

Modal Verbs of DEDUCTION

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Hi English learners. Welcome to a new lesson. We will talk about the modal verbs of deduction: may, might, could, can't, must.

We talk about deduction when we use the available information to say how certain we are about something. The modal verbs we use to indicate the level of certainty are:

- May/might/could
- Can't
- Must

Modal verbs of deduction: may/might/could

We can use the modal verbs **may**, and **might** when we think that something is not certain.

- *Sara is not at home. Where is she? She **may be** at work. She **might be** in the supermarket.*
- *I'll ask the neighbour. He **may know** where she is.*
- *I'm coming, but I **might be** a few minutes late.*
- *Susan is not answering the phone. She **may be** sleeping.*

[Learn more about the modal verbs may and might on this link](#)

You can use **could** in the same way.

- *Monica hasn't arrived at work yet. She **could be** stuck in traffic.*
- *The hotel **could hire** more staff, but nothing is sure yet.*
- *Mildred **could be** interested in working abroad.*

The modal verb of deduction: can't

We can use the modal verb **can't** when we are sure that something is impossible.

- *They **can't be** at home. The lights are out.*
- *Peter **can't know** many people here. He's just moved in.*
- *He **can't be** a rich man, living in that shabby house.*

The modal verb of deduction: must

We normally use the modal verb **must** when we are sure that something is true.

- *He **must have** a lot of money, to drive that expensive car.*
- *Sandra is not at home. She **must be** at the gym.*
- *David **must be** feeling unhappy because his parents are getting divorced.*

Modal verbs of deduction in the past

To use the modal verbs of deduction in the past you can use the structure

May/might/could/can't/must + have + past participle

- *Susan is not in her office. She **may have gone** for lunch.*
- *Martin wasn't answering his phone when I called him earlier. He **might have been** busy.*
- *I can't find my wallet. I **could have left** it at work.*
- *I **can't have forgotten** to lock my car because it was locked.*
- *The man we saw in the street was looking at the map. He **must have been** a tourist.*

Do the exercise to perfect your knowledge:

1. There was a lot of noise coming out of neighbour's house last night. They _____ (must / have) a party.
2. I can't find my phone. I _____ (might/leave) it somewhere.
3. Nobody is answering the phone. They _____ (must/be) out
4. They left a few minutes ago. They _____ far. (can't/be)
5. You've been working all day. You _____ exhausted. (must/fell)
6. That man can't speak English. He _____ be a foreigner. (might/be)

Answer key:

1) must have had 2) might have left 3) must be 4) can't be 5) must feel 6) might be