b)

For a specific achievement (she succeeded in walking after surgery), use 'was able to'. 'Could' is for general past ability, not one-time successes.

4. “won't be able to” (d)

'Next Friday' is future. Use 'won't be able to' for future inability. 'Can't able to' is not English.

5. “Can” (a)

This is about right now — use 'Can' for present perception. 'Something is beeping' confirms the present moment.

6. “could” (c)

'When she was alive' is past. Use 'could' for a general ability she had throughout that period.

7. “couldn't” (d)

'Before he moved' is past. Use 'couldn't' for past inability. The contrast with 'now' confirms the past reference.

8. “have been able to” (b)

'Since we bought' requires present perfect. Use 'have been able to' — ability from a past point continuing to now.

9. “were able to” (c)

Rescuing everyone was a specific successful action. Use 'were able to' for one-time past achievements.

10. “can” (a)

'Practises every day' shows this is present. Use 'can' for current ability.

11. “be able to” (d)

After 'will' (here contracted to 'll), use 'be able to'. Two modals (will + can) cannot go together.

12. “was able to” (b)

He actually succeeded in swimming across — a specific achievement. Use 'was able to', not 'could'.

13. “can” (a)

Use 'can' with perception verbs (smell, see, hear) for present sensory experiences.

14. “could” (c)

'When she was young' = general past ability. Use 'could'. The contrast with 'can't now' confirms the time shift.

15. “will be able to” (b)

'Next week' is future. Use 'will be able to' for a future ability or possibility.

16. “were able to” (d)

They succeeded in finishing despite difficulties — a specific achievement. Use 'were able to'.

17. “Could” (c)

'When you were at school' is past. Use 'Could' to ask about general past ability.

18. “can” (b)

'He's really handy' (present) shows current ability. Use 'can' for a present skill.

19. “couldn't” (d)

'There was' (past) tells us this happened in the past. Use 'couldn't' for past inability.

20. “be able to” (a)

After 'to' (it's important to ...), use 'be able to'. Modal verbs like 'can' and 'could' cannot follow 'to'.