

Posse – to be able

In Latin, you can use 'posse' plus an infinitive verb to show when someone is able to do something. In the present tense, it looks like this:

possum I am able	possumus we are able
potes you are able	potestis y'all are able
potest he/she/it is able	possunt they are able

In English, you can translate the posse + infinitive verb pair as 'able to do' or 'can do'.

Exercise 1 – What can I do?

Translate the sentence into English using 'I am able' or 'I can'. The first one is done for you.

1. dormire possum.

I am able to sleep (or I can sleep).

2. cantare possum.

I am able to sing (or I can sing).

3. finire possum.

I am able to finish (or I can finish).

4. navigare possum.

I am able to sail (or I can sail).

5. gladium portare possum.

I am able to carry the sword (or I can carry the sword).

6. canem invenire possum.

I am able to find the dog (or I can sleep).

7. fortiter pugnare possum.

I am able to sleep (or I can find the dog).

8. bene legere possum.

I am able to read well (or I can read well).

9. celeriter currere possum.

I am able to run fast (or I can run fast).

10. undas videre possum.

I am able to see the waves (or I can see the waves).

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Exercise 2 – Who can do what?

These sentences contain all six variations of 'posse'. Translate the sentence into English working out who is able and then what they're able to do. The first one is done for you.

1. clamare potest.

He/she is able to shout (or he/she can shout).

2. per silvam ambulare possumus.

We are able to walk through the woods. (or I can walk)

3. dei urbem delere possunt.

The gods can destroy the city.

4. navem construere potestis.

Y'all can build a boat.

5. infantem curare possum.

I can look after the child.

6. tacere non potes.

you can't keep quiet.

7. regina fortiter pugnare potest.

The queen can fight bravely.

8. "montem facile ascendere possumus!" dixit dux.

"We can easily climb the mountain!" said the leader.

9. equi celeriter currere possunt.

The horses can run quickly.

10. aquamne portare potes?

Are you able to carry the water?