

# Modals of speculation and deduction

Feedback

# Present and past modals

- **Present form** → to express degree of certainty of a **present action**

A: 'What time is it?'

B: 'It's 9PM.'

A: 'Oh, it must be dark then.'

- **Present continuous form** → to express degree of certainty of an **ongoing event** (at the time of speaking)

A: 'What time is it?'

B: 'It's 5PM.'

A: 'Oh, it must be getting dark then.' (it's not completely dark)

- **Perfect form** → to express degree of certainty of a **past event**

A: 'What time is it?'

B: 'It's 7PM.'

A: 'Then she must have finished the exam because it started at 2PM.'

- **Perfect continuous form** → to express degree of certainty of a **past event** that might have taken **a while** (long action)

A: 'It's 10AM and John isn't here; we agreed to meet at 9:30AM!'

B: 'He might have been thinking it was earlier, and now he is late.'

# Certain sth is true (MUST)

- Present form → must + infinitive without 'to'

He is really fluent in English. He **must live** in the UK.

- Present continuous form → must + be + -ing

He is a good student and has an exam tomorrow. He **must be studying** now.

- Perfect form → must + have + past participle

She got an A+ in the exam. She **must have studied** a lot.

- Perfect continuous form → must + have + been + -ing

He finally defended his PhD thesis! He **must have been working** hard for many years.

# Certain sth is not true (CAN'T)

- Present form → can't + infinitive without 'to'

She has three kids to look after; she **can't have** much time for herself.

- Present continuous form → can't + be + -ing

He went out with his friend. He **can't be studying** now.

- Perfect form → can't + have + past participle

They **can't have left** the party yet; their car is still outside.

- Perfect continuous form → can't + have + been + -ing

They **can't have been driving** for long when the car broke down; they had left 30 minutes before.

# Possibility (MAY / MIGHT / COULD)

- **Present form** → may (not) / might (not) / could + infinitive without 'to'  
She is not here yet; she **might be** stuck in traffic, but I'm not sure.
- **Present continuous form** → may (not) / might (not) / could + be + -ing  
I don't know where my nephew is; he **could be playing** tennis right now.
- **Perfect form** → may (not) / might (not) / could + have + past participle  
Joe thinks his wife **may have left** with her lover.
- **Perfect continuous form** → may (not) / might (not) / could + have + been + -ing  
Police think the art thief **might not have been working** alone.

**'May' or 'might'?** 'May' is more formal than 'might' so it is more appropriate in written, whereas 'might' is typically used in informal contexts. In terms of meaning, they are the same, but we don't tend to use 'mayn't', but 'mightn't'.

He's not answering. He **may be** in class. = He's not answering. He **might be** in class.

He **mightn't be** in class. vs. \*He ~~mayn't be~~ in class.

# Synonymous expressions

- Must: I'm certain.../ I'm confident.../ I believe... / I'm (absolutely) sure something **IS** true.
- May / Might / Could: It is possible that..., It is (highly) likely.../ Perhaps.../ It is possibly true that.../ I suppose... / I imagine
- May not / Mightn't: It is possible 'x' is not true/ It is (highly) **un**likely.../ Perhaps... 'x' is not true...
- Can't: I'm certain... / I'm confident... / I'm (absolutely) sure something is **NOT** true.

# Why are these wrong?

Complete the email with *must have*, *can't have* or *might/may (not) have* and the correct form of the verbs in brackets. Do not use contractions for 'may not' or 'might not'.

Hi Alina,

Guess what! Somebody broke into our house last week. It  ❌

(happen) before Thursday because my aunt was staying in the house until then – it

❌ (take place) on the last two days of our holiday in

France. The police aren't sure, but they think that the burglar  ❌

(know) we were away. He  ❌ (break into) the house through the open upstairs window because none of the locks downstairs are damaged.

The burglar took our huge plasma TV – he  ❌ (have) difficulty carrying that out of the house! Only one person went into the house, but the criminal

❌ (be) alone – because somebody

❌ (stand) outside watching for the police. Anyway, we were lucky – he

❌ (find) Mum's jewellery because it was still in her room or

perhaps he  ❌ (be) in a hurry. He  ✅ (feel) disappointed not to find anything really valuable!

Anyway, everything's fine – I'll speak to you soon.

Simon

# Some extra practice (I)

3 Complete these sentences by writing a suitable modal verb and the verb in brackets in the correct form (present or past) in the gaps. In some cases, more than one answer may be possible.

- 1 Everyone in the class ..... (*work*)  
incredibly hard because you have all passed the exam!
- 2 I think she ..... (*be*) a really happy person  
because she's always smiling and laughing.
- 3 Jamie woke up in the night screaming.  
He ..... (*have*) a nightmare.
- 4 I don't know why Irina hasn't arrived yet.  
She ..... (*have to*) stay on late at school,  
or she ..... (*stop*) on the way home to see  
some friends.
- 5 I don't know how old the teacher is, but he looks quite  
young, so he ..... (*be*) more than 25.
- 6 They say it ..... (*rain*) at the weekend, so  
we won't be able to play football on Saturday.



# Some extra practice (II)

1 Rewrite the sentences in *italics* using a modal verb: *might, may, could, must* or *can't*. **in the right tense.**

1 Ryan is behaving very strangely. *I'm sure he's in love.*  
He ..... *must be* ..... in love.

2 Deborah is looking a bit tired. *Perhaps she's working too hard.*  
She .....

3 He never goes on holiday. *I don't suppose he earns much.*  
He .....

4 She is studying full-time and she has a job in a restaurant. *I imagine that's very hard.*  
That .....

5 That man's quite young. *He's definitely not Claire's grandfather.*  
That .....

6 He's just bought a new car and a yacht. *He obviously sold his business for a lot of money.*  
He.....

7 Andy and Sarah aren't speaking to each other. *I don't believe they've had another argument.*  
They ..... another argument.

8 You seem very familiar. *Perhaps we've met before.*  
We .....

9 She says she doesn't like children. *I'm sure she didn't have a happy childhood herself.*  
She ..... a happy childhood.

10 I don't know why she didn't tell me she'd left her job. *It's possible she thought I would be angry.*  
She .....

Let's do SB p. 25 exercise 3

# Some extra practice - KEY

## Exercise 1 (slide 7)

1. Must have worked
2. Must be
3. Must have had / must have been having
4. Might / may / could have had to
5. Might / may / could have stopped
6. Can't be
7. Might / may / could rain

## Exercise 2 (slide 8)

- 2) She may / might / could be working too hard.
- 3) He can't / might not / may not earn much.\*
- 4) That must be very hard.\*
- 5) That can't be Claire's grandfather.
- 6) He must have sold his business for a lot of money.
- 7) They can't have had another argument.
- 8) We may / might / could have met before.
- 9) She can't have had a happy childhood.
- 10) She may / might / could have thought I would be angry

\*depending on the speaker's degree of certainty.

# Some extra practice - KEY

## Exercise 3 page 25 SB

- Jack can't have gone to work because his car is still outside.
- This can't be Bath already, can it? It hasn't taken us very long to get here.
- I'm not sure where Ken is. Try the library – he could / may / might be there.
- I didn't hear Chloe say she was getting married. I must have been doing something else when she told you.
- You seem certain that this painting is a fake, but it may / might not be – it's difficult to tell.

And finally...

Let's play some Kahoot!