

TALKING ABOUT ABILITY

PRACTICE WORKSHEET

B2-C1 English | Grammar, Vocabulary and Cambridge-Style Practice

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class/Level: _____

Score: _____ / 100

LEARNING GOALS

- recognise and use can, could and be able to accurately in different time frames;
- distinguish general past ability from success in one particular situation;
- use natural expressions such as manage to, be capable of, be good at and struggle to;
- apply ability language in Cambridge-style transformations, speaking and writing tasks.

How to use this worksheet

Complete Sections 1-8 without looking back at the lesson. Check your work with the answer key, then use the speaking and writing tasks to activate the language.

Teacher note: Suggested total score = 100 points. Open-ended speaking and writing tasks can be assessed separately.

1

Choose the Correct Form

12 points

Complete each sentence with the most natural form of *can*, *could* or *be able to*. More than one word may be needed.

1. Although I understand some Italian, I _____ speak it fluently yet.
2. My sister _____ read before she started school.
3. After next week's training, everyone _____ use the new booking system.
4. I'm sorry, but I _____ attend yesterday's meeting because I was ill.
5. _____ you hear the speaker clearly at the back of the room?
6. Since the software was updated, we _____ process orders much more quickly.
7. At the moment, the technicians _____ identify the cause of the fault.
8. I hope I _____ work abroad one day.
9. When my grandfather was young, he _____ repair almost anything.
10. We haven't _____ contact the supplier this morning.
11. The new lift means wheelchair users _____ reach every floor.
12. Do you think you _____ finish the report by Friday?

Score: _____ / 12

2

Past Ability: General or Particular?

12 points

Complete the sentences with *could/couldn't*, *was/were able to*, or *managed to*. Use the most natural form and change the tense where necessary.

1. When Elena was at university, she _____ study all night without getting tired.
2. Despite the thick smoke, the firefighters _____ rescue everyone from the building.
3. I searched everywhere, but I _____ find my passport before the taxi arrived.
4. As a child, Marcus _____ imitate several different accents.
5. After three unsuccessful attempts, we finally _____ open the damaged file.
6. Before the injury, I _____ run ten kilometres quite comfortably.
7. The road was blocked, but the driver _____ find another route to the airport.
8. Our old computer was so slow that it _____ run the design program properly.
9. Even though she had never used the machine before, she _____ operate it after a short explanation.
10. When they lived by the sea, the children _____ swim almost every day.
11. Because the line was very poor, I _____ understand what the customer was saying.
12. The team worked until midnight and _____ complete the project on time.

Score: _____ / 12

3

Complete the Ability Expressions

15 points

Complete each sentence with one expression from the word bank. Change the form if necessary. Use each expression once.

EXPRESSIONS: be good at | know how to | manage to | succeed in | be capable of | find it difficult to | have a talent for | have a knack for | be skilled in | be competent at | struggle to | be useless at | not have a clue | enable someone to | be unable to

1. Although the task looked impossible, the engineers _____ finding a safe solution.
2. She _____ explaining complicated grammar in a very simple way.
3. I _____ remember people's names, especially when I meet several people at once.
4. The new software will _____ work from home more efficiently.
5. He is highly _____ dealing with difficult negotiations.
6. Don't do it for me—I _____ completing the form myself.
7. We _____ how to restart the system, so we called technical support.
8. After several phone calls, I finally _____ speak to the person in charge.
9. Our daughter _____ music and can reproduce a melody after hearing it once.
10. I _____ DIY; even a simple shelf becomes a major adventure.
11. All reception staff must _____ using the booking platform.
12. My uncle _____ repair old clocks, although he has never studied engineering.
13. Because of the power cut, the laboratory _____ continue the experiment.
14. Do you _____ use a fire extinguisher safely?
15. Some learners _____ understand native speakers when they speak very quickly.

Score: _____ / 15

4

Grammar Patterns

12 points

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the verb in brackets. Pay attention to infinitives, -ing forms and prepositions.

1. She is very good at _____ clear and persuasive reports. (WRITE)
2. We managed _____ the missing documents before the deadline. (FIND)
3. Are you capable of _____ the whole department on your own? (RUN)
4. He knows how _____ the heating system safely. (OPERATE)
5. The company succeeded in _____ its delivery times. (REDUCE)
6. I would like to be able _____ more confidently in public. (SPEAK)
7. Many students struggle _____ the difference between these forms. (REMEMBER)
8. She has a talent for _____ people feel relaxed. (MAKE)
9. The course will enable participants _____ more effective presentations. (GIVE)

10. I find it hard _____ when there is loud music nearby. (CONCENTRATE)
11. He is skilled in _____ complex data. (ANALYSE)
12. We were unable _____ the meeting because the train was cancelled. (ATTEND)

Score: _____ / 12

5

Find and Correct the Mistake

10 points

Each sentence contains one mistake connected with ability language. Rewrite it correctly.

1. She can to speak three languages fluently.

2. I want to can use English confidently at work.

3. Yesterday, I could fix the printer after several attempts.

4. He is capable to manage the project without help.

5. We succeeded to reach an agreement before lunch.

6. I am very good in remembering faces.

7. The new system enables us working more efficiently.

8. She has a real talent to tell amusing stories.

9. I find difficult to concentrate in a noisy office.

10. He did not managed to complete the task on time.

Score: _____ / 10

6

Cambridge-Style Key Word Transformations

10 points

Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first. Use the word given. Use between two and five words, including the word given.

1. I cannot attend the conference next week.
ABLE
I will not _____ the conference next week.
2. Eventually, the technicians repaired the system.
MANAGED
The technicians eventually _____ the system.
3. When Leo was six, he knew how to read music.
COULD
When Leo was six, he _____ music.
4. This old machine cannot produce 1,000 units a day.
CAPABLE

This old machine _____ 1,000 units a day.

5. She finds it easy to work under pressure.

DIFFICULT

She does not _____ under pressure.

6. The company reduced its costs successfully.

SUCCEEDED

The company _____ its costs.

7. I have no idea how this program works.

CLUE

I _____ this program works.

8. He is very talented at making people laugh.

TALENT

He _____ people laugh.

9. The training lets staff deal with complaints more effectively.

ENABLES

The training _____ with complaints more effectively.

10. It was impossible for us to contact the client.

UNABLE

We _____ the client.

Score: _____ / 10

7

Multiple-Choice Cloze

12 points

Read the text and choose the best answer (A, B, C or D) for each gap.

LEARNING TO SPEAK IN PUBLIC

Until last year, I was convinced that I was simply not (1) _____ of speaking confidently in front of an audience. At school, I had always (2) _____ to express my ideas when everyone was looking at me. However, my new job required me to give regular presentations, so I decided to take a short course. At first, I could barely (3) _____ my voice steady, but the trainer taught us how to organise our ideas and control our breathing. After several weeks, I (4) _____ to deliver a five-minute talk without reading from my notes. I was not brilliant, but I had (5) _____ in completing it. The course also (6) _____ me to understand that confidence is a skill rather than a fixed quality. I am now quite (7) _____ at preparing clear slides, and I have developed a (8) _____ for beginning presentations with a short story. I still (9) _____ to answer unexpected questions, but I no longer feel completely (10) _____ at public speaking. Next month, I will (11) _____ able to present our project at an international meeting. A year ago, I would not have believed I was (12) _____ of doing that.

	A	B	C	D
1	capable	competent	possible	skilled
2	struggled	managed	enabled	succeeded
3	remain	keep	continue	hold
4	could	succeeded	managed	capable
5	succeeded	enabled	known	competent
6	made	allowed	enabled	managed
7	good	talent	capable	knack

	A	B	C	D
8	skill	knack	competence	success
9	manage	struggle	fail	unable
10	useless	unable	incapable	difficult
11	can	be	have	become
12	capable	talented	good	able

Score: _____ / 12

8

Reading: How Ability Develops

17 points

Read the article and complete Tasks A and B.

ABILITY IS NOT AS FIXED AS IT SEEMS

People often describe themselves by saying, 'I'm good at languages' or 'I'm useless at technology', as though ability were a permanent quality. Natural talent certainly plays a part in how quickly somebody learns, but it is only one element. Experience, opportunity, teaching, motivation and the amount of deliberate practice can all influence what a person eventually becomes able to do.

A useful distinction can be made between knowledge and performance. Someone may know how to carry out a task but be temporarily unable to perform it because of tiredness, anxiety or unsuitable conditions. A confident swimmer, for example, may not be able to swim safely in rough water. Conversely, a beginner may manage to complete a particular task once, although they have not yet developed a reliable general ability.

The way people practise also matters. Repeating an activity without thinking may make it more familiar, but focused practice is usually more effective. This involves identifying a specific weakness, attempting a suitable challenge, receiving feedback and trying again. A learner who struggles to understand fast speech might work with a short recording, listen several times and gradually increase the speed rather than simply watching hours of television.

Beliefs about ability can influence progress too. People who regard every mistake as proof that they lack talent may avoid difficult tasks. Those who see mistakes as information are more likely to continue. This does not mean that everyone can become equally skilled at everything. It means that present performance does not always show the full limit of a person's potential.

Finally, abilities are often transferable. Learning to organise a complex project can improve planning skills in other areas, while performing music may strengthen concentration and confidence. When people recognise these connections, they may discover that they are capable of far more than they first assumed.

Task A: Choose the best answer. (8 points)**1. What is the writer's main point in the first paragraph?**

- A. Ability is determined entirely by natural talent. B. Several factors can affect the development of ability. C. People usually receive too much formal teaching. D. Motivation matters only at the beginning.

2. What distinction does the writer make in paragraph 2?

- A. Physical and intellectual ability B. General knowledge and school achievement C. Knowing how to do something and being able to do it in a particular situation D. Natural talent and professional training

3. Why is the swimmer mentioned?

- A. To show that conditions can temporarily limit performance B. To prove that swimming is mainly a natural talent C. To recommend practising in dangerous water D. To show that beginners often perform better than experts

4. What does focused practice involve?

- A. Repeating the easiest part of a task B. Working on a particular weakness and using feedback C. Avoiding tasks until confidence improves D. Practising for as many hours as possible

5. What strategy is suggested for understanding fast speech?

- A. Watching television without subtitles for several hours B. Learning every unknown word first C. Using a short recording and increasing the challenge gradually D. Listening only to very slow speakers

6. How can beliefs about mistakes affect progress?

A. Mistakes always reveal a lack of talent. B. Fear of mistakes may cause people to avoid challenges. C. Confident people stop noticing their mistakes. D. Mistakes are useful only for advanced learners.

7. What does the writer say about human potential?

A. Everyone can become equally good at every skill. B. Current performance may not represent a person's full potential. C. Talent becomes less important as people get older. D. People should focus only on their strongest ability.

8. What does transferable mean in the final paragraph?

A. Useful in more than one situation B. Easy to teach to another person C. Impossible to measure accurately D. Dependent on natural talent

8B**Vocabulary in Context***9 points*

Find a word or phrase in the article that means the following.

1. a natural ability to do something well: _____
2. a carefully planned type of training intended to improve a particular part of performance: _____
3. not possible at a particular time or in particular circumstances: _____
4. succeed in doing one particular thing, often with difficulty: _____
5. able to be trusted or repeated successfully: _____
6. comments or information that help someone improve: _____
7. find something difficult and make a great effort: _____
8. the abilities someone may develop in the future: _____
9. able to be used in a different activity or situation: _____

Score: _____ / 17**Task C: Personal response (not scored)**

- Which ability have you developed mainly through practice rather than natural talent?

- Do you agree that mistakes should be treated as information? Why?

- Which skills from your work or studies are transferable to other areas?

- What kind of feedback helps people improve most effectively?

A. Speaking Practice

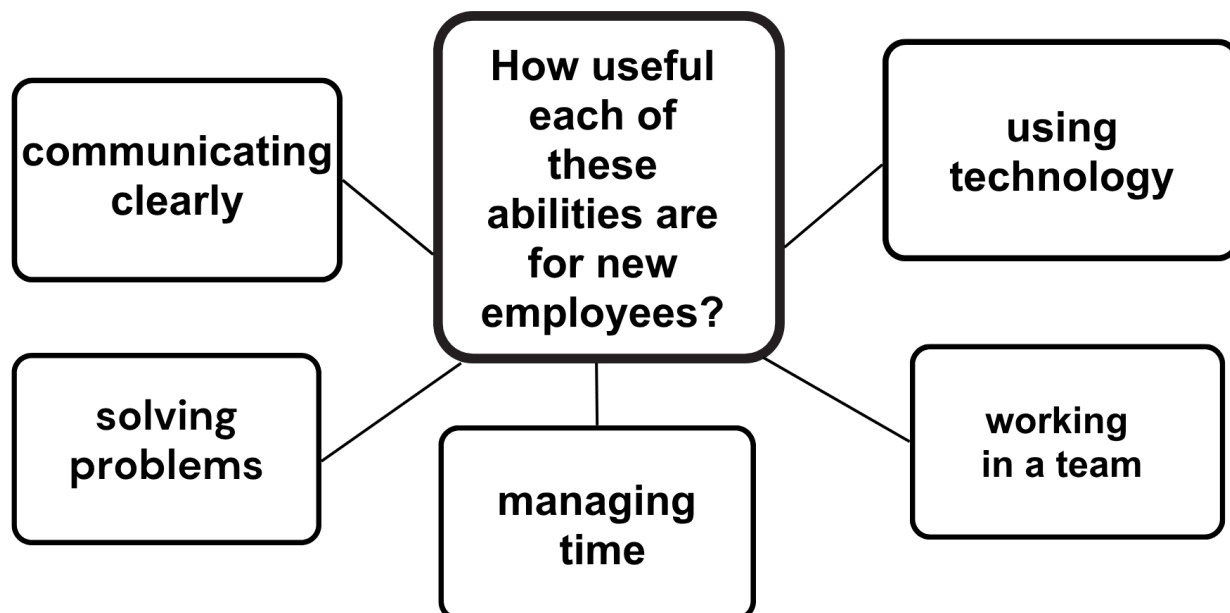
Answer the questions in pairs or small groups. Try to use at least two expressions from the box in each answer.

USEFUL LANGUAGE: be able to | manage to | be capable of | be good at | struggle to | have a knack for | be skilled in | find it difficult to | enable someone to | succeed in

1. What are you naturally good at, and what have you learnt through practice?
2. Which practical skill should every adult know how to do?
3. What do many people find difficult when they start learning English?
4. Have you ever managed to do something you had thought was impossible?
5. Which abilities are most valuable in your profession?
6. Can technology enable people to learn more effectively? How?
7. Is it better to specialise in one skill or become reasonably competent in several?
8. What ability would you most like to develop during the next year?

B. Cambridge-Style Collaborative Task

A company is preparing a training programme for new employees. Discuss how useful each of these abilities would be, then decide which two should receive the most attention.



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C. Writing Task

Write an essay of 190-220 words on the following topic:

Schools should teach practical abilities as well as academic subjects. Do you agree?

Write about: (1) preparation for adult life, (2) academic achievement, and (3) your own idea.

Useful expressions: be capable of • develop practical skills • enable students to • be competent in • struggle to • succeed in • transferable skills

WRITING PAGE

Schools should teach practical abilities as well as academic subjects. Do you agree?

Word count: _____

ANSWER KEY

Talking about Ability Practice Worksheet

1. Choose the Correct Form

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. can't / cannot | 7. can't / are unable to |
| 2. could | 8. will be able to |
| 3. will be able to | 9. could |
| 4. couldn't / was unable to | 10. been able to |
| 5. Can | 11. can / are able to |
| 6. have been able to | 12. will be able to |

2. Past Ability: General or Particular?

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. could | 7. was able to / managed to |
| 2. were able to / managed to | 8. couldn't |
| 3. couldn't / was unable to | 9. was able to / managed to |
| 4. could | 10. could |
| 5. managed to / were able to | 11. couldn't |
| 6. could | 12. managed to / were able to |

3. Complete the Ability Expressions

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. succeeded in | 9. has a talent for |
| 2. is good at | 10. am useless at |
| 3. find it difficult to | 11. be competent at |
| 4. enable employees/people to | 12. has a knack for |
| 5. skilled in | 13. was unable to |
| 6. am capable of | 14. know how to |
| 7. did not have a clue | 15. struggle to |
| 8. managed to | |

4. Grammar Patterns

1. writing
2. to find
3. running
4. to operate
5. reducing
6. to speak
7. to remember
8. making
9. to give
10. to concentrate
11. analysing
12. to attend

5. Find and Correct the Mistake

1. She can speak three languages fluently.
2. I want to be able to use English confidently at work.
3. Yesterday, I was able to / managed to fix the printer after several attempts.
4. He is capable of managing the project without help.
5. We succeeded in reaching an agreement before lunch.
6. I am very good at remembering faces.
7. The new system enables us to work more efficiently.

8. She has a real talent for telling amusing stories.
9. I find it difficult to concentrate in a noisy office.
10. He did not manage to complete the task on time.

6. Key Word Transformations

1. be able to attend
2. managed to repair
3. could read
4. is not capable of producing
5. find it difficult to work
6. succeeded in reducing
7. do not have a clue how
8. has a talent for making
9. enables staff to deal
10. were unable to contact

7. Multiple-Choice Cloze

1 A 2 A 3 B 4 C 5 A 6 C 7 A 8 B 9 B 10 A 11 B 12 A

8A. Reading: Choose the Best Answer

1 B 2 C 3 A 4 B 5 C 6 B 7 B 8 A

8B. Vocabulary in Context

1. talent
2. deliberate practice
3. temporarily unable
4. manage to complete
5. reliable
6. feedback
7. struggle to
8. potential
9. transferable

Suggested Assessment for Section 9

Speaking: Award up to 5 points for range and accurate use of ability expressions, 5 points for interaction and development of ideas, and 5 points for fluency and clarity.

Writing: Assess content, communicative achievement, organisation and language. Encourage accurate use of at least six expressions from the lesson.

Suggested Score Bands

Score	Level	Next step
90-100	Excellent control	Use the language in a timed Cambridge-style task.
75-89	Strong	Review errors and practise the transformations again.
60-74	Developing	Revise grammar patterns and past-ability contrasts.
Below 60	Needs revision	Return to the lesson and complete the worksheet again later.

End of worksheet

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