

# Past Ability (Could and Couldn't)

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Answer in full sentences using could or couldn't. Give a reason or tell the story when you can.

Practice could and couldn't for past ability. Start with simple memories or choose prompts for longer stories and discussion.

## Simple starters (A1–A2)

01. What songs could you sing when you were little?
02. Which languages could your grandparents speak?
03. Which animals could you draw when you were young?
04. What could you teach a younger child when you were ten?
05. How well could you swim when you were ten?
06. Who could run faster than you at school?
07. What English words could you say before your first English class?

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## Elementary (A2)

08. Tell me about a time you couldn't find something you needed.
09. What could you do on a computer before anyone taught you?
10. What could your grandparents make by hand?
11. What could you remember easily at school?
12. When you got your first phone, what couldn't you do without help?
13. Who could do something that everyone in your class wanted to learn?
14. Tell me about a time you couldn't open something.
15. What could you do better than an older brother, sister, or cousin?
16. Which TV characters could you imitate when you were younger?
17. Which adult could you beat at a game when you were young?
18. What couldn't you understand in your first English lessons?
19. Who could explain things when your teacher's explanation didn't help?
20. Tell me about a time you couldn't hear what someone was saying.
21. What couldn't you put together without help?
22. What could your favorite teacher do besides teach?
23. What couldn't you do that other children your age found easy?
24. What could you do well as a child that you can't do well now?
25. Which sports, games, or musical instruments could you play when you were younger?

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### Intermediate (B1)

26. Tell me about a trick you could do that people wanted to see again.
27. What couldn't you get right in your first driving lessons?
28. What could you do as a teenager that your parents never knew about?
29. Who could stay calm when everyone else in your old class or team got nervous?
30. Tell me about a time you couldn't stop laughing.
31. What couldn't you do at the end of a course, even though you passed?
32. Tell me about a time you couldn't keep up with someone.
33. What could you recognize by its sound when you were younger?
34. What could other children do that you wished you could do too?
35. What couldn't you do as a young adult because you hadn't learned how?
36. What could an older person you knew do that surprised you?

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### Upper Intermediate (B2)

37. Tell me about a time you couldn't tell whether someone was joking.
38. Tell me about a time you couldn't explain a problem because you didn't know the right words.
39. What did people assume you could do because of your job or studies, even though you couldn't?
40. What could you do as part of a team that you struggled to do alone?
41. What could you do well enough to help others, even though you still felt like a beginner?
42. Who could do something well but couldn't teach you how?
43. What could a person you disliked do that you had to admire?

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### Extended discussion (B2–C1)

44. Tell me about someone who could do something amazing but couldn't convince others to take it seriously.
45. What couldn't you do because you were trying to do it perfectly?
46. What could you do in one language that you struggled to do in another, even when you spoke both well?
47. When did you realize that someone you admired couldn't do everything you had assumed they could?
48. Looking back at a skill you once felt confident about, what couldn't you do as well as you thought?
49. What could you do convincingly even though you didn't understand it very well?
50. Tell me about a time you disagreed with someone about what a child could handle independently.