



ENGLISH GRAMMAR 2 INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

Unit 26 – can, could and (be) able to

tienganh



Can, could and (be) able to

CAN

A

Chúng ta dùng “**can**” để nói một việc gì đó:

- Có thể xảy ra - *We **can see** the lake from our hotel.*
- Được phép thực hiện - *‘I don’t have a pen.’ ‘You **can use** mine.’*
- Hoặc ai đó có khả năng thực hiện một việc gì đó - *Can you **speak** any foreign languages?*

Subject + can + infinitive (can do, can see, etc.)

- EX1: I **can come** and see you tomorrow if you like.
- EX2: The word ‘dream’ **can be** a noun or a verb.

The negative is **can’t (= cannot)**:

- EX3: I’m afraid I **can’t** come to the party on Friday.

Can, could and (be) able to

BE ABLE TO

B

- ❖ You can say that somebody **is able to** do something, but **can** is more usual:
 - EX4: We **are able to see** the lake from our hotel.
- ❖ But can has only two forms: **can** (present) and **could** (past). So sometimes it is necessary to use **(be) able to**.

EX5A: I **can't** sleep.

EX5B: I **haven't been able to sleep** recently.

EX6A: Tom **can come** tomorrow.

EX6B: Tom **might be able to come** tomorrow.

EX7A: Maria **can speak** French, Spanish and English.

EX7B: Applicants for the job **must be able to speak** two foreign languages.

Can, could and (be) able to

COULD

C

Sometimes **could** is the past of **can**. We use **could** especially with:

see / hear / smell / taste / feel / remember / understand

- EX8: We had a lovely room in the hotel. We **could see** the lake.
- EX9: As soon as I walked into the room, I **could smell** gas.
- EX10: I was sitting at the back of the theatre and **couldn't hear** very well.

We also use **could** to say that somebody **had the ability to do something**, or **was allowed to do something**:

- EX11: My grandfather **could speak** five languages.
- EX12: We were totally free. We **could do** what we wanted. (= we were allowed to do)

Can, could and (be) able to

COULD V.S BE ABLE TO

D

COULD AND WAS ABLE TO

- ❖ We use **could** for general ability and with **see, hear** etc. :
 - EX13: My grandfather could speak five languages.
 - EX14: I could see them, but not very clearly.
- ❖ But to say that somebody succeeded in doing something in a specific situation, we normally use **was/were able to** or **managed to** (not could):
 - EX15: The fire spread quickly, but everybody **was able to escape**. (not could escape)
 - EX16: I didn't know where Max was, but **I managed to find** him in the end. (not could find)
- Compare:
 - EX17: Jack was an excellent tennis player when he was younger. He **could beat** anybody.
(= he was good enough to beat anybody, he had the ability)
 - EX18: but Jack and Andy played a match yesterday. Andy played well, but Jack **managed to beat** him.
(= he succeeded in beating him this time)
- ❖ The negative **couldn't (could not)** is possible in all situations:
 - EX19: My grandfather couldn't swim.
 - EX20: I looked for Max everywhere, but I couldn't find him.
 - EX21: Andy played well, but he couldn't beat Jack.

Can, could and (be) able to

BÀI TẬP NHANH

Select the option which best completes the sentences below:

They didn't want to come with us at first,
but we _____ persuade them.

A. could

B. can

C. was able to

D. managed to

Can, could and (be) able to

TÓM TẮT

1. **“Can + infinitive”** chỉ một việc gì đó có *khả năng* (xác suất) xảy ra, được phép xảy ra, hoặc **có đủ năng lực** để làm một việc gì đó. (có thể làm) - **Can you speak any foreign languages?**
2. Thể phủ định của **can** là **can't (=cannot)**.
3. **“Could”** là dạng quá khứ của **can**. Trong các thì khác, chúng ta có thể dùng **“be able to”** để diễn đạt nghĩa của **“can”** - *Tom might be able to come tomorrow.*
4. Thể phủ định của **could** là **couldn't (=could not)**
5. Khi nói một người nào đó đã thực hiện thành công một việc gì đó trong một hoàn cảnh nhất định, chúng ta dùng **“be able to”** hoặc **“managed to”** thay cho could - *I didn't know where Max was, but I managed to find him in the end.*