

English Ladder

Teaching Guide

Explanation of "Was able to" vs. "Could"

A concise classroom guide with lesson flow, teaching cues, and a ready-to-use answer key built around the same English Ladder concept sheet.



Grammar Concepts #35

Key Points

Assurance Against Confusion:

Visual anchor

Use the concept poster to spotlight the main language pattern in **Explanation of "Was able to" vs. "Could"** and keep the explanation visible during practice and discussion.

ENGLISH LADDER

Concept #35 ► **Was able to vs Could**

We do not use **"could"** for something accomplished in the past.
Instead we use **"was able to"**.

Past

→

←

Future

"was able to" Past Accomplishment	"could have" Past Possibility	"could" + "if" Future Possibility	"can" + "if"/"when" Future Certainty
I was able to pass the exam.	I could have passed the exam if I had studied.	I could pass the exam if I study.	I can pass the exam if I study.
He was able to buy a car.	He could have bought a car if he had worked harder.	He could buy a car if he works harder.	He can buy a car if he works harder.
They were able to talk to Tom.	They could have talked to Tom if they had gone to his party.	They could talk to Tom if they go to his party.	They can talk to Tom when they go to his party.

You can also use **"would have been able to talk"** here.

You can also use **"may be able to"** here.

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At a Glance

<p>Lesson focus Explanation of "Was able to" vs. "Could"</p>	<p>Suggested timing 45-60 minutes</p>
<p>Core objective Students explain the target pattern clearly and apply it accurately in controlled practice and discussion.</p>	<p>Materials Student PDF, the concept image, board space, and time for partner checking.</p>

Suggested Lesson Flow

Warm-up	Display the concept image and ask learners to predict the rule behind Explanation of "Was able to" vs. "Could" before reading the explanation.
Model	Walk through the Core Idea and the sections on Key Points, Assurance Against Confusion. Pause after each part so students can restate the pattern in plain English.
Guided practice	Project two or three examples from the concept sheet and ask pairs to explain why each choice works, not just what the answer is.
Independent work	Use the examples on the concept sheet for quick written or oral checks.
Closure	Ask students to create one new sentence or mini-example of their own that follows the same pattern.



Likely Learner Errors

- Learners may overgeneralize the first pattern they notice. Keep returning to **Key Points, Assurance Against Confusion:** and ask students to explain what changes from one example to the next.
- Long explanations can hide the signal word or structure. Have students underline the exact phrase that tells them which form, pattern, or response is needed.
- If students can choose an answer but cannot explain it, ask them to justify their choice using words taken directly from the concept sheet.

Differentiation and Delivery Notes

- Support: teach one section at a time, then send students back to **the examples** or the practice set so they can apply the same rule immediately.
- Pair work: let students compare answers aloud before you reveal the key. The explanation step is as important as the final answer.
- Extension: ask stronger students to write two fresh examples or a short dialogue that uses the same target language accurately.

Model Language from the Concept Sheet

- Examples: Correct: I was able to pass the exam....
- Common Confusion: You might be tempted to use "could" here, thinking that since it's in the past, "could" would be appropriate....
- Examples: Correct: I could have passed the exam if I had studied....
- Common Confusion: Students might mistakenly use "was able to" when referring to missed opportunities....
- Examples: Correct: I could pass the exam if I study....
- Common Confusion: Some students may confuse "could" with "can" when discussing future possibilities....



Answer Key

Use this key for whole-class feedback or fast marking.

No practice items were available on this page.