**Modals of Ability:**

**CAN / COULD, BE ABLE TO**

- **A) In general:**
  - CAN has two forms only: *can* and *could*. There is no -ing form, no past participle, and no to-infinitive.
  - There cannot be more than one modal in a group.
  - CAN / COULD, but *never* BE ABLE TO, can also be used for permission (“Can/Could I borrow your pencil?”), possibility (“It's possible that...” = “It could be that...”), and asking favours (“Can/Could you pass me the salt, please?”).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Future with WILL, Combinations with other modals, Perfect Tenses, All uses of the -ing form, To-infinitive.</th>
<th>BE ABLE TO</th>
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- **Examples:**
  1. *I will be able to write.* NOT *I will can write.*
  2. *I may be able to write.* NOT *I may can write.*
  3. *I haven't been able to write.* NOT *I haven't can write.*
  4. *Being able to write is important.* NOT *Canning write is important.*
  5. *I want to be able to write.* NOT *I want to can write.*

- **B) Present Simple -Can, Am/Is/Are able to:**
  - Normally, CAN and BE ABLE TO can be used without difference in meaning, but CAN is more usual -it's shorter- and not as formal.
  - If we want to make a suggestion, we use CAN.

  - **Examples:**
    1. Emma *can/is able* to write computer programs.
    2. If we earn enough money, we *can'll be able to* go to the beach in summer.

    **BUT:**

    3. We can read 1984, if you want. NOT *We'll be able to read 1984, if you want.*
• **C: Past Simple: Could, Was/Were able to:**

  ◦ Normally, **COULD** for past ability and **WAS/WERE ABLE TO** are interchangeable—they mean the same.
  ◦ Only if we are talking about a past one-time activity is there a difference: We use **WAS/WERE ABLE TO**, *not** **COULD*:

      ▪ He *could* swim when he was seven.  => General.
      ▪ It was difficult, but we *were able* to swim across the river.  => Specific.

        ➔ In the specific sense, the synonym is “managed to”.
        ➔ In most cases, both work just fine.

• **D: Exercises**

Fill in the gaps. Be careful with the tenses.

1. Suddenly the lights went out. We ___________ see a thing.
2. The computer went wrong, but Emma ___________ put it right again.
3. I broke my leg, but now ___________ walk around again.
4. There was a big party last night. You ___________ hear the music a mile away.
5. I'm sorry I haven't ___________ call earlier. I was so busy!
6. It would be nice ___________ take that course, but I don't have time.
7. The train was so full I ___________ find a seat anywhere.
8. Have you ___________ get her on the phone?
9. Jake ___________ read music when he was five -before he ___________ spell!
10. I'm ill, so I won't ___________ go to the party.