

Present and past ability sentence completion games

Play the game or games below that your teacher tells you to, in each case using the suggested sentences on the next page.

Present and past ability sentence completion things in common

Tell and ask your partner about present and past abilities and try to make sentences such as those below which are true for both of you.

Present and past ability sentence completion guessing game

Perhaps after a few minutes filling in some of the sentences, choose one of the phrases below and say just the part that you completed it with (not the part that is written below). See if your partner can guess which sentence you put those words in.

Useful phrases for doing the activity

“No, that can’t be true, because...”

“Well, that could be true, but in fact...”

“That is true, but it’s not the sentence I was thinking of. Please try again”

“Yes, that’s right. It’s your turn”

Present and past ability sentence completion bluffing game

Your partner will choose one of the sentences below for you. Say a complete 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.

Past ability grammar presentation

Ask about any phrases below which you couldn’t use or couldn’t understand the different between, working together to make suitable sentences each time.

Discuss these questions together in groups and then as a class:

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

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

Which verb below is the most generally useable to talk about the past, and so the safe choice if you aren’t sure which other verbs are right?

Present and past ability sentences to complete

- I can _____ very well.
- I can _____ fairly well.
- I can't _____ very well.
- I can't _____ at all.
- I've been trying to, but I still can't _____
- I can't _____ yet, but I hope to be able to soon.
- 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 younger but I can now.
- I couldn't _____ when I was in my early teens but I can now.
- I wasn't able to _____ when I was in primary school but I can now.
- I couldn't _____ until I was six years old.
- I wasn't able to _____ until I was nine.
- Luckily, I was able to _____ when I needed to.
- Luckily, I managed to _____ when it was necessary.
- Unfortunately, I wasn't able to _____ when the need arose.
- Unfortunately, I couldn't _____ when I had to.
- Unfortunately, I didn't manage to _____ when someone asked me to.

-----cover, fold or cut-----

Suggested answers

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