

A



He **can** play the piano.



can + infinitive (can do / can play / can come etc.):

I/we/you/they he/she/it	can can't (cannot)	do play see come etc.	can	I/we/you/they he/she/it	do? play? see? come? etc.
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B

I can do something = I *know how* to do it, or *it is possible* for me to do it:

- I **can play** the piano. My brother **can play** the piano too.
- Sarah **can speak** Italian, but she **can't speak** Spanish.
- 'Can you swim?' 'Yes, but I'm not a very good swimmer.'
- 'Can you change twenty pounds?' 'I'm sorry, I **can't**.'
- I'm having a party next week, but Paul and Rachel **can't come**.

C

For the past (yesterday / last week etc.), we use **could/couldn't**:

- When I was young, I **could run** very fast.
- Before Maria came to Britain, she **couldn't understand** much English. Now she **can understand** everything.
- I was tired last night, but I **couldn't sleep**.
- I had a party last week, but Paul and Rachel **couldn't come**.

D

Can you ... ? Could you ... ? Can I ... ? Could I ... ?

We use **Can you ... ?** or **Could you ... ?** when we ask people to do things:

- Can you** open the door, please? or **Could you** open the door, please?
- Can you** wait a moment, please? or **Could you** wait ... ?

We use **Can I have ... ?** or **Could I have ... ?** to ask for something:

- (*in a shop*) **Can I have** these postcards, please? or **Could I have ... ?**

Can I ... ? or **Could I ... ?** = is it OK to do something?:


- Tom, **can I** borrow your umbrella? or Tom, **could I** borrow your umbrella?
- (*on the phone*) Hello, **can I** speak to Gary, please? or ... **could I** speak ... ?

Exercises

Unit 30

30.1 Ask Steve if he can do these things:



You  Steve

1 Can you swim?
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6

Can you do these things? Write sentences about yourself. Use I can or I can't.

- 7 I 10
- 8 11
- 9 12

30.2 Complete these sentences. Use can or can't + one of these verbs:

~~come~~ find hear see speak

- 1 I'm sorry, but we can't come to your party next Saturday.
- 2 I like this hotel room. You the mountains from the window.
- 3 You are speaking very quietly. I you.
- 4 Have you seen my bag? I it.
- 5 Catherine got the job because she five languages.

30.3 Complete these sentences. Use can't or couldn't + one of these verbs:

decide eat find go go ~~sleep~~

- 1 I was tired, but I couldn't sleep.
- 2 I wasn't hungry yesterday. I my dinner.
- 3 Kate doesn't know what to do. She
- 4 I wanted to speak to Martin yesterday, but I him.
- 5 James to the concert next Saturday. He has to work.
- 6 Paula to the meeting last week. She was ill.

30.4 What do you say in these situations? Use can or could.

