

Can vs Able to

Can & Able to are (often) approximately the same.

1 Expressing ability.

"I can swim but I can't ski."

2 Pronunciation This is not phonetic. Affirmative and negative are often confused by non-natives.

"I can" is usually pronounced "I cun"

The negative sounds like "I caan" (the "t" is often not pronounced).

Only questions are pronounced "Can"?

American pronunciation is easier to understand, a clearer "can" in the affirmative
Frequently "cannot" is used in the negative.

3 Help and permission: Can & Could are both used to offer or ask for help and to ask for permission
(Could is more polite)

"Can /Could I help you?" "Can/Could you help me?"

"Can/Could I take a holiday next week?"

(In offers to help May and Might are also used "May/Might I help you?" but not in requests for help)

4 Ability: *"Can you come to the meeting?" "Are you able to come to the meeting?"*
These are similar - "Can" is more common (it's shorter)

"Could" used here indicates a request rather than an ability.

5 I could and I did!: Able to often means I could do something and I really did it.

"He could speak Russian so he was able to explain."

Consequently, "I was able to escape." tells you that the escape was accomplished.

Compare it with

"He was very ill and could have died." tells you he didn't die.

For a more complete explanation consult Collins at:

<https://grammar.collinsdictionary.com/english-usage/what-is-the-difference-between-can-could-and-be-able-to>