

AVIATION ENGLISH COFFEE

MODALS OF ABILITY

CAN & CAN'T

PRESENT TENSE

General skills (or their lack)
happening NOW:

- *I **can** pilot an Airbus A380.*
(I can do it now)
- *I **can't** remember what
Future Simple Tense is.*
(happens now)

COULD & COULDN'T

PAST TENSE

General skills (or their lack)
happened in the PAST:

- *Boeing **could** avoid payments
related to the grounding.*
- *I **couldn't** write when I was 2.*
(I didn't have that ability)

CAN & BE ABLE TO

THE DIFFERENCE IN USE

Can and **be able to** mean the same, but we often use **be able to** when something is surprising or unusual.

Note that **wasn't/weren't able to** is more formal than **couldn't**.

BE ABLE TO

PRESENT TENSE

- **AM / ARE / IS**

When we talk about
something surprising or
unusual is happening NOW:

- *These measures will remain
in place for as long as is
needed to ensure customers
and crew **are able to** fly
safely as the world continues
to recover from the impact of
the coronavirus pandemic*



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MODALS OF ABILITY

WAS / WERE ABLE TO

PAST TENSE

- WAS / WERE

When we talk about achieving something on a specific occasion in the past, we use **was/were able to** (= had the ability to):

- *By using real-world simulation of air circulation patterns, designers **were able to** determine which of their proposed ventilation layouts would be the most effective.*

MANAGED TO

PAST TENSE

When we succeeded in doing something difficult:

- (...) *each of these 17 airlines **managed to** make an impression on the industry, and on their passengers, before flying their final flights.*

WASN'T / WEREN'T ABLE TO

PAST TENSE

- WASN'T / WEREN'T

When we talk about a specific occasion when someone didn't have the ability to do something, we can use **wasn't/weren't able to**:

- *In 2009, when automation technology failed on Air France Flight 447, and pilots **weren't able to** take control manually.*

WILL BE ABLE TO

FUTURE TENSE

- WILL BE ABLE TO

General things happened in the FUTURE:

- *Passengers **will be able to** fly directly from Canberra to Byron Bay, with Canberra Airport expanding its operations to include flights into northern NSW.*

