CAPITOLO

6

Can You Do It?

"I can't do it" is a sentence. "I can't do it yet" is a plan.

OBIETTIVI

1. I can talk about my abilities and skills with *can / can't*, and say how well I do things with adverbs of manner.
2. I can talk about past ability with *could / couldn't* and about future ability with *will be able to*.
3. I can ask for permission, make requests and offers, and answer politely.
4. I can use the words of technology and digital life: devices, apps, *download, log in, charge*.
5. I can write a short, polite email to apply for a place at a summer camp or in a school club.
6. I can talk about two pioneers of computing, Ada Lovelace and Alan Turing.

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Can you ride a bike? Can you cook pasta for four people? Can you find a lost file on a laptop? Every day we use and talk about our **skills**: the things we are able to do because we practise them. In English the key word for all of this is a very short one: *can*. With *can* you talk about what you are able to do, what is possible and what is allowed; with *could* and *be able to* you travel in time, from your childhood to your future. And with *Can I…? Could you…? Shall I…?* you ask for things and offer help politely — a vital skill when you are a guest in another country.

In this unit you visit Tech Tutors, a club where students from Sam's school help older people with technology; you spend Giulia's first evening with the Taylors in Bristol; you read Aoife's application for a summer camp; and you meet two British pioneers of computing — one with a surprising link to Turin.

6.1 Vocabulary: Skills, Devices and Digital Life

6.1.1 Abilities and skills

An **ability** *(ita: capacità)* is something that you can do: physical (swimming, juggling), artistic (drawing, singing), practical (cooking, fixing a bike) or mental (speaking a foreign language, solving a puzzle). A *skill* is an ability that you learn and practise; a **talent** is a natural ability. Many skills are verb + noun *collocations*, as in Unit 3: we **play** an instrument, **ride** a bike, **speak** a language, **write** code.

Tabella 6.1 Abilities and skills

Sport and the body	Art and music	Practical skills	Languages and technology
swim	draw *(disegnare)*	cook a meal	speak French
ride a bike / a horse	paint	bake a cake	translate a text
run fast	sing	fix a bike	write code *(programmare)*
dive	dance	sew *(cucire)*	touch-type *(scrivere senza guardare)*
ski / skate	play the guitar / the piano	look after a pet	edit a video
juggle *(fare giocoleria)*	take good photos	do first aid	use a spreadsheet

To talk about how good you are at something, use **be good at** + a noun or a verb in *-ing*: *Callum is good at football. Aoife is good at drawing. I'm not very good at maths.* The opposite is *be bad at*, and the word for a person with a lot of skill is an *expert*. Notice that the preposition is **at**, not *in*:

✗*She's good in English* → ✓*She's good at English*. Remember also that musical instruments take *the* (*play the piano*), but sports do not (*play tennis*).

6.1.2 Technology and devices

A **device** *(ita: dispositivo)* is a machine made for a particular job, usually an electronic one: a *smartphone*, a *tablet*, a *laptop* (a computer you can carry), a *desktop* computer, a pair of *headphones*. Figura 6.1 shows the parts of a laptop and of a smartphone. A *touchscreen* reacts when you touch it; on a laptop you move the pointer with the *touchpad* or a *mouse*. You connect a device to a **charger** with a *cable*; when the battery is empty, it is *flat* (BrE) or *dead*.

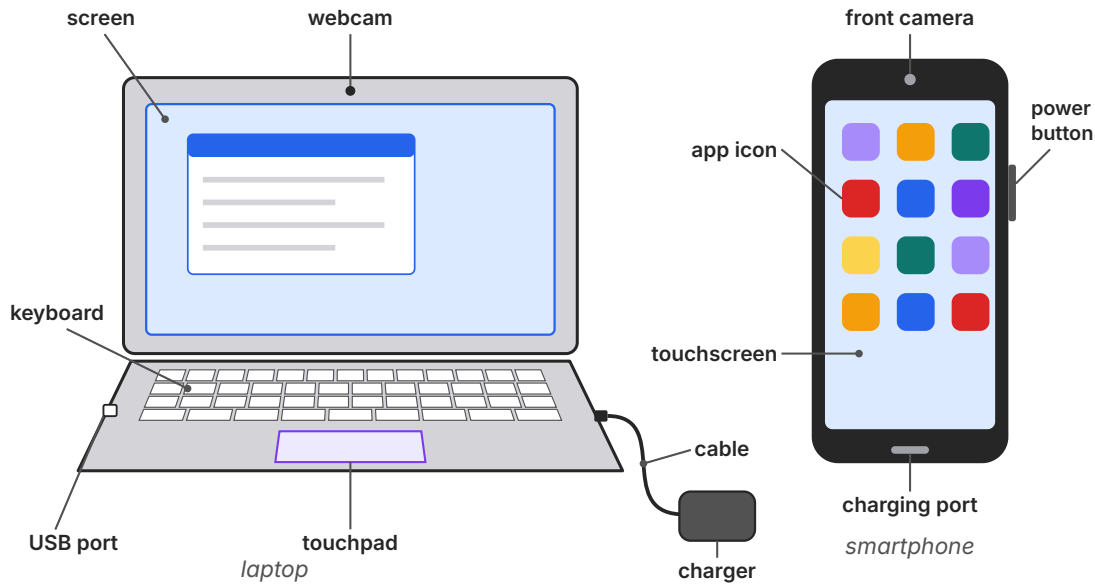


Figura 6.1 The parts of a laptop and of a smartphone. You *charge* both devices through a cable connected to a charger; the laptop also has a USB port for other cables and accessories.

6.1.3 Digital life: verbs

Many words of digital life are **phrasal verbs**: a verb + a small word like *in, out, up*, with a special meaning. You *log in* to a website with your username and *password*, and *log out* when you finish; you *sign up* for a new account. You *download* a file from the internet and *upload* a photo to it. See Tabella 6.2.

Tabella 6.2 Verbs for digital life

Verb	Meaning	Example
download / **upload**	copy from / to the internet	Can I download this app? I upload my videos on Sundays.
log in / **log out**	enter / leave an account	Log in with your school email.
sign up	create a new account	Sign up for the newsletter.
charge	put electricity into a battery	My phone is charging.
install / **update**	put a program on a device / get the newest version	The laptop is updating. Please wait.
save / **delete**	keep / remove a file	Save your work every ten minutes!
tap / **swipe** / **scroll**	touch / move your finger across / move up or down a screen	Swipe left to see the next photo.
share / **post**	show to other people / put online	Don't share your password!
attach	add a file to an email	I can't attach the photo: it's too big.

An **app** is short for *application*, a program for a phone or a tablet. When you are connected to the internet (by *Wi-Fi*, for example) you are *online*; when you aren't, you are *offline*. In Britain people say *mobile* (AmE *cell phone*) or simply *phone*.

6.1.4 Adverbs of manner

An adjective describes a noun (*a careful driver*); an **adverb of manner** describes a verb: it tells us *how* somebody does something (*She drives carefully*). These are the Italian adverbs in *-mente*; in English most of them end in **-ly** (Tabella 6.3).

Tabella 6.3 Adverbs of manner: spelling

Adjective	Rule	Adverb
slow, quick, careful, bad, polite	most adjectives: + *-ly*	slowly, quickly, carefully, badly, politely
easy, happy, noisy	consonant + *-y* → *-ily*	easily, happily, noisily
gentle, terrible, possible	consonant + *-le* → *-ly*	gently, terribly, possibly
automatic, basic	*-ic* → *-ically* (exception: *public* → *publicly*)	automatically, basically
full	*-ll* → *-lly*	fully
good	irregular	**well**
fast, hard, late, early	same form as the adjective	**fast, hard, late, early**

The irregular adverbs are the most important ones. *Good* is an adjective, and its adverb is **well**: *Sam is a good cook. He cooks well. Fast, hard, late* and *early* have the same form as adjectives and adverbs: *a fast car*, *she runs fast*; *a hard exam*, *they work hard*; *a late bus*, *she always arrives late*. Some adjectives already end in *-ly* — *friendly, lovely, lonely, ugly, silly* — and they have no adverb form, so we say *in a friendly way*.

Adverbs of manner go **after the verb**, or after the object: *She speaks English very well*, never between the verb and its object. To ask about the level of a skill, use *How well…?*: *How well can you swim? — Quite well, but not very fast.*

ERRORE FREQUENTE

Good o well? Hard o hardly? *Good* è un aggettivo (accompagna un nome o segue *be*); *well* è l'avverbio (accompagna un verbo).
✗ *She speaks good English very good.* → ✓ *She speaks good English.* / ✓ *She speaks English very well.*
Attenzione anche alla posizione: ✗ *She speaks very well English.* → ✓ *She speaks English very well.* (l'avverbio non separa il verbo dal complemento oggetto).
Infine, *hardly* e *lately* **non** sono gli avverbi di *hard* e *late*: *hardly* significa "a malapena, quasi non", *lately* significa "ultimamente". ✗ *I work hardly.* → ✓ *I work hard.* (lavoro sodo).

6.2 Reading: Tech Tutors

Before you read. Who helps you when you have a problem with your phone or your computer? Who do *you* help? Can your grandparents use a smartphone? Look at the title and the first paragraph of the article: what do you think a "tech tutor" does?

Tech Tutors: when teenagers become the teachers

From the Hillside Academy school magazine

Every Wednesday at four o'clock, the community room of our local library is full of noise. Twelve students from Hillside Academy are sitting at long tables next to people who are sixty, seventy and even ninety years old. On the tables there are tablets, smartphones, laptops, chargers, glasses and a lot of cups of tea. This is **Tech Tutors**, a volunteer club where teenagers help older people with technology.

Callum Reid, 15, is one of the tutors. “My gran lives in Edinburgh and she can't see me very often, so we have a video call every Sunday,” he explains. “I'm her tech support! Here I can do the same thing for other people's grandparents. It's a great feeling.”

Today Callum is working with Margaret, who is 81. She is holding a tablet very carefully, with both hands. “When I was a girl, we couldn't phone our friends whenever we wanted,” she says. “Today I can talk to my grandson in Australia and I can see his face! Six months ago I couldn't even switch on this tablet. Now I can send emails, book an appointment with my doctor online and look at photos of my great-granddaughter every day.”

What can the tutors teach? Almost everything. They show people how to make video calls, how to make the text on the screen bigger, how to download apps safely and how to recognise dangerous messages. “Some people get messages that say ‘Your bank account has a problem. Click here!’” explains Callum. “We teach them to stop and think. Your bank never asks for your password in a message.” The club has one golden rule: tutors can explain, but they can't touch other people's passwords. “People type their passwords themselves,” says Callum. “We look away.”

The tutors are learning too. “I'm not a very patient person,” admits Aoife Byrne, 15. “But here I'm learning to speak slowly and clearly. I can't always answer every question, but I can always say: ‘Let's find out together.’ ” Aoife also designs the club's posters, because she can draw beautifully.

And sometimes the lessons go the other way. “Can I tell you a secret?” Margaret asks with a smile. “Six months ago this young man couldn't boil an egg. Now he can make a very good omelette — with my recipe!” Callum laughs. “It's true. She's a great teacher.”

Would you like to be a tech tutor? The club needs more volunteers. You don't need to be a computer genius: you need to be patient, to be friendly and to be able to listen. Ask Ms Adeyemi in Room 14 for more information.

Language in context. The article is full of the grammar of this unit. Find examples of *can / can't* for ability (*she can draw beautifully*) and for permission (*tutors can't touch other people's passwords*), of *couldn't* for past ability (*this young man couldn't boil an egg*), and of *be able to* (*to be able to listen*). Also look for adverbs of manner: *carefully, safely, slowly, clearly, beautifully*. *When I was a girl* means “quando ero ragazza”: *was* is the past of *am / is*, and you will study it in Unit 8.

6.3 Grammar: *can*, *could*, *be able to*; requests and offers

6.3.1 *can / can't* for ability

Can is a **modal verb** *(ita: verbo modale)*: a special auxiliary that adds a meaning — ability, permission, possibility — to the main verb. Look at the form in Tabella 6.4.

Tabella 6.4 *can*: form

Affirmative	Negative	Questions	Short answers
I can swim.	I cannot / can't swim.	Can I swim?	Yes, you can. / No, you can't.
You can swim.	You can't swim.	Can you swim?	Yes, I can. / No, I can't.
He / She / It can swim.	He / She / It can't swim.	Can she swim?	Yes, she can. / No, she can't.
We / You / They can swim.	We / You / They can't swim.	Can they swim?	Yes, they can. / No, they can't.

Three rules make *can* different from ordinary verbs. First, it has **the same form for every person**: there is no *-s* in the third person (*she can*, not ✗ *she cans*). Second, it is followed by the **base form** of the verb, the infinitive **without** *to* (*I can swim*, not ✗ *I can to swim*). Third, it does not need *do / does*: the negative is *cannot* — written as one word — or, much more often, *can't*; the question simply puts *can* before the subject (*Can you swim?*). Short answers repeat *can*: *Can Sam cook? — Yes, he can.*

Wh- questions: question word + *can* + subject + verb. *What can you do? How well can she sing?*

Ability is the most common meaning of *can*: *Aoife can draw. Callum can't cook very well.* With verbs of perception English often uses *can* where Italian doesn't: *I can hear music* (sento della musica).

Figura 6.2 shows a class survey about everyday skills: *Eighteen students can ride a bike well, five can ride a bike a little, and only one can't ride a bike.*

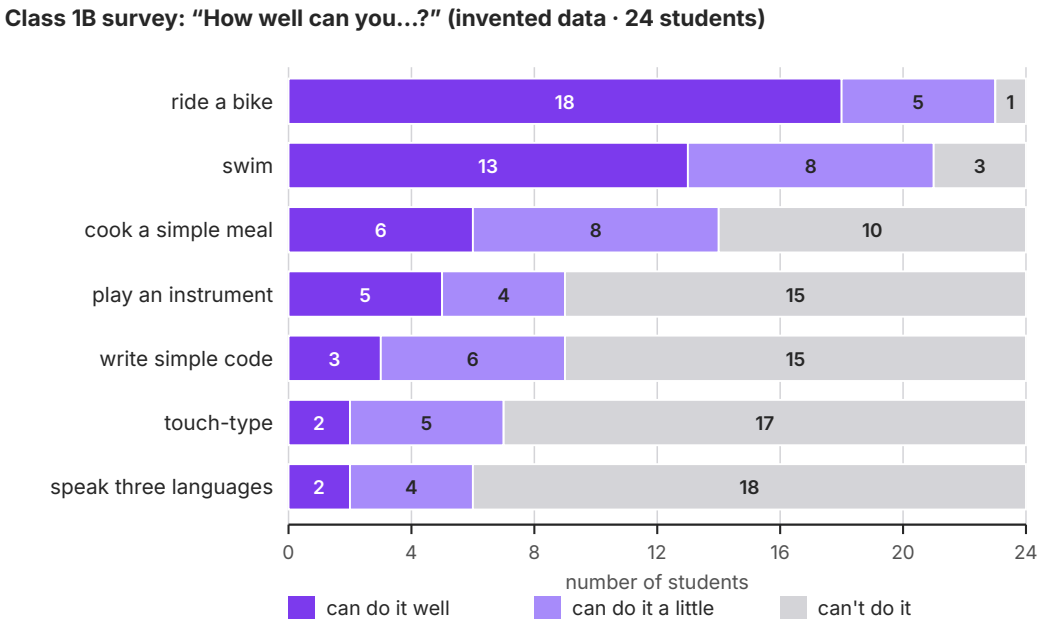


Figura 6.2 Class 1B survey. Each of the 24 students answered the question “How well can you…?” for seven skills (invented data). Each bar shows how many students can do the activity well, a little, or not at all; the three numbers in each bar add up to 24.

GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO

***can* per l'abilità.** *Can* è un **verbo modale** (*modal verb*) e corrisponde sia a **sapere** (“so nuotare” = *I can swim*) sia a **potere / riuscire a**. Regole di forma: 1) è uguale per tutte le persone, senza *-s* alla terza singolare (*he can*); 2) è seguito dalla **forma base** del verbo, senza *to* (*She can drive*); 3) non usa l'ausiliare *do*: negativa *cannot / can't* (attaccato, una sola parola), interrogativa con inversione (*Can you…?*), risposte brevi *Yes, I can / No, I can't*. Con i verbi di percezione l'inglese usa spesso *can* anche dove l'italiano non usa “potere”: *I can't hear you* = non ti sento.

DA RICORDARE

Pronunciation of *can* and *can't*. In an affirmative sentence *can* is not stressed and has a weak vowel: *I can swim* /aɪ kən ˈswɪm/. In short answers and when it is stressed, it has its strong form /kæn/: *Yes, I can. Can't* is always stressed and has a long vowel in British English: /kɑːnt/ (AmE /kænt/). So listen to the vowel and the stress, not to the final *t*, which is often very quiet: *I* ***can't*** *swim* /aɪ ˈkɑːnt swɪm/.

ERRORE FREQUENTE

Dopo un verbo modale non si usa *to*, e il modale non prende mai *-s* né l'ausiliare *do*.
✗ *I can to play the guitar.* → ✓ *I can play the guitar.*
✗ *She cans speak Spanish.* / ✗ *She can speaks Spanish.* → ✓ *She can speak Spanish.*
✗ *Do you can swim?* → ✓ *Can you swim?* · ✗ *I don't can come.* → ✓ *I can't come.*
E per "sapere fare qualcosa" non si dice ✗ *I know swim*: ✓ *I can swim* (oppure ✓ *I know how to swim*).

6.3.2 *can / can't* for possibility and permission

Can also expresses **possibility**: the situation makes something possible. *You can buy tickets online. It can be cold in Scotland, even in June. Can't* says that something is impossible: *Your plug can't go into this socket.*

The third meaning is **permission**. To **ask for** permission, use *Can I...?* or the more polite *Could I...?*; to **give** or **refuse** it, use *you can / you can't*: *You can use my laptop, but you can't download anything.* Rules often use *can't*: *You can't use phones in class.*

Finally, *Can you...?* makes a **request**: you ask another person to do something. *Can you help me with this app?* Figura 6.4 puts all these meanings together.

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***can* per possibilità, permesso e richiesta.** Oltre all'abilità, *can* esprime: 1) la **possibilità** ("si può, è possibile"): *You can pay by card* = si può pagare con la carta; 2) il **permesso** ("potere, avere il permesso di"): *Can I go out tonight?* = posso uscire stasera? — *Yes, you can / No, you can't*; nelle regole *can't* equivale a "non si può, è vietato"; 3) la **richiesta**: *Can you help me?* = puoi aiutarmi? In italiano usiamo "potere" in tutti questi casi, quindi la traduzione è facile; la difficoltà è solo la forma (nessun *to*, nessun *do*). Per chiedere un permesso in modo più cortese si usa *Could I...?* ("potrei...?").

6.3.3 *could / couldn't* for past ability

Could is the past of *can* for a **general ability in the past**. Like *can*, it has one form for every person, it takes the base form, and it makes questions and negatives by itself.

Tabella 6.5 *could*: form

Affirmative	Negative	Questions	Short answers
I could read at four.	I could not / couldn't read at three.	Could you read at four?	Yes, I could. / No, I couldn't.
She could swim at five.	She couldn't swim at four.	Could she swim at five?	Yes, she could. / No, she couldn't.
They could speak English.	They couldn't speak Italian.	What could they do?	—

We often use *could* with *at the age of six*, *six months ago* or *when I was six* (= quando avevo sei anni): *My brother could read at four. When I was little, I couldn't say the letter R.* Pronunciation: /kʊd/ (weak /kəd/), *couldn't* /ˈkʊdnt/: the *l* is silent. Figura 6.3 places *could*, *can* and *will be able to* on a timeline.

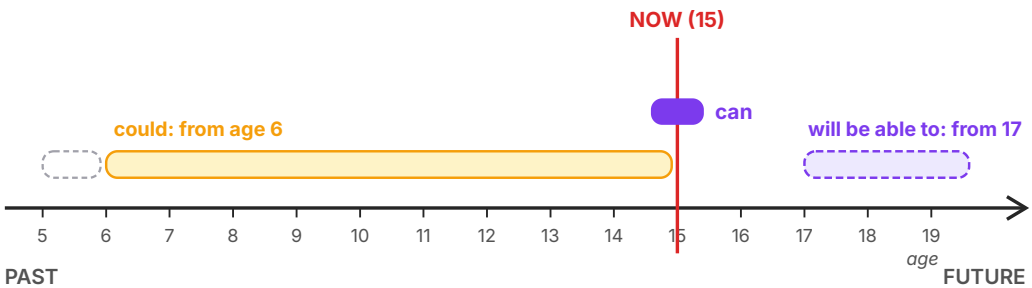


Figura 6.3 Ability on a timeline, for a 15-year-old. *Could / couldn't* (amber) describes ability in the past; *can* (violet) describes ability now; *will be able to* (dashed) describes ability in the future. NOW is the red line.

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***could* per l'abilità nel passato.** *Could / couldn't* traduce "sapevo / non sapevo, riuscivo / non riuscivo, potevo / non potevo" quando parliamo di una capacità **generale** nel passato: *At six I could ride a bike* = a sei anni sapevo andare in bici. La forma è identica per tutte le persone, senza *did*: ✗ *Did you could…?* → ✓ *Could you…?*; ✗ *I didn't could* → ✓ *I couldn't*. Attenzione: *Could you…?* si usa anche per le richieste cortesi al presente ("potresti…?", vedi 6.3.5): in quel caso *could* non indica il passato.

APPROFONDIMENTO

Why is there an *l* in *could*? *Can* comes from the Old English verb *cunnan*, which meant "to know" or "to know how to" — the same root as the adjective *cunning* (clever in a tricky way). Its old past form had no *l*: people wrote it *coude* or *couthe*. In the 16th century writers added a silent *l*, to make it look like *would* and *should*, two words that really had an *l* in the past. The spelling changed, but the pronunciation did not: that is why today we write *could* but say /kʊd/.

6.3.4 *be able to* (introduction)

Can has only two forms, *can* and *could*: no infinitive (✗ *to can*), no *-ing* form, no future. For these we use **be able to** + base form, with the same meaning. In the present it is a little more formal than *can*: *She is able to speak four languages.*

Tabella 6.6 *be able to*

	Affirmative	Negative	Questions
present	I'm able to swim. She's able to swim.	I'm not able to swim.	Are you able to swim?
future	I'll (I will) be able to swim.	I won't (will not) be able to swim.	Will you be able to swim?
after another verb	I want to be able to swim.	I hate not being able to swim.	—

The most useful form for you now is the **future**: *will be able to*. *Will* (short form *'ll*, negative *won't*) is the auxiliary of the future, which you will study fully in Unit 12; here you only need it in this chunk. *Next year I'll be able to understand films in English without subtitles. With this app you'll be able to learn ten new words a day. Sorry, I won't be able to come to your party on Saturday.* In Figura 6.3, the dashed bar shows a future ability: *I'll be able to learn to drive when I'm seventeen* — the age at which you can start driving a car in the UK.

The second useful pattern is *be able to* after another verb: *I want to be able to play this song for my mum's birthday.*

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be able to. Significa "essere in grado di" e sostituisce *can* nelle forme che il modale non ha: l'infinito (*to be able to*), la forma in *-ing* (*being able to*) e il futuro (*will be able to*). Il futuro di "potere / sapere" è quindi *will be able to*: "Il prossimo anno saprò nuotare" = *Next year I'll be able to swim*. Un modale non può seguire un altro modale: ✗ *I will can come* → ✓ *I'll be able to come*. Dopo un verbo come *want*: ✗ *I want to can drive* → ✓ *I want to be able to drive* (voglio essere in grado di guidare). Esiste anche il passato *was / were able to*, che si costruisce con il passato di *be* (*was / were*, Unità 8).

6.3.5 Requests and offers

When we ask somebody to do something, we make a *request*; when we say we are ready to do something for somebody, we make an **offer**. British speakers use a lot of softening words — *please*, *thank you*, *Could you...?* — because a direct imperative (*Give me the charger*) can sound rude. Tabella 6.9, in section 6.4, collects the useful phrases.

Requests. *Can you...?* is informal, fine with friends and family; *Could you...?* is more polite (teachers, adults you don't know, shops); *Could you possibly...?* is even more polite. Here *could* is **not** past (Figura 6.4).

Offers. Shall I...? is a typical British way to offer help, used only with *I* and *we*: *Shall I carry that for you?* (AmE *Should I...?*). *I'll...* is an offer you decide in the moment: *You look cold. I'll close the window. Would you like...?* + a noun offers something politely: *Would you like a biscuit?*

Answers. To say yes, add thanks: *Yes, please. That's very kind of you.* To say no, English speakers rarely say only *No*: they soften the answer with **I'm afraid** (= I'm sorry, but...) and give a reason. *Could I borrow your laptop? — I'm afraid not. I need it for my homework.*

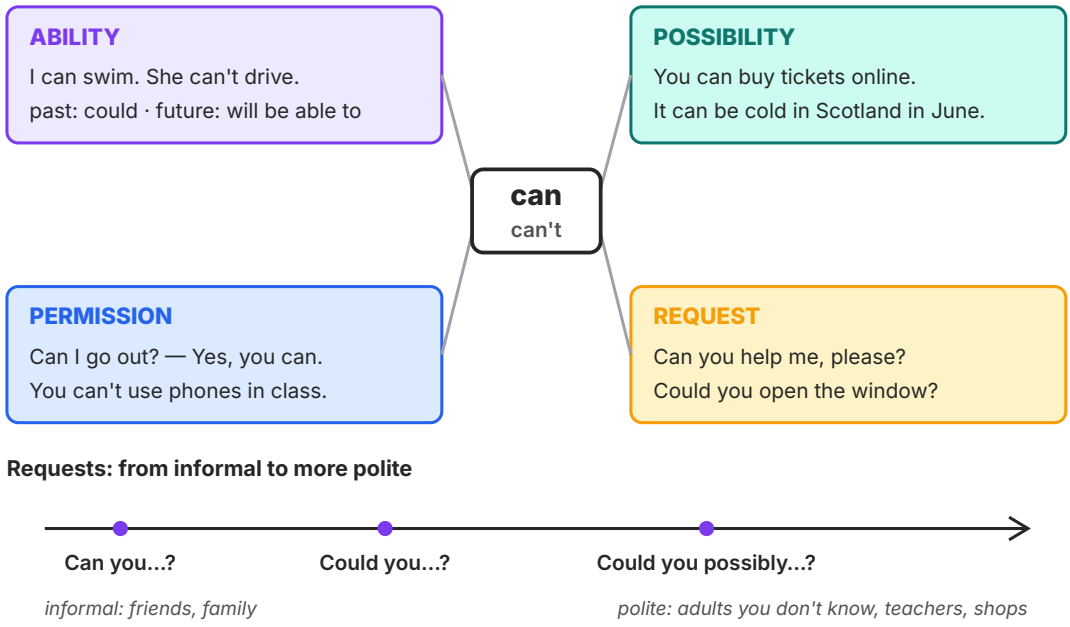


Figura 6.4 The four main meanings of *can / can't*: ability, possibility, permission and request. Below: requests from the most informal to the most polite. *Could* in requests is not a past form.

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Richieste e offerte. Richieste: *Can you...?* ("puoi...?", informale) → *Could you...?* ("potresti...?", cortese) → *Could you possibly...?* (molto cortese). Permesso: *Can I...? / Could I...?* ("posso...? / potrei...?"). Offerte: *Shall I...?* ("vuoi che io...?", solo con *I* e *we*: *Shall I help you?* = vuoi che ti aiuti?); *I'll...* (decisione presa sul momento: *I'll do it!* = lo faccio io!); *Would you like...?* ("vuoi / gradisci...?", molto cortese: *Would you like a cup of tea?*). Nelle risposte negative l'inglese evita il *No* secco: *I'm afraid not* ("temo di no, purtroppo no"), *Sorry, I can't*. Attenzione: in italiano "Mi dai il caricatore?" è normale; in inglese ✗ *You give me the charger?* è scortese e sbagliato → ✓ *Could you give me the charger, please?*

6.4 Listening and Speaking: Asking for Permission, Requests and Offers

Before you listen. What do you need to ask for on your first evening as a guest abroad? Make a list. Now listen while your teacher or two classmates read the script aloud, then read it: Giulia arrives at the Taylors' house in Bristol, and Sam's mum, Helen, opens the door.

Tabella 6.7 Listening script — First evening in Bristol

Helen	Hello, Giulia! Welcome to Bristol! Come in, come in. You look tired.
Giulia	Just a bit. Thank you, Mrs Taylor.
Helen	Oh, please call me Helen. Would you like a cup of tea? Or something cold?
Giulia	Could I have a glass of water, please?
Helen	Of course. Here you are.
Giulia	Thanks. Er… can I use the Wi-Fi? My parents are waiting for a message.
Sam	Sure. The password is on the fridge. Shall I connect your phone for you?
Giulia	No, it's OK, I can do it. Oh no — my battery is nearly dead! Can I charge my phone somewhere?
Sam	Yes, there's a socket next to your bed. Wait — your charger is Italian! It can't go into a British socket.
Helen	Don't worry, I've got an adapter in the kitchen. I'll get it for you.
Giulia	Thank you so much. Could you tell me what time dinner is?
Helen	At half past six. Is there anything you can't eat?
Giulia	No, I can eat everything. But I'm not very good with spicy food!
Sam	That's fine. Mark is cooking lasagne right now. Italian food for our Italian guest!
Giulia	Oh, lovely! Can I help in the kitchen? I can make a really good tiramisu.
Helen	That's very kind of you, but not tonight. You can relax. Maybe at the weekend?
Sam	Yes, please! Can I have a big piece?
Giulia	Only if you can find mascarpone in Bristol!

The next day, at Hillside Academy, Giulia needs to print a document.

Tabella 6.8 Listening script — In the school library

Giulia	Excuse me, could I use this computer, please?
Librarian	Of course. Can you log in with your school account?
Giulia	I'm afraid I haven't got one. I'm an exchange student from Italy.
Librarian	Ah, I see. Then you can use the visitors' computer, over there by the window. You can't print from it, I'm afraid.
Giulia	Oh. But I need to print my train ticket. Could you possibly help me?
Librarian	No problem. Email it to me and I'll print it for you. Shall I write down my email address?
Giulia	Yes, please. That's really kind of you.

Notice how Giulia changes her language. With Sam she uses *Can I...?*; with Helen and with the librarian, adults she doesn't know well, she uses *Could I...?*, *Could you...?* and even *Could you possibly...?*. Helen and the librarian both say no to something, but politely: *That's very kind of you, but not tonight*; *You can't print from it, I'm afraid*.

Tabella 6.9 Useful language — permission, requests and offers

You want to...	Useful language
ask for permission	Can I...? · Could I..., please? · Is it OK if I...?
give permission	Sure. · Of course. · Yes, go ahead. · No problem.
refuse permission	I'm afraid not. · Sorry, you can't. · I'm afraid you can't... because...
ask someone to do something	Can you...? · Could you..., please? · Could you possibly...?
offer to do something	Shall I...? · I'll... · Can I help? · Do you need any help?
offer something	Would you like...? · Do you want...? (informal) · Help yourself!
accept / refuse an offer	Yes, please. · That's very kind of you. · No, thanks. I'm fine.
thank somebody	Thanks a lot. · Thank you so much. — You're welcome. · No problem.

ESEMPIO SVOLTO

From an order to a polite request, step by step. Giulia wants the librarian to print her ticket.

1. The basic message is an imperative: *Print my ticket.* It is grammatically correct, but it sounds like an order.
2. Make it a question with *can*: *Can you print my ticket?* This is fine with a friend.
3. Use *could* for an adult you don't know: *Could you print my ticket?*
4. Add *please* at the end, or *possibly* after the subject: *Could you possibly print my ticket, please?*
5. Give a short reason, and prepare your thanks: *I'm an exchange student and I can't print from the visitors' computer. Could you possibly print my ticket, please? — Thank you so much.*

Note the word order: *could* + subject + base form; *possibly* goes after the subject, before the main verb.

Speaking.

1. **Role play: the guest.** A is an exchange student on the first evening in a British home; B is the host. A asks for permission and makes requests; B offers things and answers politely, with reasons.
2. **Find someone who can…** Ask your classmates *Can you…? How well can you…?* and find one person for each column of Tabella 6.1. Report: *Marta can juggle!*
3. **Describe the chart.** Talk for one minute about Figura 6.2. What can most students in Class 1B do? What can't they do? Is your class similar?

6.5 Writing: An Application Email

Summer camps, school clubs and volunteer projects often ask you to apply by email. An **application** is a request for a place, a job or an opportunity; to *apply* (for something) is to ask for it formally. In your email you say who you are, which skills you have and why you want the place. Read Aoife's application for a summer camp.

Tabella 6.10 Model text — Aoife's application

To: info@youngcreatorscamp.example
Subject: Application – Young Creators Summer Camp

Dear Ms Patel,

I am writing to apply for a place at the Young Creators Summer Camp in July. My name is Aoife Byrne, I am fifteen and I am a student at Hillside Academy in Bristol.

I am very interested in digital art and video. I can draw quite well, and I can use two drawing apps on my tablet. I can also edit short videos: every month I make a video for our school's Tech Tutors club. I can't write code yet, but I learn quickly and I really want to try.

I am a good team player. I am patient, and I can explain things clearly, because every Wednesday I help older people with their phones and tablets. At the camp I hope to learn how to make animations. After the summer I will be able to share these new skills with the students in my club.

Could you tell me if I need to bring my own laptop? I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,
Aoife Byrne

Structure. The **subject line** says exactly what the email is about; the **greeting** uses a title and a surname. **Paragraph 1** gives the reason for writing (*I am writing to apply for…*) and introduces the writer. **Paragraph 2** describes skills, with *can*, *can't… yet* and adverbs (*quite well, quickly*). **Paragraph 3** describes personal qualities, with evidence, and what the writer hopes to learn (*will be able to*). The **final paragraph** asks a polite question and closes with a standard sentence.

Register. This is a **semi-formal** email: the reader is an adult that Aoife doesn't know. Compare it with Sam's informal email in Unit 3: here there are no contractions (*I am*, not *I'm*), no exclamation marks, no *Hi!*. If you know the reader's name, begin *Dear Mr / Ms + surname* and finish *Yours sincerely*; if not, begin *Dear Sir or Madam* and finish *Yours faithfully* (BrE). In American English, *Sincerely* is usual in both cases. *Can't… yet* is a good way to present a weakness positively: it says that you are learning.

IN SINTESI

Checklist: an application email

- a clear subject line · • *Dear Mr / Ms + surname,* (or *Dear Sir or Madam,*)
- paragraph 1: *I am writing to apply for…* + who you are
- paragraph 2: your skills with *can / can't (yet)* + adverbs of manner (*well, quickly, carefully*)
- paragraph 3: your qualities + an example; what you hope to learn (*I will be able to…*)
- a polite question with *Could you…?* · *I look forward to hearing from you.*
- *Yours sincerely / Yours faithfully* + full name · • no contractions, no slang

Writing task. Your school is starting a new club (choose one: robotics, theatre, photography, cooking, or a club like Tech Tutors). Write an email to the teacher in charge, Mrs Hill, to apply

for a place (80–100 words). Say who you are, what you can do and how well, what you can't do yet, and what you will be able to do after a year in the club. Ask one polite question.

6.6 Culture: Digital Britain — from Lovelace to Turing

Every time you tap an app, you use an idea almost two hundred years old: a machine that can follow a list of instructions. This page tells the story of two British pioneers in the present simple, as a timeline does.

6.6.1 Ada Lovelace: the first program

Ada Lovelace (1815–1852) is the daughter of the famous poet Lord Byron, but her mother wants her to study mathematics and science, not poetry. As a young woman she meets the mathematician **Charles Babbage** (1791–1871), who designs calculating machines. His most ambitious design is the **Analytical Engine**, a mechanical machine that can, in theory, follow instructions written on punched cards. Babbage can't finish it, but in 1840 he presents its ideas to a group of scientists in **Turin**. The Italian engineer Luigi Federico Menabrea, later Prime Minister of Italy, writes an article about the machine in French.

Ada Lovelace translates Menabrea's article into English and adds her own notes, which are longer than the article itself. They appear in 1843. In the last note, *Note G*, she explains step by step how the Analytical Engine can calculate a sequence of numbers, the Bernoulli numbers. For this reason many people call her work the first published computer **algorithm** — a set of exact instructions for a machine — and Ada the first programmer. She also understands that a machine like this can work with symbols, not only with numbers: one day, she imagines, it will even be able to compose music.

6.6.2 Alan Turing and Bletchley Park

Alan Turing (1912–1954) is a mathematician from London. In 1936 he describes an imaginary "universal machine" that can carry out any calculation if it has the right instructions: this is the basic idea of every modern computer. During the Second World War he works at **Bletchley Park**, a country house north-west of London, where British **code-breakers** try to read secret German messages. The Germans encrypt them with a machine called *Enigma*, and they believe that nobody can read them. Turing helps to design the *Bombe*, an electromechanical machine that can find the Enigma settings very quickly. In 1944 *Colossus*, one of the first electronic computers in the world, starts working there too. In 1950 he proposes the "imitation game", the *Turing test*: can a machine answer questions so well that we can't tell it from a human?

Turing's story has a sad ending. In 1952 a court finds him guilty because he is gay — at that time a crime in Britain — and he dies in 1954. In 2013 he receives a royal pardon, and today his portrait is on the Bank of England's £50 note (since 2021). Bletchley Park is now a museum.

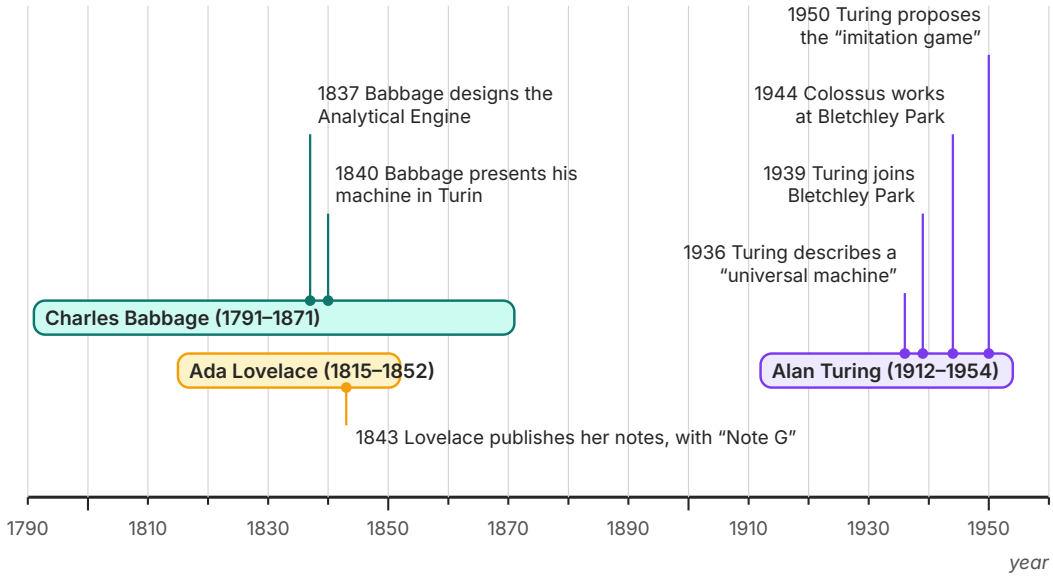


Figura 6.5 A proportional timeline of three pioneers of computing: Charles Babbage, Ada Lovelace and Alan Turing, with some key events of their work. One square of the grid is ten years.

COLLEGAMENTI

Maths and computer science. Note G and the universal machine are both about *algorithms*: exact, step-by-step instructions, like long division or the method for the highest common factor. In *informatica* you write them as flowcharts or code. **History.** The work of Bletchley Park stays secret for about thirty years after the war.

Compare with Italy. Turin, Giulia's city, appears in the history of the computer in 1840. Do you know any Italian pioneers or companies in the history of computing (for example, Olivetti in Ivrea)? Find one fact and present it to the class in English.

SINTESI

- Skills: *play* an instrument (*the* guitar), *ride* a bike, *speak* a language, *write* code; *be good at* + noun / *-ing*.
- Digital life: *download / upload, log in / log out, sign up, charge, install, update, save, delete, tap, swipe, scroll, share, attach*.
- Adverbs of manner: adjective + *-ly* (*carefully, easily, gently, automatically*); irregular *good* → *well*; *fast, hard, late, early* don't change. They go after the verb or the object.
- *can* (modal verb): same form for all persons, + base form without *to*, no *do*: *Can you swim? — Yes, I can. / No, I can't*.
- Meanings of *can:* ability, possibility, permission (*Can I…?*), request (*Can you…?*).
- Pronunciation: weak /kən/, strong /kæn/, *can't* /kɑːnt/ (AmE /kænt/).
- *could / couldn't*: general ability in the past (*At six I could swim*); no *did*.
- *be able to* replaces *can* in missing forms: *will be able to* (future), *want to be able to*; ✗ *will can*.
- Requests: *Can you…?* → *Could you…?* → *Could you possibly…?* (more polite; *could* here is not past).
- Offers: *Shall I…?* (BrE, *I / we*), *I'll…*, *Would you like…?*; answers: *Yes, please / No, thanks / I'm afraid not*.
- Application email: *Dear Ms…, I am writing to apply for…, I look forward to hearing from you, Yours sincerely*; no contractions.
- Ada Lovelace (1815–1852) wrote the first published algorithm for a machine (1843); Alan Turing (1912–1954) imagined the universal machine and broke codes at Bletchley Park.

ESERCIZI

Vocabulary

1. ● Match the verbs (1–6) with the words (a–f) to make skills. 1 ride · 2 play · 3 speak · 4 write · 5 bake · 6 edit — a code · b a cake · c a horse · d a video · e the piano · f Spanish

2. ● Find the odd one out. a laptop · tablet · charger · smartphone — b download · upload · log in · juggle — c well · fast · friendly · hard — d swim · dive · sew · ski

3. ● You type your password to enter your account. You…

   A. log out.
   B. log in.
   C. sign off.
   D. switch up.

4. ● Your phone battery is nearly empty. You need to...
   A. upload it.
   B. swipe it.
   C. delete it.
   D. charge it.

5. ●● Complete the sentences with the words in the box: *attach · download · password · scroll · touchpad · update*. a Never share your _____ with anybody. b You can _____ the app for free. c I can't use the mouse, so I move the pointer with the _____ . d _____ down to see the older messages. e Don't forget to _____ the photos to the email. f The laptop is slow because it needs an _____ .

6. ●● Write the adverbs. a quick · b easy · c good · d gentle · e hard · f automatic · g polite · h late

7. ●● Complete each sentence with the adjective or the adverb in brackets. a Callum is a _____ footballer. (good / well) b He plays football very _____ . (good / well) c Please drive _____ : the road is icy. (careful / carefully) d The test is _____ , but I can do it. (hard / hardly) e She speaks so _____ that I can't hear her. (quiet / quietly) f Aoife is a very _____ person. (patient / patiently)

Grammar

8. ● Look at Figura 6.2 and complete with numbers. a _____ students can't swim. b _____ students can ride a bike well. c _____ students can cook a simple meal (well or a little). d _____ students can't touch-type. e Only _____ students can write simple code well.

9. ● Complete with *can* or *can't* and the verb in brackets. a I'm sorry, I _____ (come) to your party: I'm at my grandparents' house this weekend. b Giulia _____ (speak) Italian, English and a little French. c _____ you _____ (hear) me? The connection is bad. d My little sister is two, so she _____ (read) yet. e You _____ (use) your phone in the exam room. It's against the rules.

10. ● _____ you play the guitar? — Yes, I can.
    A. Do
    B. Are
    C. Can
    D. Does

11. ● When I was four, I _____ ride a bike, but now I can.
    A. couldn't
    B. can't
    C. didn't can
    D. wasn't can

12. ●● Write the meaning of *can / can't / could* in each sentence: ability (A), possibility (Po), permission (Pe) or request (R). a Can I borrow your pen? b You can buy a bus ticket on the app. c Can you lend me your charger? d My grandad can speak three languages. e You can't wear trainers at our school. f Could you repeat the question, please?

13. ●● Make questions and short answers. a you / swim? (yes) b Sam / play the piano? (no) c your parents / speak English? (yes) d Margaret / use a tablet / six months ago? (no) e you / read / at the age of five? (yes)

14. ●● Complete with *can, can't, could, couldn't* or the correct form of *be able to*. a Mozart _____ play the piano when he was very young. b Don't worry: after this course you _____ make a website. c Ten years ago my grandparents _____ send emails, but now they can. d I want to _____ speak English fluently. e Sorry, I _____ help you now — I'm busy. f Next summer my brother _____ learn to drive: he's seventeen in May.

15. ●● Find and correct the mistake in each sentence. a ✗ I can to play the drums. b ✗ Do you can come tomorrow? c ✗ She cans ski very well. d ✗ I will can help you next week. e ✗ He speaks very well Spanish. f ✗ My brother runs very fastly.

16. ●● Put the words in order to make sentences or questions. a you / could / please / the / door / close / ? b I / shall / you / help / ? c can't / he / very / sing / well d possibly / could / you / slowly / speak / more / ? e like / would / some / you / tea / ?

17. ●● Make a request, an offer or a question asking for permission for each situation. Use *Can I...? Could you...? Shall I...? I'll...* or *Would you like...?* a You want to use your friend's phone. b Your teacher is speaking too fast. c Your grandmother's bags look heavy. d A guest arrives at your house. Offer a drink. e You are in a shop and you want to try on a jacket. f The phone is ringing and your mum is busy.

18. ●●● Rewrite the sentences with the words in brackets so that the meaning doesn't change. a Is it OK if I open the window? (Could) b I'm able to cook paella. (can) c It's possible for me to come tomorrow. (can) d Please help me with this app. (Could ... possibly) e Do you want me to carry your bag? (Shall)

19. ●●● Translate into English. a Mia nonna non sapeva usare il computer, ma ora sa mandare le email. b Potresti spegnere la musica, per favore? c Il prossimo anno sarò in grado di capire i film in inglese.

Reading and Listening

20. ● Read *Tech Tutors* again. True (T), false (F) or doesn't say (DS)? a Tech Tutors meets every Wednesday afternoon. b Callum's grandmother lives in Bristol. c Margaret couldn't switch on a tablet six months ago. d The tutors type the passwords for the older people. e Aoife is a very patient person. f Ms Adeyemi is a computer genius.

21. ●● Answer the questions about the article. a Why does Callum have a video call every Sunday? b What can Margaret do now with her tablet? Give three things. c What is the club's golden rule? d What is Aoife learning at the club? e What can Callum do now, thanks to Margaret?

22. ●● Find words or phrases in the article that mean: a a person who works without money; b in a way that avoids danger; c the person who helps you with technology problems; d the daughter of your grandchild; e a very intelligent, very talented person.

23. ● Read the listening script *First evening in Bristol* (Tabella 6.7). Answer the questions. a What does Giulia drink? b Why does she want to use the Wi-Fi? c Why can't Giulia's charger go into the socket? d What time is dinner? e What does Giulia offer to make?

24. ●● Read both scripts (Tabelle 6.7 and 6.8) and find: a two requests with *Could you…?*; b two offers with *Shall I…?*; c two offers with *I'll…*; d one polite way to refuse permission.

Writing and Speaking

25. ● Complete the sentences about yourself. a I can… very well. b I can't… yet, but I want to be able to… c When I was six, I could… d I'm good at… e After this school year, I'll be able to…

26. ●● Do the writing task in section 6.5: an email to Mrs Hill to apply for a place in a school club (80–100 words). Use *can / can't (yet)*, at least two adverbs of manner, *will be able to* and a question with *Could you…?*

27. ●● Speaking. Role play. Student A is staying with Student B's family. A needs to: use the washing machine, phone home, borrow a hairdryer, and go to the cinema with friends on Saturday evening. B is the host: say yes to two things and no to two, politely, with a reason. Then make two offers.

28. ●●● Speaking. Talk for one minute about a skill you couldn't do some years ago but can do now (for example swimming, cooking or playing an instrument). Say how well you can do it now, and what you will be able to do in the future.

Towards B1

29. ●● Read the text and choose the correct answer (A, B, C or D) for each gap.
My grandfather is 78, and he (1) ___ use a smartphone very well. Two years ago he (2) ___ even send a text message, but now he sends me photos every day. He learns very (3) ___ because he practises a lot. Next year he wants to (4) ___ make video calls on his own. "(5) ___ you show me how to do it?" he asks me every Sunday.
(1) A can · B cans · C can to · D is can
(2) A can't · B didn't could · C couldn't · D wasn't
(3) A quick · B quickly · C quicker · D fastly
(4) A can · B could · C be able · D be able to
(5) A Do · B Could · C Shall · D Are

30. ●● Open cloze. Write ONE word in each gap.
Giulia (1) ___ cook very well, but she can't make English food (2) ___ — she's learning. "(3) ___ I help you in the kitchen?" she asks Helen. "That's very kind (4) ___ you, but not tonight," says Helen. "(5) ___ you like a cup of tea?"

31. ●●● Complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first. Use one to three words. a My brother is a very good swimmer. → My brother swims _____ . b I can't ride a horse. → I'm _____ ride a horse. c Is it OK if I sit here? → _____ sit here? d I'm not able to come to your party. → I _____ to your party. e Do you want me to help you? → _____ help you?

32. ●● You are staying with an English family. Write a note (35–45 words) to your host, who is at work. Ask for permission to invite a friend to the house this afternoon, ask your host to buy something you need, and offer to do something to help at home.

PER APPROFONDIRE

- MUR — R. Murphy, *Essential Grammar in Use*: the units on *can / could*, *Could you…? / Can I…?* and adverbs of manner, with extra practice.
- SWA — M. Swan, *Practical English Usage*: entries on *can* and *could*, *be able to*, *shall*, and on polite requests.
- CGE — R. Carter, M. McCarthy, *Cambridge Grammar of English*: modal verbs and politeness in spoken English.
- ROA — P. Roach, *English Phonetics and Phonology*: strong and weak forms of *can* and other function words.
- CED — D. Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*: the vocabulary of computing and the internet.

Glossario del capitolo

Adverb of manner
avverbio di modo — says how something happens: *slowly, carefully, well, fast*

Algorithm
algoritmo — a set of exact, step-by-step instructions, e.g. for a computer

App
app, applicazione — short for *application*: a program for a phone or a tablet

Be able to
essere in grado di — replaces *can* in missing forms: *I'll be able to drive next year*

Be good at
essere bravo in / a — + noun or *-ing*: *He's good at maths. I'm good at drawing*

Can / can't
sapere, potere / non sapere, non potere — ability, possibility, permission, requests: *Can you swim?*

Charger
caricabatterie — you connect it to a device to charge the battery

Could
sapevo, potevo; potresti — past ability (*I could read at four*) or polite requests (*Could you help me?*)

Device
dispositivo — a machine for a particular job, e.g. a smartphone, a tablet, a laptop

Download / upload
scaricare / caricare (in rete) — copy from the internet to your device / from your device to the internet

I'm afraid (not)
purtroppo (no), temo di no — softens a negative answer: *Can I borrow it? — I'm afraid not*

Log in / log out
accedere / uscire (da un account) — *Log in with your username and password*

Modal verb
verbo modale — can, could, must, should…: same form for all persons, + base form without *to*

Offer
offerta — saying you are ready to do or give something: *Shall I help you? Would you like some tea?*

Phrasal verb
verbo frasale — verb + particle with a special meaning: *log in, sign up, get up*

Request
richiesta — asking somebody to do something: *Could you open the window, please?*

Skill
abilità, competenza — something you can do because you learn and practise it: *cooking is a useful skill*

Talent
talento — a natural ability: *She has a talent for music*

To apply (for)
fare domanda, candidarsi (per) — ask formally for a place or a job; noun *application*

Well
bene — the adverb of *good*: *She sings well* (not ✗ *good*)

Soluzioni

1. 1 c (ride a horse) · 2 e (play the piano) · 3 f (speak Spanish) · 4 a (write code) · 5 b (bake a cake) · 6 d (edit a video).

2. a charger (an accessory, not a computer or a phone) · b juggle (not a digital verb) · c friendly (an adjective, not an adverb) · d sew (not a sport).

3. B (log in).

4. D (charge it).

5. a password · b download · c touchpad · d Scroll · e attach · f update.

6. a quickly · b easily · c well · d gently · e hard · f automatically · g politely · h late.

7. a good · b well · c carefully · d hard · e quietly · f patient. *Aggettivo con un nome o dopo be; avverbio con un verbo.*

8. a 3 · b 18 · c 14 (6 + 8) · d 17 · e 3.

9. a can't (cannot) come · b can speak · c Can ... hear · d can't (cannot) read · e can't (cannot) use.

10. C (Can). *La risposta breve "Yes, I can" richiede can nella domanda.*

11. A (couldn't). *Il passato di can è could; non si usa did.*

12. a Pe · b Po · c R · d A · e Pe · f R.

13. a Can you swim? — Yes, I can. · b Can Sam play the piano? — No, he can't. · c Can your parents speak English? — Yes, they can. · d Could Margaret use a tablet six months ago? — No, she couldn't. · e Could you read at the age of five? — Yes, I could.

14. a could · b will be able to ('ll be able to) · c couldn't (could not) · d be able to · e can't (cannot) · f will be able to ('ll be able to).

15. a I can play the drums. · b Can you come tomorrow? · c She can ski very well. · d I will (I'll) be able to help you next week. · e He speaks Spanish very well. · f My brother runs very fast.

16. a Could you close the door, please? · b Shall I help you? · c He can't sing very well. · d Could you possibly speak more slowly? · e Would you like some tea?

17. Model answers: a Can I use your phone? · b Could you speak more slowly, please? · c Shall I carry your bags? / I'll carry your bags. · d Would you like a drink? · e Could I try on this jacket, please? · f I'll answer it! / Shall I answer it?

18. a Could I open the window? · b I can cook paella. · c I can come tomorrow. · d Could you possibly help me with this app? · e Shall I carry your bag?

19. a My grandmother couldn't use a (the) computer, but now she can send emails. · b Could you turn off (switch off) the music, please? · c Next year I'll (I will) be able to understand films in English.

20. a T · b F (she lives in Edinburgh) · c T · d F (people type their passwords themselves) · e F (she says she isn't very patient) · f DS.

21. a Because his gran lives in Edinburgh and she can't see him very often. · b Any three: she can talk to her grandson in Australia and see his face, send emails, book an appointment with her doctor online, look at photos of her great-granddaughter. · c Tutors can explain, but they can't touch other people's passwords. · d To speak slowly and clearly (and to say "Let's find out together"). · e He can make a very good omelette.

22. a volunteer · b safely · c tech support · d great-granddaughter · e genius.

23. a A glass of water. · b Because her parents are waiting for a message. · c Because it's Italian: Italian plugs don't fit British sockets. · d At half past six. · e Tiramisu.

24. a Could you tell me what time dinner is? · Could you possibly help me? · b Shall I connect your phone for you? · Shall I write down my email ad-

dress? · c I'll get it for you. · I'll print it for you. · d You can't print from it, I'm afraid.

25. Open answers. Check the form: *can / can't* + base form; *could* for the past; *I'll be able to* for the future; *good at* + noun or *-ing*. Example: *I can swim very well. I can't play the guitar yet, but I want to be able to play it. When I was six, I could ride a bike. I'm good at maths. After this school year, I'll be able to write a formal email in English.*

26. Model answer (about 95 words): *Dear Mrs Hill, I am writing to apply for a place in the new photography club. My name is Luca Rossi and I am in Class 1B. I can take good photos with my phone, and I can edit them quite well on my laptop. I can't use a professional camera yet, but I learn quickly and I practise every weekend. I am patient and I work carefully. After a year in the club I will be able to take portraits and landscapes with a real camera. Could you tell me when the club meets? Yours sincerely, Luca Rossi*

27. Model: A: Could I use the washing machine, please? — B: Of course. Shall I show you how it works? · A: Can I phone my parents? — B: Sure, go ahead. · A: Could I borrow a hairdryer? — B: I'm afraid I haven't got one, sorry. · A: Can I go to the cinema with my friends on Saturday evening? — B: I'm afraid not: we've got a family dinner on Saturday. Maybe on Friday? · B: Would you like a cup of tea? I'll get you a towel too.

28. Model: *Five years ago I couldn't swim at all. Now I can swim quite well: I can swim one kilometre without stopping, but I can't dive very well yet. I go to the pool twice a week. Next summer I'll be able to swim in the sea with my friends, and in two years I want to be able to work as a lifeguard.*

29. (1) A · (2) C · (3) B · (4) D · (5) B.

30. (1) can · (2) yet (also accept: well) · (3) Can / Could / Shall / May · (4) of · (5) Would.

31. a very well · b not able to / unable to · c Can I / Could I / May I · d can't (cannot) come · e Shall I.

32. Model (about 40 words): *Hi Helen, could I invite my friend Marta here this afternoon? We want to study together. Could you possibly buy some shampoo for me? Mine is finished. I'll do the washing-up after dinner tonight. Thanks a lot! Giulia*