

Talking about present and past ability bluff

Present and past abilities lying game

Your partner will choose one of the sentences below for you to complete. Say a whole sentence, using your imagination if you can't think of anything true. Perhaps after asking you for more details, the other students will guess if your sentence is true or false.

- I can...
- I (still) can't...
- I can't... yet.
- I could... but I can't anymore.
- I was able to... but I can't anymore.
- I couldn't... when I was... but I can now.
- I wasn't able to... when I was... but I can now.
- I couldn't... when I was...
- I wasn't able to... when...
- I couldn't... until I was...
- I wasn't able to... until I was....
- Luckily, I was able to... when...
- Luckily, I managed to... when...
- Unfortunately, I wasn't able to...
- Unfortunately, I couldn't...
- Unfortunately, I didn't manage to... when...

Past abilities grammar presentation

Why can't you say "Luckily, I could... when..."? Why would "manage to" be okay in that sentence?

Why can't you say "I didn't manage to... when I was... but I can now"? Why would "could" be okay in that sentence?

Which forms can be used to talk about past general abilities, e.g. when you are a certain age?

Which forms can be used to talk about particular moments in time, e.g. when you are telling a story? How about with negative verbs?

Which form is the most generally useable to talk about past abilities, and so is the safe choice if you aren't sure which ones are right?

Suggested answers

Why can't you say "Luckily, I could... when...?"

"Could" is only used for a general ability, not for doing something at a particular point in time as in a story.

Why can't you say "I didn't manage to... when I was... but I can now"?

"Manage to" is only used for doing something at a particular point in time, not for a general ability in the past.

Which forms can be used to talk about past general abilities, e.g. when you are a certain age?

"could", "was/were able to"

Which forms can be used to talk about particular moments in time, e.g. when you are telling a story?

"was able to/ were able to", "managed to"

How about with negative verbs?

"couldn't", "wasn't able to/ weren't able to", "didn't manage to"

Which form is the most generally useable to talk about past abilities, and so is the safe choice if you aren't sure which ones are right?

"was/ were able to"