Unit 29: COULD

Could is a modal verb. Unit 27 shows you how to make correct sentences with it. This unit shows you when you can use it.

1 Possibility

a NOW EXAMPLE: I suppose he **could be** at home.

b FUTURE EXAMPLE: It **could become** a big problem.

c PAST EXAMPLE: Surely it could not have got lost in the mail.

d IMAGINARY EXAMPLE: If I had more money, I **could buy** a car.

e IMAGINARY PAST EXAMPLE: I did my best. I **could** not **have tried** any harder.

NOTICE: also may (Unit 30); also might (Unit 30)

NOTICE: for more on imagining, see Unit 86.2

2 Asking for

a HELP EXAMPLES: Please **could** you **send** me some information about the course.

Could you **lend** me some money?

NOTICE: also can (Unit 28); also will (Unit 31)

b PERMISSION EXAMPLE: Could I possibly **come** and see you next week?

NOTICE: also can (Unit 28); also may (Unit 30)

3 Past tense of can

a ABILITY EXAMPLE: We **could** not **find** a seat on the train.

b PERMISSION EXAMPLE: In those days, you **could drive** without a licence.

c POSSIBILITY EXAMPLE: At that time, you could live like a king on twenty dollars a day.

NOTICE: Luckily, I **could** get in by the back door. It was possible.

Luckily, I was able to get in by the back door. And I did.

ALSO be able to (Unit 36.1)

NOTICE:

We also use **could** (NOT *can*) in sentences with a past tense verb before the modal (Unit 63.8).

EXAMPLES: They wanted to know if I could help them.

He **said** that he **could** not come on Saturday.