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THE USAGE PANEL

The Usage Panel is a group of nearly 200 prominent scholars, creative writers, journalists, diplomats, and others in occupations requiring mastery of language. Annual surveys have gauged the acceptability of particular usages and grammatical constructions.

[The Panelists](#)



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-able or **-ible**

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suff.

1. Susceptible, capable, or worthy of a specified action: *debatable*.
2. Inclined or given to a specified state or action: *changeable*.

[Middle English, from Old French, from Latin *-ābilis*, *-ibilis* : *-ā-* and *-i-*, thematic vowels + *-bilis*, adj. suff.]

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a·ble  (ā bəl)

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adj. **a·bler**, **a·blest**

1. Having sufficient power or resources to accomplish something: *a singer able to reach high notes; a detergent able to remove stains*.
2. *Usage Problem* Susceptible to action or treatment: *The brakes were able to be fixed*.
3. Especially capable or proficient: *The new programmers proved to be very able*.

[Middle English, from Old French, from Latin *habilis*, from *habēre*, to handle; see **ghabh-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

a bly (ā blē) *adv.*

Usage Note: The construction *able to* takes an infinitive to show the subject's ability to accomplish something: *We were able to finish the project thanks to a grant from a large corporation. The new submarine is able to dive twice as fast as the older model*. Subjects to which people don't ascribe active roles tend to sound awkward in this construction, especially in passive constructions involving forms of the verb *be*, as in *The problem was able to be solved by using this new method*. Here, the use of the passive underscores the subject's not taking an active role, while the use of *able* suggests the opposite, creating a conflict. In our 2005 survey, only 24 percent of the Usage Panel accepted *able* in a sentence like this, though 54 percent accepted the use of *capable* instead (*the problem was capable of being solved*), suggesting that *capable* is less jarring. It may be easier just to substitute *can* or *could*, which are standard: *The problem could be solved by using this new method*.

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[Indo-European Roots](#)

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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