Could, Would & Should

Many students struggle with when to use could, would, and should. In this simple lesson we will help you better understand how to use them correctly.

Use Could & Couldn't For Past Abilities:
Since could and couldn't are the past tense of can and can't, we can use them to express our past abilities.

1.) When I was young, I could play the guitar very well.
2.) A few generations ago Koreans could barely speak any English at all. However, now many can speak English.
3.) My family couldn't afford to send me to a private school when I was growing up.

Incorrect:
1.) Last year I can't speak any English at all.
2.) When I was young I can't swim, but now I can swim very well.

Make a sentence using could and couldn't to show past abilities.

Use Could For Future Possibilities:
We can use could for ideas and possibilities as well as missed opportunities.

1.) I could have had a better job if I picked a better major.
2.) We could promote our business by creating a website to sell our products online.

3.) I could be healthier and happier if I didn't drink so much soju.

Make your own examples showing future possibilities.

Use Could To Make Polite Requests:
Using could to ask for something or for help is much more polite and respectful.

1.) Could you please pass the salt?
2.) Could you please speak slower? English isn't my first language.
3.) This beer is so delicious. Could I please have another? Thank you.

Make your own examples by requesting for something politely.

Incorrect:
1.) Give me more salt please.
2.) Speak slower. My English is no good.
3.) This beer is delicious. I want another one please.

Use Would Or Wouldn't If You Are Talking About Hypothetical Situations:
We can use would when we are talking about unreal situations or if we are talking about being in someone else's shoes.

1.) If I was you I would consider finding a new job.
2.) If I were the president I would stop sending manufacturing jobs overseas.
3.) I wouldn't have called him back if I were you.

Make your own hypothetical examples using would.
Use Would To Make Polite Offers:
If we are offering something to someone it is always polite to start with "would you like..."

1.) Would you like to join us for dinner?
2.) Would you like something to drink?
3.) Would you like some help with your Korean studies?
Make a polite offer using "would you like..."

Use Should & Shouldn't When Asking For And Giving Advice:
Always use should when asking and especially when giving advice. If you don't use should when giving advice people will think you are bossy or very controlling.

1.) Should I stick with Hynix or should I look for a job with more flexibility?
2.) You should stick with Hynix. It's a good company with a bright future.
3.) Should I take the KTX or the bus to Seoul? You should take the bus it's cheaper and takes about the same time to get there.

Make a sentence using should to ask for advice, and use shouldn't to give advice.

Incorrect
1.) You take the bus to Seoul it's faster.
2.) You want to stay with Hynix it's a good company with a bright future.

Tips:
Students often think that by adding the word "please" to the end of their sentences that they are automatically being polite. If we say "give me more chicken please" or "I want more chicken please," it is often considered rude because it is very demanding. "Could I please have more chicken." is more polite and respectful.

Another tip to consider is that many people use could and would interchangeably when making a polite request. "Could you please pass the salt." and "Would you please pass the salt." mean the same thing. However, for the sake of the lesson try to use would for offering and could for requesting.

Quiz

• 1.) When I was young, I _______ bench press over 100 kilograms.
• 2.) _______ I quit my job or stay with Hyundai Mobis?
• 3.) My mother said women _______ smoke because it's not ladylike.
• 4.) I was wondering if you ______ help me with my English assignment.
• 5.) If I were you I ______ marry her. Songi is beautiful!
• 6.) I _______ always go back to school and try to get a better job.
• 7.) Everyone _______ respect their parents and take care of them into their old age.
• 8.) If I were President Park I ________ have increased the minimum wage.
• 9.) _______ you please close the window. It is cold.
• 10.) Are you cold? _______ you like me to close the window?

Vocabulary:

• Missed opportunities: Means a chance is no longer available or being offered. "Not studying abroad was a missed opportunity I will never forget."
• Hypothetical: Means not real or a theory. An unreal example. "Mark Zuckerberg could hypothetically make 30,000 new millionaires if he was generous."
• Bossy: Means to give people orders when you are not in fact the boss. "Ever since he got a promotion he has been acting very bossy."
Interchangeable: Means identical or very similar. "Big and huge can be used interchangeably."

Questions:
1.) What would you change about your life if you were a millionaire?
2.) Should I visit China or Japan on my next vacation? Why?
3.) What could you do in the past that you can no longer do now.
4.) What can you do now that you couldn't do in the past?
5.) What could your company do to develop a better relationship with its employees?
6.) What could your university do to improve the experience for its students?
7.) Should I focus on my career or try to find a spouse?

Daily Expressions & Idioms:
1.) "Stick with": Means to not give up and keep trying.
"English is hard in the beginning but if you stick with it, eventually you'll get the hang of it."
2.) "Get the hang of it": Means to succeed at something after you practice or study a lot.
"Even though golf was difficult at first I am finally starting to get the hang of it." "I don't think I will ever get the hang of speaking Korean. It's just too difficult."