

Lesson Plan: Speaking about ability (can, could, be able to)

Level: Intermediate (B1)

Time: 60–75 minutes

Objectives

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

- Use **can, could, and be able to** accurately to talk about ability
- Distinguish between **present, past, and specific situations**
- Communicate about skills, achievements, and abilities in real-life contexts

Target Language

Present ability:

- *I can swim.*
- *She can't drive.*

Past general ability:

- *I could read when I was four.*

Specific past ability / achievement:

- *I was able to fix the problem yesterday.*

Future ability:

- *I'll be able to help you tomorrow.*

Questions

- *Can you play an instrument?*
- *Could you run fast when you were a child?*
- *Were you able to finish the test?*

Materials

- Whiteboard / slides
- Ability cards (optional)
- Worksheet (gap-fill + sentence correction)

Lesson Procedure

1. Warm-up (10 minutes)

Aim: Activate schema and introduce the topic

- Write on the board:
"What can you do really well?"
- Students think individually, then discuss in pairs.
- Elicit answers and write examples:

I can cook well.

I can't sing.

Ask follow-up questions:

Could you do this when you were younger?

2. Presentation (15 minutes)

Aim: Clarify meaning, form, and use

a) Context

Tell a short story:

"When I was a child, I could run very fast. Last year, I was able to run a marathon, but today I can't run very far."

Ask concept-checking questions:

- Is this about skills? (Yes)
- Is it about now, the past, or a specific moment? (All)

b) Form & Use

Write on the board:

1. CAN – Present ability

- *I can speak English.*
- *She can't drive.*
- *Can you swim?*

→ Used for **general ability now**

2. COULD – Past general ability

- *I could ride a bike when I was six.*
- *He couldn't read at that age.*

→ Used for **general ability in the past**

3. BE ABLE TO – Ability in specific situations

- *I was able to finish the project yesterday.*
- *We'll be able to travel next year.*

→ Used for:

- **Specific past achievements**
- **Future ability**
- Situations where **can/could** are not possible

Highlight:

could ≠ successful action

was able to = success

3. Controlled practice (10–15 minutes)

Aim: Build accuracy

Activity 1: Fill in the blanks

Students complete sentences:

1. When I was younger, I ____ swim very well.
2. I ____ help you tomorrow.
3. She ____ finish the test because it was too difficult.
4. Were you ____ to solve the problem?

Check answers together.

Activity 2: Choose the best option

Students choose **can / could / was able to**:

- I ____ speak three languages now.
- He ____ run very fast when he was a teenager.
- They ____ escape from the building during the fire.

4. Semi-controlled practice (10 minutes)

Aim: Connect grammar with personal meaning

Find someone who...

Students walk around and ask questions:

- *Can you cook a special dish?*
- *Could you play any sports as a child?*
- *Were you able to do something difficult recently?*

Students take notes and report back.

5. Freer practice (15 minutes)

Aim: Encourage fluency and confidence

Activity: "My abilities timeline"

Students draw a simple timeline:

- Past
- Present
- Future

They write:

- 1 ability in the past (*could*)
- 1 ability now (*can*)
- 1 future ability (*will be able to*)

Students share in pairs or small groups.

6. Feedback & error correction (5–10 minutes)

1. Write common errors on the board:

 *I could finish the exam yesterday*
 *I was able to finish the exam yesterday*

2. Students correct together.

3. Quick recap:

- When do we use **can**?
- When do we use **could**?
- When do we need **be able to**?

Optional homework

Write 8–10 sentences about your abilities:

- Past (childhood)
- Present
- A recent challenge
- A future goal