

Lesson Plan: Expressing ability and permission (can, could, be allowed to)

Level	Beginner / Intermediate (A2-B1)
Time	50-60 minutes
Skills	Grammar, speaking
Focus	Can/can't for ability and permission; could for past ability; be allowed to for formal permission

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Use can and can't for present ability and permission correctly
- Use could and couldn't for past ability
- Use be allowed to for formal permission contexts
- Understand the difference between ability (can do it) and permission (allowed to do it)

TARGET LANGUAGE & EXAMPLES

Can — ability (present)

- I can swim. / She can speak three languages.
- He can't drive — he never learned.
- Can you play the guitar?

Can — permission (present)

- You can leave early today. (permission given)
- Can I borrow your pen? (asking for permission)
- You can't park here. (permission denied)

Could — past ability

- When I was young, I could run very fast.
- She could speak French as a child but she's forgotten it.
- I couldn't swim until I was 10.

Be allowed to — formal/official permission

- You are not allowed to use your phone in the exam.
- Are we allowed to use a dictionary?
- Passengers are allowed to bring one piece of hand luggage.

Meaning & Nuance

Structure	Meaning	Example
can	present ability	She can play chess.
can't	inability / prohibition	You can't smoke here.
could	past ability (general)	He could read at age 4.

couldn't	past inability	I couldn't sleep last night.
be allowed to	formal permission	Mobile phones are not allowed in class.
managed to	succeeded on one specific occasion	I managed to finish the report before the deadline.

LESSON PROCEDURE

1. Warm-up: Talent show (5 min)

Task: Students say one thing they can do and one thing they can't.

- 'I can cook but I can't sing.' → creates a relaxed, personal context.

2. Presentation (10 min)

Task: Teach can for ability and permission. Then could for past ability.

- Be allowed to: more official — rules and regulations.
- Managed to: succeeded in doing something specific once (not general ability).

3. Past ability storytelling (15 min)

Task: Students write 5 sentences about what they could/couldn't do as a child.

- Share with a partner. Ask follow-up questions: 'When did you learn to ride a bike?'

4. Permission roleplay (15 min)

Task: Scenarios requiring asking for and giving/denying permission.

- At school: asking to hand in work late.
- At work: asking to leave early.
- At a hotel: asking about facilities.

→ Practise both *can I / am I allowed to*.

TEACHER NOTES

- Managed to vs. could: I managed to finish (one specific success) vs. I could swim (general ability) — a subtle but important distinction at B1.
- Be allowed to is underused by learners who default to 'can' for all permission contexts.

EXTENSION / HOMEWORK

Choose one or more:

1. Write 8 sentences about rules in a place you know (school, gym, workplace) using be allowed to.
2. Write a paragraph comparing things you could and couldn't do as a child vs. now.
3. Write a dialogue asking for permission in 3 different formal contexts.