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BSc Degree

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English – II (Advanced English)

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Could vs Would

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COULD vs WOULD

1. Both 'could' and 'would' can be used to talk about the past.

I can run a few kilometers without any break. (present)

I could run a few kilometers without any break. (past)

I know he will pass the exam. (future)

I knew he would pass the exam. (past)




Let us first talk about what is common in both these words – could and would. So, one thing that is common in them is that both could and would can be used to talk about the past. Let me substantiate that with a few example sentences. The first one is, I can run a few kilometres without any break. So, someone here is talking about his ability. So, he says that he can run for a few kilometres without any break.

So, what tense is it? It is present tense because he is talking about his ability at present. So, it is the present tense. Now, if someone says, I could run a few kilometres without any break. It clearly means he does not possess that ability at present. So, therefore, 'could' here refers to the past. I could run a few kilometres without any break.

Now, similarly, when we look at the use of would, we have two example sentences here. I know he will pass the exam. That is the future tense because someone is talking about a future possibility; I know he will pass the exam. Someone is sure about that; I know he will pass the exam. Now, look at this sentence; I knew he would pass the exam.

That is the past of, the past form of this sentence. I know he will pass the exam. It is something; it is about a possibility in future, a possibility that this person he quite sure of. The second sentence is talking about his belief in the past. He was sure even in the past that he would pass the exam. So, it is a matter of the past, his past belief. So, I hope you understood the use of would and could in its past form.

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COULD vs WOULD

2. Possible and imaginary situations.

Miss. Maya has set the question paper. The exam could be very tough. Possibility
 My boss isn't responding to my mails. He could be busy. Possibility
 Indicates possibility and not past form – would cannot be used in place of could

In imaginary situations, we prefer to use 'would'.
 If I had a lot of money, I would retire early. (I could retire early)
 If Kishore worked hard, he would pass the exam. (He could pass the exam)
 Would is used a lot more in imaginary situations.



Now, let us look at the use of could and would in possible situations and in imaginary situations. So, let us check this sentence out. Miss. Maya has set the question paper. The example could be very tough. So, in this case, we are talking about a possibility and therefore, we are using could because Miss. Maya has set the question paper; it is the possibility that the question is very tough; the question could be very tough.

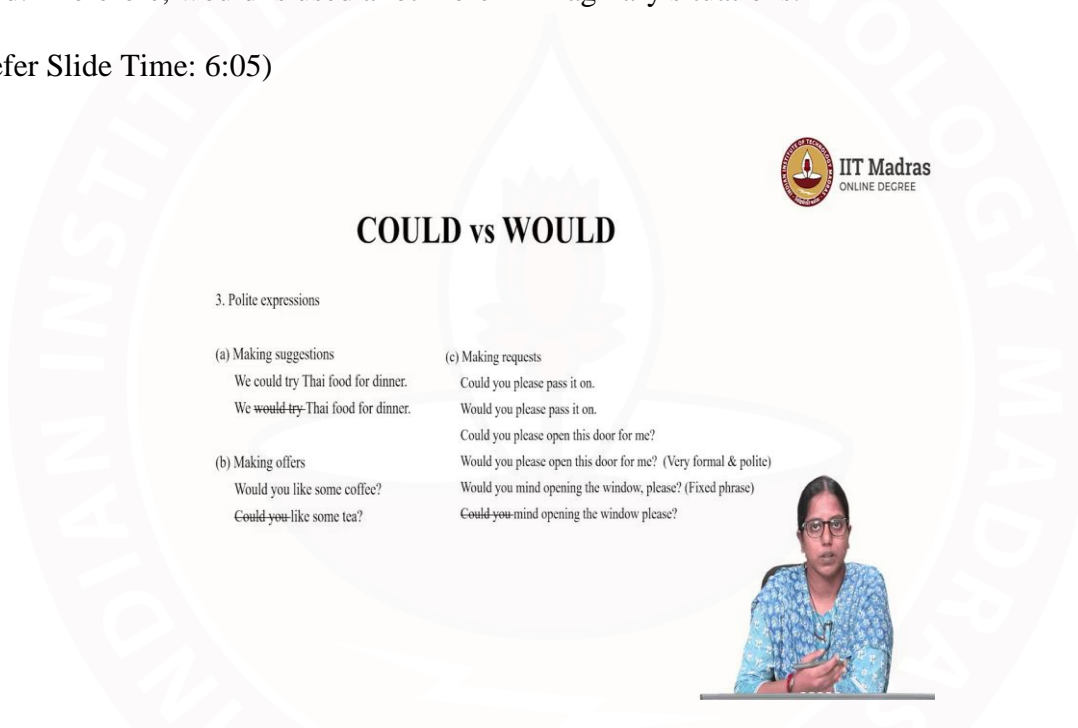
Now, are you sure the exam is going to be very tough? Well, no. But I am saying it is quite possible that it could be tough. My boss is not responding to my emails; he could be busy. This is a second example sentence. My boss is not responding to my emails; he could be busy. Now, here again, you are talking about a possible situation. It is possible that because my boss is busy, he is not responding to my emails.


Now, when we are talking about possible situations, we must use could and not would. So, in these two sentences, these two sentences talk about the possibility. This is in the context of possibility. In the context of possibility, one should not replace could with would. This is very important, a lot of us confuse it. If I give you, if I strike this off and if this is, if it is a blank in place of could, you should not be writing the exam would be very tough.

That will be wrong, or he would be busy. When you are talking about a possibility, we should definitely use could and not would. However, if you are talking about the past form and if you are not talking about a possibility, then it is okay to use either of these modal verbs. So, when we talk about imaginary situations, we must always prefer using would over could. For example, if I had a lot of money, I would retire early.

It is okay to use if I had a lot of money, I could retire early, but it is always better to use I would retire early because you are talking about an imaginary situation. If Kishore worked hard, he would pass the exam. It is also possible that you say; if Kishore worked hard, he could pass the exam. But like I said, in imaginary situations, it is better to use would over could. Therefore, would is used a lot more in imaginary situations.

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COULD vs WOULD

3. Polite expressions

<p>(a) Making suggestions</p> <p>We could try Thai food for dinner.</p> <p>We would try Thai food for dinner.</p>	<p>(c) Making requests</p> <p>Could you please pass it on.</p> <p>Would you please pass it on.</p> <p>Could you please open this door for me?</p> <p>Would you please open this door for me? (Very formal & polite)</p> <p>Would you mind opening the window, please? (Fixed phrase)</p> <p>Could you mind opening the window please?</p>
<p>(b) Making offers</p> <p>Would you like some coffee?</p> <p>Could you like some tea?</p>	

Now, when we talk about polite expressions, we should definitely talk about would and could. Now, let us talk about making suggestions. Let us suppose you are going out for dinner with your friends and you would like to make this suggestion that we could try Thai food for dinner. Now, my question is, can you replace the word could with would when you make suggestions?

Instead of saying we could try Thai food for dinner, is it appropriate for you to say we would try Thai food for dinner? The answer is a simple No. When you are making suggestions, it is always right, and it is always appropriate for you to use could over would. So, the right use of, the right use of the sentence is; we could try Thai food for dinner.

Now, talking about making offers, “would you like some coffee, please?” Or will you say, “Could you like some tea?” Could you like some coffee, please? Well, that is wrong. When you make offers, you should always use would over could. So, you should not be asking, could you like some tea? Instead, you should ask, would you like some tea?

Now coming to the third part of it, which is making a request, when you make a request, which modal verb would you use, could or would? Well, the right answer is you could use both. Let us look at the example sentences here. Could you please pass it on? It is also possible that you could say; would you please pass it on?

It is also quite okay to say, would you please pass it on. Similarly, could you please open this door for me? Would you please open this door for me? But notice that when you use would, it is going to be very formal, but polite of course. So, it is in very formal occasions that you use would, but you also need to know that using would is also a mark of politeness.

Now, one very important thing that you need to keep in mind is you must have come across this phrase, would you mind, would you mind opening the window, please? Now, that is a request. Now, can I replace ‘would you mind’ with ‘could you mind’? Could you mind opening the window, please?

No. Because would you mind is a fixed phrase and the ‘would’ in this particular case ‘would you mind’ cannot be replaced with could. So, when you make a request, you could use both could and would, except for the phrase, would you mind. So, in the phrase would you mind, you cannot replace the word would with could.

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COULD vs WOULD

(d) Ask for permission

Could I borrow your pen for a couple of minutes?
Would it be OK if I **borrowed** your bike for a couple of days?
Would you mind if I **borrowed** your bike for a couple of days?
(The verb should be in the past)



The fourth situation is when you need to ask for permission. Example sentences I have given here. Could I borrow your pen for a couple of minutes? Possible, you could also ask, “Would it be okay if I borrowed your bike for a couple of days?” Now, my question is, can I replace could with would here, would I borrow your pen?

Now, if you want to use would, there is a different way of putting that, that is, start the sentence with ‘could it be okay’, ‘would you mind’. Example sentences I have given here. Would it be okay if I borrowed your bike for a couple of days? Similarly, “would you mind if I borrowed your bike for a couple of days?” What you need to note here is that the verb should be in past if you use, would it is okay, would you mind at the beginning of the sentence.

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ACTIVITY

1. ----- you mind sharing your notes with me?
2. Prabha ----- already speak three languages when she was 6.
3. If I became the prime minister, I ----- make health services free for everybody.
4. ----- I use your laptop to send an email?
5. ----- you like me to give you a ride back home?



So, here comes the activity time. I have five sentences for you. So, with this, you will be able to know if you have got the concepts clear. Let me read out the sentences. The first one is, dash you mind sharing your notes with me? Second, Prabha dash already speak three languages when I was 6. Third, if I became the Prime Minister, I dash make health services free for everybody.

Dash I use your laptop to send an email? Dash, you want me to give you a ride back home? Now I want you to pause the video, work on these questions and then we will discuss the answers. So, let us now check the answers.

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ANSWERS

1. **Would** you mind sharing your notes with me?
2. Prabha **could** already speak three languages when she was 6. *past*
3. If I became the prime minister, I **would** make health services free for everybody. *imaginary*
4. **Could** I use your laptop to send an email?
5. **Would** you like me to give you a ride back home?



Now, yes. It would you mind sharing your notes because, like I have already discussed, would you mind is a fixed phrase and could cannot be replaced within that phrase, would you mind, in place of would. Now second is Prabha could already speak three languages when she was 6. This is in the past form, so it is could there. If I became the Prime Minister, I would make health services free for everybody.

This is an imaginary situation. And in imaginary situations, one should prefer using would over could. Could I use your laptop to send an email? That is, could I use your laptop to send an email is you are asking for someone's permission. So, there it is appropriate for you to use could instead of would. The fifth one is would you like me to give you a ride back home?

Why is it? Because you are making an offer, I mean when you are making an offer, it is always appropriate for you to use would instead of could. So, with that, we come to the end of this session. I hope you like this session. I will meet you with a different topic on a different day, until then, stay safe, take care, bye.