

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

2. They mustn't be serious.

3. He might went to bed early.

4. This could be the answer yesterday.

5. She can't has forgotten the password.

6. He must have be very tired.

7. They may have took the wrong bus.

8. It must rains later this evening.

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*

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

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

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*

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

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

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. (*must be having / may be having / might be having*)
2. Sam looks puzzled. He _____ the instructions. (*might not understand / may not understand*)
3. The floor is wet, so someone _____ water on it. (*must have spilled*)
4. Ava is not answering. She _____ her phone at home. (*might have left / may have left / could have left*)
5. There is no milk in the fridge. Dad _____ to the shop already. (*might have gone / may have gone / could have gone*)
6. That coat is tiny. It _____ yours. (*can't be*)
7. The roads are empty. Everyone _____ already. (*must have left / may have left*)
8. I don't recognise that number. It _____ the courier. (*could be / might be / may be*)
9. Their lights are off and the curtains are closed. They _____ out. (*may be / might be / could be*)
10. Jon looks delighted. He _____ some good news. (*must have heard*)

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 celebrate
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 _____ (*must be at home / may still be awake / could be working*)

2. A: Amir didn't come to class.

B: He _____ (*might be ill / may have overslept / could have forgotten*)

3. A: Ella looks very cheerful today.

B: She _____ (*must have had some good news*)

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

B: It _____ (*can't be hers*)

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

B: Everyone _____ (*must have stayed at home / may have left later*)

6. A: Who left the window open?

B: Jack _____ (*might have done it / may have forgotten to close it*)

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.