MODAL VERBS OF ABILITY

CEFR Level B1 — Intermediate

English Language Worksheets | 4 Worksheets + Answer Key

Worksheet 1: 'could' or 'was able to'?

General ability vs one successful achievement.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

PART A — **Look and learn**

Meaning	Form	Example
general ability in the past	could	She could swim at the age of four.
one success, one occasion	was/were able to, managed to	The swimmer was able to reach the shore.
negative — either is fine	couldn't / wasn't able to	I couldn't open the door. / I wasn't able to open it.
with see, hear, feel, understand	could (even for one occasion)	I could hear a noise upstairs.

*The rule in one line: for a **single past success** use **was able to / managed to**, not **could**.*

PART B — **could or was/were able to?**

Underline the correct option. Sometimes both are possible.

1. The fire spread quickly, but everyone (could / was able to) escape.
2. My grandfather (could / was able to) speak five languages.
3. After hours of searching, we (could / were able to) find the keys.
4. I (could / was able to) hear voices in the next room.
5. She (couldn't / wasn't able to) come to the meeting yesterday.
6. As a child he (could / was able to) recite the whole poem.
7. Despite the storm, the pilot (could / was able to) land safely.
8. I (could / was able to) see the mountains from my window.

PART C — **Explain the difference**

Explain the difference in meaning between the two sentences.

1. (a) He could run 10 km. (b) He was able to run 10 km yesterday.
   Difference: _____
2. (a) She could pass the exam. (b) She managed to pass the exam.
   Difference: _____

Score: _____ / 12

Worksheet 2: manage to, succeed in, be capable of

Other ways to talk about ability and achievement.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

PART A — **Look and learn**

Structure	Note	Example
manage to + verb	success after difficulty	We managed to finish on time.
succeed in + -ing	formal; always -ing	She succeeded in persuading them.
be capable of + -ing	has the capacity	He is capable of running a marathon.
have the ability to + verb	formal	She has the ability to lead.
know how to + verb	learned skill	I know how to change a tyre.

Watch the form! ***manage to do*** *but* ***succeed in doing***; ***capable of doing***.

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. After three attempts, they succeeded in _____ the summit. *(reach)*
2. Do you know how _____ this machine? *(use)*
3. She is perfectly capable of _____ the decision herself. *(make)*
4. We managed _____ two tickets at the last minute. *(get)*
5. He has the ability _____ complex ideas simply. *(explain)*
6. Nobody succeeded in _____ him. *(convince)*

PART B — **Say it another way**

Rewrite each sentence with the structure in brackets. Keep the meaning.

1. After a long search, we found the missing file. *(manage to)*
   → _____
2. She can run a marathon. *(be capable of)*
   → _____
3. They finally persuaded the committee. *(succeed in)*
   → _____
4. I can play chess. *(know how to)*
   → _____

Score: _____ / 10

Worksheet 3: Ability, Permission or Possibility?

'Can' and 'could' do more than one job.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

PART A — **Look and learn**

Meaning	Example	Test
ability	She can speak Greek.	= she is able to
permission	You can leave now.	= you are allowed to
possibility	It can be cold in April.	= it is sometimes
request	Can you pass the salt?	= please do this
polite request	Could you help me?	more polite than ‘can’

Write ABILITY, PERMISSION, POSSIBILITY or REQUEST for each sentence.

1. Could you close the window, please? → _____
2. Students can use the library until 10 p.m. → _____
3. My sister can play three instruments. → _____
4. The roads can be dangerous in winter. → _____
5. You can't park here. → _____
6. Can you lift this box on your own? → _____

PART B — **Correct the mistakes**

Each sentence has ONE mistake. Write the correction.

1. “Yesterday I could finally fix the printer.”
   Correction: _____
2. “She succeeded to convince the board.”
   Correction: _____
3. “He is capable to lift 100 kg.”
   Correction: _____
4. “We managed finishing the report on time.”
   Correction: _____
5. “Next month I can travel to Japan.” (future ability)
   Correction: _____

Score: _____ / 11

Worksheet 4: Reading & Writing

Ability in a real story, then in your own.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

PART A — **Analytical reading**

> *As a boy, Petar could hold his breath longer than anyone in the village. He couldn't read music, but he could play any tune after hearing it once. When the flood came, he was able to pull three people from the water before the current took the bridge. He never managed to explain how he had known where to look. 'I could hear them,' he said. 'That's all.' Today, at eighty, he is no longer able to swim, but he still knows how to listen.*

1. Find one example each of: general past ability, a single past success, and an inability. Quote them.

_____

_____

_____

2. Why 'was able to pull three people' and not 'could pull'?

_____

_____

3. 'I could hear them' refers to one occasion. Why is 'could' correct here?

_____

_____

4. Rewrite 'he is no longer able to swim' using 'can'. Which is more formal?

_____

PART B — **Write a profile**

Write a profile (80–100 words) of a person with an unusual skill. Use at least FIVE ability structures, including ONE 'was able to' for a single success and ONE 'manage to' or 'succeed in'. Underline them.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Word count: _____ Structures underlined: _____ / 5

Score: _____ / 14

ANSWER KEY & TEACHER NOTES

For teacher use only — B1 Level Worksheets

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Worksheet 1 – could vs was able to

#	Question / Item	Answer / Guidance
B	Choices 1–8	**1 was able to (single success), 2 could (general ability), 3 were able to (single success), 4 could (verb of perception), 5 both correct (negative), 6 could (general ability), 7 was able to (single success), 8 could (verb of perception)**
C1	run 10 km	**(a) states a general capacity — he was the kind of runner who could do it. (b) states that on one occasion he actually did it.**
C2	pass the exam	**(a) says she had the ability, and does not tell us whether she took or passed it. (b) says she actually passed, and implies it was difficult.**

Worksheet 2 – manage / succeed / capable

#	Question / Item	Answer / Guidance
A	Forms 1–6	**1 reaching, 2 to use, 3 making, 4 to get, 5 to explain, 6 convincing**
B1	manage to	**After a long search, we managed to find the missing file.**
B2	be capable of	**She is capable of running a marathon.**
B3	succeed in	**They finally succeeded in persuading the committee.**
B4	know how to	**I know how to play chess.**

Worksheet 3 – Meaning & Mistakes

#	Question / Item	Answer / Guidance
A	Meanings 1–6	**1 REQUEST, 2 PERMISSION, 3 ABILITY, 4 POSSIBILITY, 5 PERMISSION, 6 ABILITY**
B1	could finally fix	**Yesterday I was finally able to fix the printer. (single past success → 'was able to')**
B2	succeeded to convince	**She succeeded in convincing the board. (succeed in + -ing)**
B3	capable to lift	**He is capable of lifting 100 kg. (capable of + -ing)**
B4	managed finishing	**We managed to finish the report on time. (manage to + verb)**
B5	Next month I can travel	**Next month I will be able to travel to Japan. ('can' has no future form)**

Worksheet 4 – Reading & Writing

#	Question / Item	Answer / Guidance
A1	Three examples	**General past ability: 'could hold his breath longer than anyone' / 'could play any tune'. Single past success: 'was able to pull three people from the water'. Inability: 'couldn't read music' / 'never managed to explain' / 'is no longer able to swim'.**

#	Question / Item	Answer / Guidance
A2	‘was able to pull’	**It describes one specific achievement on one occasion, completed successfully against difficulty. ‘Could pull’ would suggest only a general capacity, not that he actually did it.**
A3	‘I could hear them’	**Verbs of perception (hear, see, feel, smell, understand) take ‘could’ even for a single occasion. ‘I was able to hear them’ would sound unnatural.**
A4	‘no longer able to swim’	**‘He can no longer swim.’ — ‘be able to’ is the more formal of the two.**
B	Profile (80–100 words)	**Up to 6 marks: 5 for five ability structures used correctly (including one ‘was able to’ and one ‘manage to / succeed in’), 1 for coherence and accuracy.**