

Ability and skill

by Adrian Doff

Level: Intermediate and above

Time: 20 minutes

Aim: – To use common expressions for talking about ability and skill.
– To say what you and other people know how to do.
– To say how good people are at doing things.

There are three ways of using this worksheet:

- Give the worksheet to students to work through independently and then in the next lesson go through the exercises and deal with any points that arise.
- Use the worksheet for an active classroom lesson. The notes below give ideas for doing this.
- Do not give the worksheet out in class but use it as the basis for your own lesson, getting ideas and phrases from the students and presenting language on the board (use the notes below to help you). Then give out the worksheet at the end and ask students to do the exercises for homework.

Warm-up

Warm-up: Establishing the concept

Give out the worksheet.

Read the texts at the top of the worksheet. Establish that they are extracts from job references (e.g. written by an employer). Ask what kind of job they might be for. Possible answers:

- A an international negotiator (e.g. for the UN), or possibly a job in business that involves negotiations with governments or other companies.
B a teacher of art or design (or possibly engineering), probably at a college.

Worksheet

Language focus

1. **be able to, have the ability to.** Read the examples, and make sure students know how to pronounce *able* and *ability*.

Look at the texts at the top of the page. Ask students to make sentences about the two people, using *able to* or *has the ability to*. Possible answers:

- A She has the ability to negotiate; she is able to gain other people's trust; she has the ability to remain calm.
B He is able to design things; he has the ability to communicate ideas; he is able to work with students.

2. **know how to.** Point out that we say *know how to*, not *know to*. To focus on this, ask students what e.g. a two-year-old child knows how to do (e.g. *walk, sit, talk*), and what he/she doesn't know how to do (*read, write, ride a bike*).

Then write on the board:

I know how to ...

I don't know how to ...

Ask students to think of continuations that are true of them.

3. **be good at + -ing, be a good + noun.** Read through the tables and focus on the difference between these structures:

- He can design clothes well.
- He's good at designing clothes.
- He's a good designer.

Point out that after *at*, we use a *noun* or an *-ing* form, e.g.:

- He's good at *chess*.
- He's good at *playing chess*.

Look at the two texts at the top of the worksheet. Ask what the two people are good at. Possible answers:

- A negotiating, getting people to trust her, staying calm
B designing things, communicating ideas, encouraging students, teaching

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Ask students what they need to be good at in their own job.

Point out that:

- *I'm no good at speaking = I'm not good at it, I'm bad at it.*
- *We don't normally say: He's bad at speaking or He's a bad speaker. Instead, we usually say: He's not very good at speaking.*

4. **skills.** Read the examples, and make sure students understand the meaning of *skill* (= something you can become good at).

Read through the list of skills, and show the relationship between the adjectives, nouns and verbs:

- management skills = you are able to manage a company
- administrative skills = you are able to administrate
- organizational skills = you are able to organize
- negotiating skills = you are good at negotiating
- communication skills = you are able to communicate with people
- (engineering has no equivalent verb).

For each item, ask students if this skill is important in their job.

Practice

1. Talk or write:

Students write part of two job references, following the style of the examples at the top of the Worksheet. Then ask them to read out what they have written.

Alternative: Ask students to choose two people. Give them a few moments to think what to say and possibly make a few notes. Then ask them in turn to give a 'reference' for the two people.

Larger classes: Do this as pairwork. Ask pairs to read out one of their 'references'.

2. Exercises:

Let students do the exercises in pairs. Then go through them together.

Possible answers:

- 1 a) has the ability to
b) have administrative and communication skills
c) good at town planning
d) Do you know how to
- 2 a) He's very good at organizing events and presentations.
b) I'm afraid I'm not a very good speaker.
c) Don't ask Anja. She doesn't know how to write good business letters.
d) I admire her ability to get work finished on time.

Other language areas you could explore:

1. learn and study

- *learn how to (use PowerPoint), learn about (marketing)*
- *study marketing (at university)*

2. skilled/unskilled

- *be a skilled/unskilled (worker), semi-skilled, highly skilled*

3. specialize

- *specialize in (company law)*
- *have a specialized job, be (highly) specialized*

4. other prepositions after good

- *be good with people, customers, clients*
- *be good in meetings, negotiations, interviews*

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A She is a **skilled negotiator** and she **has the ability to** gain other people's trust. She **is also able to** remain calm and in control in stressful situations.

excerpts from
job references

B He is not only a **brilliant designer**, but he also **knows how to** communicate his ideas to other people. He would certainly **be good at** encouraging students to have creative ideas.

be able to, have the ability (to)

Compare these sentences:

1. He **can** make other people laugh.
2. He **is able to** make other people laugh.
3. He **has the ability to** make other people laugh.

They all have a similar meaning, but 2 and 3 emphasize that this is an *ability* (something not everyone can do).

know how to

We can often use *know how to* in the same contexts as *be able to*:

He **knows how to** make other people laugh. (= he has developed this ability)

We can use *know how to* for things that you learn to do:

Do you **know how to** edit pictures in Photoshop?

He **knows how to** do simple bookkeeping, but he **doesn't** really **know how to** run a business.

be good at + -ing, be a good + noun

He's	brilliant good		designing (clothes)
She's	not very/much good	at	speaking in public
	no good		organizing people
	very bad		

He's	a brilliant a good	designer
She's	not a very good a very bad	public speaker
		organiser

NOT He's brilliant in designing clothes.

skills

likely and *unlikely* are adjectives (not adverbs). They mean the same as *probable* and *improbable*:

Noun:	skill(s)	He has the professional and social skills needed for the job.
Adjective:	skilled	To get a top job in local government, you need to be a skilled administrator.

We need someone with	We need ...	We need someone with ...	We need ...
... management skills	... a skilled manager	... negotiating skills	... a skilled negotiator
... administrative skills	... a skilled administrator	... communication skills	... a skilled communicator
... organizational skills	... a skilled organizer	... engineering skills	... a skilled engineer

Talk or write

Think of two people in your company. What abilities and skills do they have?

Write a 'reference' for each of them, like those at the top of the page.

Exercise

In each sentence, replace the phrase in *italics* with an expression using the word in brackets.

1. He's a good manager. He is able to create a good atmosphere at work. (**ability**)
2. The successful candidate should be a skilful administrator and communicator. (**skills**)
3. She's a really good town planner. (**good at**)
4. Can you use PowerPoint? (**know**)

Correct the mistake in each sentence.

1. He's very good in organizing events and presentations.
2. I'm afraid I'm a not very good speaker.
3. Don't ask Anja. She doesn't know to write good business letters.
4. She is always ability to get projects finished on time.