

Can and Could Special Uses

Can and could are modal auxiliaries used to express ideas such as ability, possibility and permission. They also have some special uses. For example, they are often used with verbs that do not have a continuous form to talk about ongoing states and experiences.

Complete the following sentences with an appropriate word or phrase.

1. I Mary coming.

- can see
- am seeing
- see

2. somebody coming up the stairs?

- Are you hearing
- Can you hear

3. What did you put in the soup? I something funny.

- taste
- am tasting
- can taste

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4. Suddenly I realized I something burning.

was smelling
could smell

5. I what she wanted.

knew
could knew
had known

6. I what she wanted.

guessed
could guess
Either could be used here

7. You she is British from her accent.

tell
told
can tell

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8. I what you are talking about.

can't understand

don't understand

Either could be used here

9. She is an arrogant woman, but somehow you can't her.

help to like

help like

help liking

10. I couldn't what they said.

help to overhear

help overhearing

help overhear

11. I can't help what she wants.

but to wonder

but wonder

but wondering

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12. I can't help what I should do next.

but wonder

wondering

Either could be used here

Answers

1. I can see Mary coming.
2. Can you hear somebody coming up the stairs?
3. What did you put in the soup? I can taste something funny.
4. Suddenly I realized I could smell something burning.
5. I knew what she wanted.
6. I guessed / could guess what she wanted.
7. You can tell she is British from her accent.
8. I can't understand / don't understand what you are talking about.
9. She is an arrogant woman, but somehow you can't help liking her.
10. I couldn't help overhearing what they said.
11. I can't help but wonder what she wants.
12. I can't help wondering / but wonder what I should do next.