Modal Verbs of Deduction

B2 GRAMMAR PRACTICE • 60 QUESTIONS + ANSWER KEY

Use must, might, may, could and can't to make logical deductions about present and past situations.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Quick guide: how certain are you?

ALMOST CERTAIN

must be / must have been

She must be tired.

POSSIBLE

may / might / could

He might have forgotten.

IMPOSSIBLE

can't / can't have

That can't be right.

Form reminder

Present: modal + base verb / be + -ing • Past: modal + have + past participle

For negative deduction, use can't (not mustn't). Mustn't usually means prohibition.

Exercise 1: How certain is the speaker?

Write A (almost certain), B (possible) or C (almost certainly impossible).

01. He must be at the station. His train leaves in five minutes. _____

02. She might be having lunch. _____

03. That can't be the correct PIN. The machine rejected it. _____

04. They could have missed the bus. _____

05. He must have worked late: his office light was on at midnight. _____

06. The parcel can't have arrived yesterday; it wasn't sent until this morning. _____

07. She may know the password. _____

08. You must be exhausted after that run. _____

09. The café can't be open; the sign says CLOSED. _____

10. It might have snowed in the mountains last night. _____

Present Deduction

Exercise 2: Choose the best modal verb

Circle the best option (a, b or c). Choose the one that fits the evidence most naturally.

01. The board says the train left ten minutes ago. It ___ have gone. a) might b) must c) can't

02. It ___ be James at the door; he is abroad this week. a) can't b) must c) may

03. Nobody knows why the Wi-Fi stopped. It ___ be the router. a) can't b) must c) could

04. Look at that enormous queue. The concert ___ be popular. a) can't b) must c) mustn't

05. The bakery ___ be closed; I can see customers going in. a) must b) can't c) might

06. I can't find my glasses. I ___ have left them in the car, but I'm not sure. a) might b) must c) can't

07. This ___ be the correct address; the house number is wrong. a) can't b) must c) might

08. He invented the system, so he ___ understand how it works. a) must b) can't c) mightn't

09. Perhaps she is still on the train. She ___ be on her way. a) must b) might c) can't

10. There ___ be an error in the bill: it lists six meals, but only four of us ate. a) must b) can't c) mustn't

Exercise 3: What is happening now?

Complete each sentence using the modal and verb in brackets. Use modal + be + -ing.

01. I hear typing in the office. Someone _____ (must / work) there.

02. Dad is sitting here with us. He _____ (can't / cook) right now.

03. I hear a noise upstairs. The neighbours _____ (might / move) furniture.

04. The noise is from the street. Our washing machine _____ (can't / make) it.

05. He has his coat on and he's picking up his keys. He _____ (must / leave).

06. She isn't answering. She _____ (may / drive).

07. They are still in class. They _____ (can't / wait) outside.

08. Smoke is coming from the oven. Something _____ (must / burn).

09. He is wearing trainers and running around the garden. He _____ (must / jog).

10. The children are quiet. They _____ (could / read) in their room.

Past Deductions & Common Mistakes

Exercise 4: What happened?

Use modal + have + past participle. Complete each sentence using the words in brackets.

01. His shoes are muddy. He _____ (must / play) football.

02. I didn't get his email. He _____ (might / forget) to send it.

03. She was with me all afternoon. She _____ (can't / take) your bike at two.

04. The door was unlocked. Someone _____ (must / leave) it open.

05. He knew nothing about the surprise. He _____ (can't / read) our messages.

06. They were out of breath. They _____ (must / run) all the way here.

07. Perhaps Amy took the wrong turning. She _____ (may / get) lost.

08. The film ended before we arrived. We _____ (can't / see) the ending.

09. The lights were on at 2 a.m. Jake _____ (could / work) late.

10. The cake is gone. My brother _____ (must / eat) it; he was the only one home.

Exercise 5: Find and correct the mistake

Each sentence has one grammar mistake. Rewrite it correctly on the line below.

01. She must to be tired after the journey.

02. He can't has taken your keys.

03. They mustn't be at work. I just saw them at home.

04. She might has forgotten my birthday.

05. You can't have saw Ben yesterday.

06. The children may playing outside.

07. He must be knowing the answer.

08. That can't have be the right train.

09. I may have leave the tickets at home.

10. They might to be waiting for us.

Cambridge B2 First Practice

Exercise 6: Key Word Transformations

Complete the second sentence with 2–5 words, including the word given. Do not change the word given.

01. I'm sure Ella is at home.
MUST Ella _____ at home.

02. Perhaps our neighbours are watching a film.
MIGHT Our neighbours _____ a film.

03. I'm certain he didn't open the safe.
CAN'T He _____ the safe.

04. Perhaps they forgot the appointment.
MAY They _____ the appointment.

05. I'm sure it isn't the correct bus.
CAN'T It _____ the correct bus.

06. I'm almost sure the children were playing in the garden.
MUST The children _____ in the garden.

07. Perhaps Priya left her notebook in class.
COULD Priya _____ her notebook in class.

08. I'm certain Amir knew the truth.
MUST Amir _____ the truth.

09. It's possible that Sam is working late.
MAY Sam _____ late.

10. I'm sure they haven't finished yet.
CAN'T They _____ yet.

Extra challenge: Be the detective!

A bicycle is outside a café. Its owner is missing; the tyres are wet and an umbrella is open.

Write three deductions: one certain, one possible and one about the past.

Answer Key

MODAL VERBS OF DEDUCTION • CHECK YOUR WORK

Exercise 1 – Certainty

1 A 2 B 3 C 4 B 5 A 6 C 7 B 8 A 9 C 10 B

Exercise 2 – Best modal

1 b 2 a 3 c 4 b 5 b 6 a 7 a 8 a 9 b 10 a

Exercise 3 – Actions happening now

1. must be working
2. can't be cooking
3. might be moving
4. can't be making
5. must be leaving
6. may be driving
7. can't be waiting
8. must be burning
9. must be jogging
10. could be reading

Exercise 4 – Past deductions

1. must have played
2. might have forgotten
3. can't have taken
4. must have left
5. can't have read
6. must have run
7. may have got
8. can't have seen
9. could have worked
10. must have eaten

Exercise 5 – Corrected sentences

1. She must be tired after the journey.
2. He can't have taken your keys.
3. They can't be at work. I just saw them at home.
4. She might have forgotten my birthday.
5. You can't have seen Ben yesterday.
6. The children may be playing outside.
7. He must know the answer.
8. That can't have been the right train.
9. I may have left the tickets at home.
10. They might be waiting for us.

Exercise 6 – Key Word Transformations

1. must be
2. might be watching
3. can't have opened
4. may have forgotten
5. can't be
6. must have been playing
7. could have left
8. must have known
9. may be working
10. can't have finished

Challenge: Answers will vary. Check whether the deduction matches the evidence.

Read the full lesson: Modal Verbs of Deduction