

Modal Verbs of Speculation About the Past

Practice Worksheet • B2–C1

Name	_____
Date	_____

Quick reminder

Use this structure to speculate about the past: modal verb + have + past participle. Use *may have* / *might have* / *could have* for possibility, *must have* for strong certainty, and *can't have* for strong negative certainty.

Exercise 1 — Choose the best option

Complete each sentence with the best answer: *may have*, *might have*, *could have*, *must have*, or *can't have*.

1. Julia looks exhausted. She _____ gone to bed very late last night.

2. Tom didn't answer my message. He _____ left his phone at home, but I'm not sure.

3. They arrived an hour early. They _____ misunderstood the starting time.

4. I saw Ben in the library at 6 p.m., so he _____ been at the cinema at that time.

5. The roads are completely wet. It _____ rained during the night.

6. She was smiling all morning. She _____ received some good news.

7. He knew every answer in the quiz. He _____ revised very carefully.

8. The dog was in the garden a minute ago. It _____ gone far.

Exercise 2 — Multiple choice

Circle or highlight the correct answer.

No.	Sentence and options
1	I can't find my glasses. I (must have / might have / can't have) left them in the kitchen.
2	Sophie didn't come to the lesson. She (can't have / may have / must have) forgotten about it.
3	The lights are off and the door is locked. They (must have / might have / can't have) gone out.
4	Harry knew nothing about the surprise party, so he (must have / can't have / may have) seen the invitation.
5	Ella got full marks again. She (must have / could have / can't have) worked very hard.
6	We've just checked every room. The keys (must have / can't have / may have) been upstairs after all.

Exercise 3 — Rewrite the sentence

Use the word in brackets to rewrite each sentence so that the meaning stays the same.

1. I am almost sure Liam forgot about the meeting. (must)

2. It is possible that I left my umbrella on the bus. (might)

3. I am sure they did not see us. (can't)

4. Perhaps she took the wrong train. (may)

5. It was possible for anyone in the area to hear the explosion. (could)

6. I am almost sure your sister was disappointed. (must)

Exercise 4 — Read the clues and speculate

Write one sentence for each clue. More than one answer may be possible.

Evidence / clue	Write a sentence of speculation
The cake is missing and there are crumbs on the table.	_____
Amir is not in class today. His friend says he felt ill this morning.	_____
The pavement is wet, but the sky is clear now.	_____
Mia looks upset after the interview.	_____
The museum is closed, although the website says it should be open.	_____

Exercise 5 — Correct the mistakes

Each sentence contains one mistake. Rewrite it correctly.

1. She must has forgotten our appointment.

2. They can't have went home so early.

3. I might left my notebook at school.

4. He mustn't have been at the café. I saw him there myself.

5. We could have saw the eclipse if we had woken up earlier.

6. Anna may have took the wrong file.

Exercise 6 — Complete the mini-dialogues

Complete each reply using a suitable modal verb of speculation about the past.

1. A: Why is Nora so happy?

B: She _____ some good news.

2. A: Jack isn't answering the phone.

B: He _____ it on silent.

3. A: I heard that Leo failed the exam.

B: He _____ it. He studied for weeks.

4. A: The shop is shut.

B: It _____ earlier than usual today.

5. A: Why is your bag so heavy?

B: I _____ my laptop in it by mistake.

Exercise 7 — Short writing

Write 4–6 sentences. Use at least four different forms: *may have*, *might have*, *could have*, *must have*, and *can't have*.

Scenario: You arrive home and notice that the front window is open, the lights are on, your keys are on the table, and the cat is hiding under the sofa. What might have happened?

Answer Key

Suggested answers. Accept other grammatically correct answers where appropriate.

Exercise 1

1. must have
2. may have / might have / could have
3. may have / might have / could have
4. can't have
5. must have
6. may have / might have / could have
7. must have
8. can't have

Exercise 2

1. might have
2. may have
3. must have
4. can't have
5. must have
6. can't have

Exercise 3

1. Liam must have forgotten about the meeting.
2. I might have left my umbrella on the bus.
3. They can't have seen us.
4. She may have taken the wrong train.
5. Anyone in the area could have heard the explosion.
6. Your sister must have been disappointed.

Exercise 4

1. Someone must have eaten the cake. / The children might have eaten it.
2. He may have stayed at home because he felt ill.
3. It must have rained earlier.
4. She might have had a bad interview. / They may have rejected her.
5. The staff may have closed it early. / The website could have been wrong.

Exercise 5

1. She must have forgotten our appointment.
2. They can't have gone home so early.
3. I might have left my notebook at school.
4. He can't have been at the café. / He must have been at the café.
5. We could have seen the eclipse if we had woken up earlier.
6. Anna may have taken the wrong file.

Exercise 6

1. must have received / may have received
2. may have left / might have left
3. can't have failed
4. may have closed / might have closed / must have closed
5. must have put / may have put

Exercise 7

1. Answers will vary.