

Series 1 – No.1 Able

Audioscript

Welcome to **Words Alive**. The **Words Alive** series helps with the pronunciation of, and listening to, words and their examples in the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary. **Words Alive** is written and recorded by Richard Cauldwell, and brought to you by Cambridge University Press.

Part 1 Today's Word

Today's word is 'able'. The dictionary gives several entries for 'able' – we will work with the first one, 'able' in its CAN DO meaning. 'Able' is very common word, but it is not always easy to hear – it is often spoken quickly and quietly. Other words around it get highlighted, but not 'able' itself. But let's start with the word on its own. It is a two syllable word /'eɪ.bl/. It is an adjective which is most often used in the expression 'to be able to do something'. The dictionary tells us that it means 'to have the necessary physical strength, mental power, skill, time, money or opportunity to do something.'

Part 2 Examples.

There are four examples – as I say them, listen for the word 'able'. In three of the examples it will be easy to hear, in the other one it will be difficult.

Example 1

Will she be able to cope with the work?

Example 2

He's never been able to admit to his mistakes.

Example 3

I'm sorry that I wasn't able to phone you yesterday.

Example 4

It's so wonderful being able to see the sea from my window.

In which example was it most difficult for you to hear the word 'able'? I suspect it was example number 3, 'I'm sorry that I wasn't able to phone you yesterday'. In this example, 'able' is very short and quick and part of 'thatiwasnableto', 'thatiwasnableto', 'thatiwasnableto'. It is very common, in everyday speech, that words are 'gabbled' like this, (very fast), and this gabbling makes listening difficult. Oops. Sorry - AND THIS GABBling MAKES LIStening DIfficult.

Part 3 Practice

Let's work with the third example at different speeds to help with fluent pronunciation, and to help with listening to natural speech. Imagine first that you are dictating these words for someone to write down accurately and say the example as a list with four items:

Example 3A

// i'm SOrry // that i WASn't Able // to PHONE YOU // YESterday //

Now say it as if you are apologising to someone you love, who is upset because you didn't phone!

Example 3B

// i'm SOrry that i WASn't able // to PHONE you YESterday //

Now say it as if you are passing a friend in the corridor. The friend was half expecting you to phone yesterday, but is not upset. And we are going to put all the words into one speech unit, with just the words 'SOrry' and 'PHONE' highlighted – we will do it at three different speeds 120, 200, and 300 words per minute:

Example 3C

1 // i'm SOrry that i wasn't able to PHONE you yesterday // 120

2 // i'm SOrry that i wasn't able to PHONE you yesterday // 200

3 // i'm SOrry that i wasn't able to PHONE you yesterday // 300

The last version, at 300 words per minute, may seem too fast for you. But these kinds of speeds are very common in natural speech. Remember it is very common for words to be gabbled, when they are not highlighted – THAT I WAS NOT ABLE TO becomes 'thatiwasnableto', 'thatiwasnableto', 'thatiwasnableto' - // i'm SOrry that i wasn't able to PHONE you yesterday //.

Part 4 Pairwork

To end with, let's add a reply which makes it clear that the friend is not offended.

Example 3D

// i'm SOrry that i wasn't able to PHONE you yesterday //

// no PROblem // you DID TELL me // you MIGHT not be able to PHONE //