

Describing ability in the past

6 Underline the words in bold that are the most natural then read the information in the box.

- In the old days **we could**/we were able to take our customers out for lunch all the time without worrying about the bill.
- The new software arrived yesterday. **I could**/I was able to install it quite easily.

- To talk about general past ability (not limited to one occasion) we use *could*.
- To talk about one specific past action we use *was/were able to*.
- To talk about one specific past action we can also use *managed to*, *failed to* and *succeed in*.

7 Complete each sentence with the correct ending, a) or b).

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1 I was able | 3 I succeeded |
| 2 I managed | 4 I failed |

- to install it
- in installing it

8 Look at the second bullet point in the box above, and then look at the sentence below.

Her presentation was excellent. I could understand everything she said.

This seems to break the rule – is it correct?

To talk about one specific past action with verbs of the senses and thoughts (*see, feel, hear, think, understand, etc.*) we can use *could* as well as *was/were able to*.

Articles

9 Match the uses a–j in the box with the examples 1–10.

a/an

- referring to something for the first time
- used when you mean any person or thing of a particular type, but not a specific one
- describing a type of job (*a teacher, an accountant*)

the

- referring to something mentioned previously
- referring to something for the first time when it is clear from the situation which one we mean
- when there is only one of something (*the boss, the sun*)
- nationalities and other groups (*the English, the young, the poor*)

no article

- plural countable nouns (*facts, jobs, machines, animals*) used in a general way
- uncountable nouns (*information, work, machinery, nature*) used in a general way
- most countries, continents, cities, streets (*Italy, Europe, Geneva, Church Street*)

- He's finished university and wants to work as an electrical engineer.
- Have you got a car?
- I have a suggestion.
- I've been thinking about **the** suggestion you made at the meeting yesterday.
- We sell these products all over **the** world.
- I think there should be more training for **the** unemployed.
- I think **the** project is going well.
- For me, football is like life.
- At our plant in Slovakia we make cars and trucks.
- Riga is the capital of Latvia.

10 The word *advice* is uncountable. Decide if each sentence is correct (✓) or incorrect (x).

- He gave me a good advice.
- He gave me the good advice.
- He gave me good advice.
- He gave me some good advice.
- The advice he gave me was very good.

- A common mistake is to use *a* or *the* with uncountable nouns used in a general way. In these cases we sometimes use no article, but it is more common to use *some* or *a lot of*.
- In sentence 5 *the* is used because it is clear from the situation which advice we mean.

11 The word *computer* is countable. Decide if each sentence is correct (✓) or incorrect (x).

- He's a real techie – he loves the computers.
- He's a real techie – he loves computers.
- The computers we have at work are a bit out-of-date.

- A common mistake is to use *the* with plural countable nouns used in a general way. We normally use no article.
- In sentence 3 *the* is used because it is clear from the situation which computers we mean.

12 If the sentence is correct, put a tick (✓). If it is incorrect, add or delete the articles *the* or *a/an*.

- In business, the up-to-date information is critical for success.
- This is a very important information.
- Thanks for information you gave me – it was useful.
- I enjoy job I do in the evening.
- It's hard to find jobs in the finance sector.
- To become doctor you need to study at university for many years.
- The love is not rational – you can't explain it.
- The love I have for my cat is not the same as the love I have for my boyfriend.
- We need to do a research.
- We need to do some research.
- We need to do the research to see if you're right.
- We need to do a lot of research.