



Mastering "I could" in French

*The ultimate guide to
Je pourrais & Je pouvais*

The basic structure for expressing "I could" in French is simple and identical across both forms.

The Golden Formula:

Subject (Je) + could (pourrais/pouvais)
+ base verb (Infinitif)

The Conditional: Je pourrais

Attention ! Always add the '-s'. Writing *Je pourrai* (without the 's') changes the meaning entirely to: "I will be able to".

Polite Suggestion

Je pourrais venir te chercher à la gare.

(I could come pick you up at the train station.)

Possibility

Je pourrais arriver à 9h30 si je partais à 9h.

(I could arrive at 9:30 if I'd leave at 9.)

Polite Request

Je pourrais partir plus tard ?
(Could I leave later?)





The Past Tense: Je pouvais

How do you express “I could” for an action that has already happened? You must use the past tense form of *pouvoir*.

Capacity in the Past

Quand j'étais à Paris, je pouvais voir la Tour Eiffel de ma chambre.

(When I was in Paris, I could see the Eiffel Tower from my room.)

Recurring Action

Quand j'étais en vacances, je pouvais aller à plage tous les jours.

(When I was on vacation, I could go to the beach everyday.)

Your Quick Reference Guide

	Je pourrais	Je pouvais
Form	Conditional	Past Tense
Timeframe	Present / Future-leaning	Strictly in the Past
Primary Uses	Polite suggestions, possibilities, polite requests.	Past capacities, recurring past actions.
Spelling Rule	Ends with an -s (Crucial: without it, it means "I will be able to").	Ends with an -s.



À vous ! (Your Turn)

Test your knowledge of *pouvoir*.

Section 1: Multiple Choice

What does "Je pourrai" (without the -s) mean?

- ☐ A) I could
 - ☐ B) I will be able to
 - ☐ C) I was able to
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Section 2: Fill in the Blank

"Je _____ arriver à 9h30 si je partais à 9h."
(Hint: Expressing a possibility)

Section 3: Match the Context

Match the French sentence to its grammatical purpose:

- | | | |
|---|-------|-------------------------|
| 1. Je pourrais partir plus tard ? | ----- | A. Polite Suggestion |
| 2. Je pourrais venir te chercher... | ----- | B. Capacity in the Past |
| 3. ...je pouvais voir la Tour Eiffel... | ----- | C. Polite Request |