

Language and learning

8.1 The amazing human brain

GOALS ■ Talk about ability ■ Talk about skills and abilities

Grammar & Listening ability (*can, be able to*)

- 1a Work with a partner. Look at the words below and say the colours you see, not the words. Say them as fast as you can.

GREEN	RED	PURPLE
ORANGE	BLUE	YELLOW

BLACK	RED	GREEN
BLUE	ORANGE	BLACK

- b Did you slow down in the second group? Why do you think this happens? Read the information at the bottom of the page to find out.

- 2a You are going to listen to a radio programme about the human brain. First work with a partner and decide if these sentences are true (T) or false (F).

- We only use 10% of our brain.
- Boys' brains are bigger than girls' brains.
- We can remember things better if we listen to classical music.
- Babies can't learn more than one language at the same time.
- The brain isn't able to repair itself.
- Computers are able to read our minds.

- b 8.1))) Listen to the programme and check your answers.

It is harder to say the second group of words because the word and the colour do not match. This is called the 'Stroop Effect', after J Ridley Stroop, who discovered this phenomenon in the 1930s. It shows that the brain can read words more quickly than it can recognize and then name colours.

- 3 8.2))) Listen to the last part of the programme again and complete the sentences.
- Computers will soon be _____ to scan our brains and put our thoughts into words.
 - They _____ be able to understand the thoughts, though.
 - People with speech problems _____ be able to communicate just by thinking.
- 4 Read the Grammar focus box and complete the rules with the words *present* and *future*.

GRAMMAR FOCUS ability (*can, be able to*)

- We use *can* and *be able to* to say that we have the ability to do something (we know how to do it).
- For ability in the ¹ _____ we use *can* or *be able to* + infinitive.
Bilingual children can speak two languages.
The brain is able to repair itself.
Note: In the present, *can* is more common than *be able to*.
- For ability in the ² _____ we use *will/might* + *be able to* + infinitive.
People will be able to search the internet just by thinking.
NOT *In the future, scientists can understand the brain better.*

→ Grammar Reference page 148



- 5 Complete the article with *can* or *can't* where possible. If not, use *be able to* in the correct form.

Computers and the human brain

Which is smarter: a computer or a human brain? Even today's simplest computers ¹ _____ solve maths and other problems much faster than humans. However, they ² _____ use imagination or come up with new ideas. But what about the future – will computers ever ³ _____ think creatively, like humans? Will they ever ⁴ _____ know what salt tastes like or what pain feels like? Some scientists doubt it. They say that even a hundred years from now, computers ⁵ _____ do this. Others say that science is full of surprises so we ⁶ _____ predict now what will happen in the distant future.

Meanwhile, neuroscientists are using computers to help them understand the human brain better. In a new \$1.6 billion project, the Human Brain Project, scientists from several countries will work together to create the world's first computer model of the human brain. The 'computer brain' ⁷ _____ operate 1,000 times faster than today's computers, and scientists ⁸ _____ 'fly around' inside it and learn more about how the brain works. They also hope they ⁹ _____ discover more about brain illnesses, such as Alzheimer's. Scientists might even ¹⁰ _____ learn more about where our thoughts and emotions come from.

- 6 Complete the sentences with *can*, *can't* and *be able to* and your own ideas. Then compare your sentences with a partner.

- In my opinion, men can read maps better than women.
- In general, women _____ better than men.
- Scientists might _____ one day.
- I won't _____ this year.
- I hope that _____ soon.

Vocabulary & Speaking skills and abilities

- 7a Work with a partner. Which group do the words and expressions below belong to? Write C, P or T next to each. Some may go into more than one group.

- communication skills (C)
 - practical skills (P)
 - thinking/learning skills (T)
- learning languages
 - map reading
 - spelling
 - taking care of people
 - making speeches
 - following instructions
 - remembering names
 - understanding how things work
 - telling jokes
 - explaining things clearly
 - solving computer problems
 - organizing events
 - fixing things that are broken
 - making decisions

- b Add your own ideas to the three groups.

- 8a With your partner, put a–g in order, from being able to do things well (1) to badly (7).

- She's **quite good at** map reading.
- He's **brilliant at** solving computer problems.
- I'm **really/very good at** fixing things.
- I'm **terrible/useless at** remembering people's names.
- He **isn't very good at** telling jokes.
- I'm **OK at** following instructions.
- She's **good at** spelling.

PRONUNCIATION at

- b 8.3))) Listen and check your answers. Notice the pronunciation of *at* in each sentence.

- c 8.4))) Listen and repeat the sentences.

- d What verb form comes after the preposition *at* in the sentences above?

- 9a **TASK** Work in a group. Find out how good other people are at doing the things in exercise 7. Ask questions using the grammar and vocabulary from this lesson and the phrases below. Who in the group do you have most in common with?

How well can you ...? How good at ... are you?

- b Tell the class what you found out about the others in your group.

▶ VOX POPS VIDEO 8.1

Communicate

Imagine