

# Modal Verbs of Speculation

Extensive exercise worksheet for B2-C1 learners

## What this worksheet practises

- speculation about the present and future
- speculation about the past
- degrees of certainty: must, may, might, could, can't
- error correction and exam-style transformation

## Student details

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Class / Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Score: \_\_\_\_\_

## Quick reference

**Present speculation:** must be, may be, might be, could be, can't be

**Past speculation:** must have done, may have done, might have done, could have done, can't have done

**Tip:** Use **must** for a strong logical conclusion and **can't** for something you feel is impossible.

## Exercise 1 - Match the situation to the best modal sentence

Complete each sentence with a suitable modal verb of speculation. Use the context carefully. In some cases, more than one answer may be possible, but choose the strongest or most natural one.

- Situation:** The office lights are still on and Jane's coat is hanging by the door.  
*She \_\_\_\_\_ still be working late. \_\_\_\_\_*
- Situation:** Tom has revised for three nights in a row and now he can barely keep his eyes open.  
*He \_\_\_\_\_ be exhausted. \_\_\_\_\_*
- Situation:** I am not certain, but I think this is the right platform.  
*This \_\_\_\_\_ be the correct platform. \_\_\_\_\_*
- Situation:** The baby is asleep, so that noise in the kitchen is definitely not her.  
*It \_\_\_\_\_ be the baby. \_\_\_\_\_*
- Situation:** I cannot find my glasses anywhere. Perhaps I left them in the car.  
*I \_\_\_\_\_ have left them in the car. \_\_\_\_\_*
- Situation:** They set off two hours ago, and the journey only takes fifty minutes.  
*They \_\_\_\_\_ have arrived by now. \_\_\_\_\_*
- Situation:** The film ended at ten, so Daniel definitely wasn't at the cinema at midnight.  
*He \_\_\_\_\_ have been at the cinema at midnight. \_\_\_\_\_*
- Situation:** Perhaps Ella forgot about the dinner invitation.  
*Ella \_\_\_\_\_ have forgotten about the invitation. \_\_\_\_\_*

## Exercise 2 - Multiple choice: choose the best answer

Circle or underline the best option. Only one answer is intended in each sentence.

1. Look at those dark clouds. It \_\_\_\_ rain later. must / might / can't
2. They've been travelling since dawn. They \_\_\_\_ be tired. must / can't / couldn't
3. I'm not sure where Mia is. She \_\_\_\_ be in the library. must / may / can't
4. He has got the wrong key. This \_\_\_\_ be his flat. must / can't / might
5. The message was marked as read. She \_\_\_\_ have seen it. must / can't / could
6. I called three times but got no answer. They \_\_\_\_ have gone out. might / mustn't / can't
7. Ben won the race again? He \_\_\_\_ have trained very hard. must / can't / might
8. Lena isn't at school. She \_\_\_\_ be ill, but I don't know. may / must / can't
9. That story sounds absurd. It \_\_\_\_ be true. could / can't / must
10. We left early, but we still got stuck in traffic. We \_\_\_\_ have taken the train instead. must / could / can't
11. The door is locked from the inside. Someone \_\_\_\_ be at home. must / can't / may
12. I can't find Ali's umbrella. He \_\_\_\_ have taken yours by mistake. might / mustn't / can't

## Exercise 3 - Present or past speculation?

Write one complete sentence for each prompt. Decide whether you need a present form (must be, might be, can't be...) or a past form (must have..., might have..., can't have...).

1. **Prompt:** She / be / nervous | **Clue:** photo of a job interview

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2. **Prompt:** They / miss / the train | **Clue:** they are running towards the platform now

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3. **Prompt:** He / forget / his wallet | **Clue:** he is checking every pocket anxiously

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4. **Prompt:** The neighbours / have / a party | **Clue:** loud music is coming from next door

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5. **Prompt:** You / hear / the news already | **Clue:** everyone in the office is talking about it

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6. **Prompt:** They / take / the wrong road | **Clue:** they are using a map and look confused

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7. **Prompt:** She / know / the answer | **Clue:** she keeps raising her hand

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8. **Prompt:** He / not sleep / well | **Clue:** he is yawning all morning

## Exercise 4 - Correct the mistakes

Each sentence contains one mistake. Rewrite it correctly.

1. She might to be at home.

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2. They mustn't be serious.

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3. He might went to bed early.

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4. This could be the answer yesterday.

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5. She can't has forgotten the password.

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6. He must have be very tired.

---

7. They may have took the wrong bus.

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8. It must rains later this evening.

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## Exercise 5 - Rewrite using the modal in brackets

Rewrite each sentence so that it keeps the same meaning. Use the modal verb or expression in brackets.

1. Perhaps she is working from home. *Use: might*

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2. I am almost sure they are waiting outside. *Use: must*

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3. It is impossible that Leo sent that rude email. *Use: can't have*

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4. Perhaps we left the documents in the taxi. *Use: may have*

---

5. I am sure he isn't telling the truth. *Use: can't*

---

6. It was probably difficult for her to say no. *Use: must have*

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7. Maybe this is the café they recommended. *Use: could*

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8. I am almost certain Nina forgot the meeting. *Use: must have*

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## Exercise 6 - Open cloze

Complete each sentence with a suitable modal verb of speculation and the correct verb form. More than one answer may be possible in some items.

1. You can hear laughter and music from the garden. The neighbours \_\_\_\_\_ a barbecue.
2. Sam looks puzzled. He \_\_\_\_\_ the instructions.
3. The floor is wet, so someone \_\_\_\_\_ water on it.
4. Ava is not answering. She \_\_\_\_\_ her phone at home.
5. There is no milk in the fridge. Dad \_\_\_\_\_ to the shop already.
6. That coat is tiny. It \_\_\_\_\_ yours.
7. The roads are empty. Everyone \_\_\_\_\_ already.
8. I don't recognise that number. It \_\_\_\_\_ the courier.
9. Their lights are off and the curtains are closed. They \_\_\_\_\_ out.
10. Jon looks delighted. He \_\_\_\_\_ some good news.

## Exercise 7 - Exam-style multiple choice

Choose the best option A, B or C. This section is designed to feel like exam practice.

No.	Sentence	A	B	C
1	'Where's Marta?' 'I'm not sure. She ___ in the staff room.'	must	might be	can't
2	The essay is brilliant. He ___ a lot of time on it.	must have spent	can't have spent	may be spending
3	I saw Olivia a minute ago, so she ___ far.	mustn't be	can't be	might have been
4	They've bought balloons and a huge cake. They ___ someone's birthday.	must be celebrating	can't celebrate	might celebrating
5	No one answered the bell. They ___ out for dinner.	may have gone	mustn't have gone	can't went
6	You look pale. You ___ well last night.	can't sleep	must not have slept	can't have slept
7	If the car is still warm, he ___ only a few minutes ago.	must have left	may left	can't leaving
8	This letter has no signature. It ___ from the manager after all.	might not be	mustn't be	couldn't has been

## Exercise 8 - Sentence transformation

Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning. Use between two and five words, including the word given.

1. I'm sure Carla is worried about the interview. (must)  
Carla \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Perhaps they missed the last bus. (might)  
They \_\_\_\_\_.
3. I'm sure this isn't the right file. (can't)  
This \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Perhaps Adam left early. (may)  
Adam \_\_\_\_\_.
5. I'm almost certain she knows the answer. (must)  
She \_\_\_\_\_.
6. I'm sure they didn't understand the question. (can't)  
They \_\_\_\_\_.

## Exercise 9 - Situation cards: write your own ideas

Read each situation and write two or three speculative sentences. Try to vary the modal verbs you use.

1. You hear a loud crash upstairs at midnight. *Write two possible speculative sentences.*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. A friend arrives soaked through and without an umbrella. *Write one strong deduction and one possible explanation.*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Your colleague has won three awards in one year. *Write two sentences using present and past speculation.*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. You find an open suitcase on the bed and plane tickets on the desk. *Write two sentences of speculation.*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. A student keeps looking out of the window instead of doing the task. *Write two speculative sentences.*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Exercise 10 - Complete the dialogue naturally

Complete each reply with a natural speculative sentence. More than one answer may be possible.

1. A: The lights are on in their flat.  
B: They \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. A: Amir didn't come to class.  
B: He \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. A: Ella looks very cheerful today.

B: She \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

4. A: This isn't Sophie's handwriting.

B: It \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

5. A: The roads were empty at 6 a.m.

B: Everyone \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

6. A: Who left the window open?

B: Jack \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Exercise 11 - Mini writing challenge

Write a short paragraph (80-120 words) about one mysterious situation. Use at least five modal verbs of speculation, including at least one past form.

**Choose one prompt:** a missing wallet / a strange noise at night / an empty classroom / a cancelled meeting / a surprise package

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Self-check

Tick the boxes before you finish.

<input type="checkbox"/>	I used must for strong deduction.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I used may / might / could for possibility.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I used can't for impossibility.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I used modal + have + past participle for past speculation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I checked word order after each modal verb.

## Answer Key

Teacher note: where more than one answer is possible, the key gives the most likely or most useful options. Accept other grammatically correct answers that fit the context.

### Exercise 1

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

### Exercise 2

- 1 might
- 2 must
- 3 may
- 4 can't
- 5 must
- 6 might
- 7 must
- 8 may
- 9 can't
- 10 could
- 11 must
- 12 might

### Exercise 3

- 1 She must be nervous.
- 2 They might miss the train. / They may miss the train.
- 3 He may/might/could have forgotten his wallet.
- 4 The neighbours must be having a party.
- 5 You must have heard the news already.
- 6 They may/might/could have taken the wrong road.
- 7 She must know the answer.
- 8 He can't have slept well.

### Exercise 4

- 1 She might be at home.

- 2 They can't be serious.
- 3 He might have gone to bed early.
- 4 This could have been the answer yesterday.
- 5 She can't have forgotten the password.
- 6 He must have been very tired.
- 7 They may have taken the wrong bus.
- 8 It may/might rain later this evening.

### Exercise 5

- 1 She might be working from home.
- 2 They must be waiting outside.
- 3 Leo can't have sent that rude email.
- 4 We may have left the documents in the taxi.
- 5 He can't be telling the truth.
- 6 It must have been difficult for her to say no.
- 7 This could be the café they recommended.
- 8 Nina must have forgotten the meeting.

### Exercise 6

- 1 must be having / may be having / might be having
- 2 may not understand / might not understand
- 3 must have spilled
- 4 may have left / might have left / could have left
- 5 may have gone / might have gone / could have gone
- 6 can't be
- 7 must have left / may have left
- 8 could be / may be / might be
- 9 may be / might be / could be
- 10 must have heard

### Exercise 7

- 1 might be
- 2 must have spent
- 3 can't be
- 4 must be celebrating
- 5 may have gone
- 6 can't have slept
- 7 must have left
- 8 might not be

### Exercise 8

- 1 Carla must be worried about the interview.
- 2 They might have missed the last bus.
- 3 This can't be the right file.

- 4 Adam may have left early.
- 5 She must know the answer.
- 6 They can't have understood the question.

### Exercise 9

- Answers will vary. Accept any grammatically correct speculative sentence that fits the context.

### Exercise 10

- 1 They must be at home. / They may still be awake.
- 2 He might be ill. / He may have overslept. / He could have forgotten.
- 3 She must have had some good news.
- 4 It can't be hers.
- 5 Everyone must have stayed at home. / may have left later.
- 6 Jack might have done it. / may have forgotten to close it.

### Exercise 11

- Answers will vary. Check for accurate use of at least five modal forms of speculation.

## Optional extension tasks

These can be used in class discussion or for homework.

1. Write five deductions about your classroom, school, or neighbourhood using must, may, might, could, and can't.
2. Find three photos online or in a magazine and write two speculative sentences about each one.
3. Retell a mystery story and stop three times to speculate about what may have happened.
4. Write a short dialogue in which two people try to explain a strange event.