

## MODAL VERBS ABILITY

### CAN

#### STRUCTURE

+/- Subj. + can / can't + base form.

? QW + Can + subj. + base form?

#### USE

We use can for **ABILITY** in the **PRESENT**.

- She **can** drive a car.
- John **can** speak Spanish.
- I **cannot** hear you. (I **can't** hear you.)
- **Can** you hear me?

### COULD

#### STRUCTURE

+/- Subj. + could / couldn't + base form.

? QW + Could + subj. + base form?

#### USE

We use could for **ABILITY** in the **PAST**.

- I **could** swim when I was 5 years old.
- My grandmother **could** speak seven languages.
- When we arrived home, we **could not** open the door. (...**couldn't** open the door.)
- **Could** you understand what he was saying?

### BE ABLE TO

#### STRUCTURE

+/- Subj. + + **be** (in the correct tense) + able to + base form.

? QW + **be** (in the correct tense) + subj. + able to + base form?

#### USE

We use be able to for **ABILITY** in **ALL TENSES**.

*I was able to drive...*

*I will be able to drive...*

*I have been able to drive...*

- I **have been able to** swim since I was five. (present perfect)
- You **will be able to** speak perfect English very soon. (future simple)
- I would like **to be able to** fly an airplane. (infinitive)

**\* BE ABLE TO FOR ABILITY \***

We use **be able to** to express ability. "Able" is an adjective meaning: having the power, skill or means to do something. If we say "I **am able to** swim", it is like saying "I **can** swim". We sometimes use **be able to** instead of "can" or "could" for ability. **Be able to** is possible in all tenses - but "**CAN**" is possible only **in the present** and "**COULD**" is possible only in **the past for ability**. In addition, we use **WAS/WERE ABLE TO** when **we talk about one special / specific occasion** in the past. Look at these examples:

The pilot was able to land the plane safely. (on that occasion).

I could design a web page when I was still a kid. (general ability at any time in that period).