

Lesson 10 – Modal Verbs for Deduction

Today's lesson will focus on using modal verbs for **certainty**, **probability**, and **deduction**.

"Deduction" means using the information available to make a guess or draw a conclusion about the facts.

Depending on the information available, you might be more certain that your conclusion is true, or less certain that your conclusion is true - and we use different modal verbs to indicate the degree of certainty.



How certain are you?	Use these modal verbs:
100% - Completely or almost certain	must, can't, couldn't
80% - Expecting to be certain	should
50% - Maybe certain	might, may, could

Let's look at some examples.

Certainty

Certainty about the Present

When making deductions about the present, we use **must** if we are sure something is true and **can't** if we are sure that something is impossible.

For example, if you see this guy, you can say:

- He **must** be a chef.
(we are very certain, because of his uniform and what he is doing)
- He **can't** be a policeman.
(we are very certain he is NOT a policeman)



Carla works every day from 9 AM to 5 PM. Right now it's 10:30 AM, so...

- She **must** be at work.
- She **can't** be at home.

Put it into practice!

You'll see five pictures accompanied by sentences. For each one, fill in the blank with **must** (if you think it is true) or **can't** (if you think it's not possible).



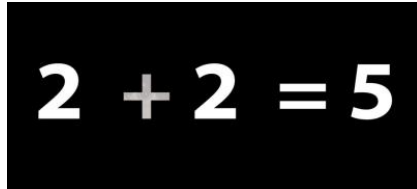
He _____ be a vegetarian.



They _____ be in love.



You studied all night. You _____ be exhausted.



That _____ be right...



She _____ love her cat.

Certainty about the Past

When we consider some present evidence and draw a reasonably certain conclusion about what happened in the past, we use **must have** and **couldn't have** plus the past participle of the verb.

must have + past participle

when we draw the conclusion that something DID happen

- Sheila got a tan. She **must have spent** a lot of time in the sun lately.
- There was one banana left, but now it's gone. My husband **must have eaten** it.



must not have + past participle

when we draw the conclusion that something did NOT happen

- The car is still dirty. Paul **must not have washed** it yet.
- He barely touched his lunch. He **must not have been** hungry.

couldn't have + past participle

when we are certain that something was IMPOSSIBLE

- Martha **couldn't have taken** your notebook; she wasn't even in class yesterday.
- The cookies are gone. But Eric **couldn't have reached** the cookies on the top shelf; he **must have asked** his older brother to get them.

Eric's older brother



Eric



Can't have is also possible, but it is much less common than **couldn't have**.

Here's an example that illustrates the difference between **must not have** and **couldn't have**:

- I don't see the report here – she **must not have** printed it out.
(we draw the conclusion that she did not do it)
- The printer's been broken for the past week, so she **couldn't have** printed out the report.
(we know it was IMPOSSIBLE for her to do it)

Put it into practice!

You'll see five pictures accompanied by sentences. For each one, fill in the blank with **must have** (if you think it happened), **must not have** (if you think it didn't happen) or **couldn't have** (if you think it's impossible).



The thief _____ gotten in through the window.



I _____ left my phone at work; I made a call on the drive home.



She _____ been happy when she heard the good news.



They _____ bought a house without a loan because they had no savings.



He looks upset. He _____ liked whatever she just said.



“How was your presentation?”

“Great! It _____ been better!”

Certainty about the Future

Making deductions about the future is the same as making predictions. As you learned in the lesson about future tenses, we can use **will** or **going to** for saying what we believe will happen in the future. When you are quite sure that your prediction is correct, you can also add the word **definitely** to emphasize your certainty:

- She's **definitely going to** love this book - it's by her favorite author.
- The kids **will definitely** be thrilled when we tell them we're going to Disney World.

Two slightly more formal expressions that can be used for talking about the future with certainty is saying that something **is certain to** happen, or **is sure to** happen:

- Engineers **are certain to** develop even faster computers.
- The country **is sure to** come to the aid of its ally.

Expectation

Present/Future Expectation

When you *expect* something to happen (although you are not completely, 100% certain), you can use **should/shouldn't** for the present or future:

- **Present:**
I took my car to the mechanic yesterday and he said the problem would be fixed in a day - so my car **should** be ready by now.

- **Future:**

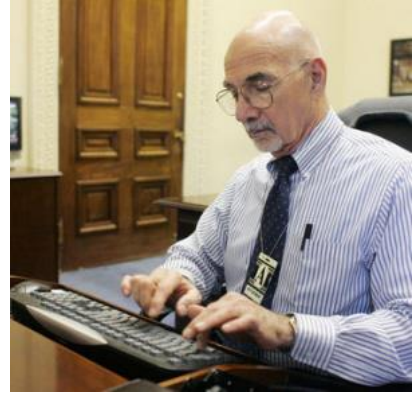
Can you please type up these notes?
It **should** only take about half an hour.

- **Present:**

The weather is clear, so our flight **shouldn't** be delayed.

- **Future:**

I've written out all the instructions for this task step by step, so you **shouldn't** run into any problems when you try to do it.



Put it into practice!

What is one thing you expect to do or one thing you expect to happen within the next week? Create your own sentence using **should**:

Ex) Within the next week, I should finish the book I'm reading.

Past Expectation

For expectations about what was supposed to happen in the past, you can use **should have** and **shouldn't have** plus the **past participle**:

- I sent the package three weeks ago with express mail.
They **should have** received it already.
= I expect that they have already received it
- This car is brand new. It **shouldn't have** broken down.
= I expected it NOT to break down



Because **should/shouldn't** are also used for giving advice and recommendations, we can also use **should have** and **shouldn't have** for evaluating things in the past and declaring them to have been right or wrong, good or bad:

- Lindsay saw a woman who needed help, but did nothing.
"Lindsay, you **should have** helped her."

- I said something mean to my best friend during an argument. "I **shouldn't have** said that. It really hurt her feelings."



Put it into practice!

Think of one thing you regret doing, and one thing you regret NOT doing. Make sentences about them using **should/shouldn't have + the past participle**:

- I **should have**...
- I **shouldn't have**...

Possibility

Present/Future Possibility

We can use **may, might** and **could** to talk about things that are possible in the present and future.

Present:

- Where's Fred? He's not in his office. He **may** be in the bathroom... or he **might** be in the conference room.
- Don't eat that mushroom. It **could** be poisonous.



Future:

- The weather forecast says it **may** rain tomorrow.
- Your daughter is really smart. She **could** be very successful someday.
- We **might** take a road trip this weekend.

Some people say that **might** is less certain than **may**, but in spoken English there is really no effective difference. It's probably best to use **might**. The word **may** is less common, and we can only use **could** in the positive form, not the negative form, for talking about possibility:

- Are you sure that's a good idea?
The boss **may not** / **might not** like it when he finds out.
~~The boss **could not** like it when he finds out.~~
- I **may not** / **might not** be the smartest person in the class, but I definitely work the hardest.
~~I **could not** be the smartest person in the class, but I definitely work the hardest.~~

Past Possibility

When talking about past possibilities, we can use... **might have** / **may have** / **could have** + **past participle** (for positive possibilities) and **might not have** / **may not have** + **past participle** (for negative possibilities).

Positive Past Possibilities:

- She's not home. She **might have** gone to the store.
- He **may have** misunderstood you when you talked to him yesterday.
- The person who stole the documents **could have** been one of the employees.



Could have is usually used in unreal conditions - when we are imagining a possibility if something in the past had been different: "If we had started this project earlier, we **could have** finished on time."

Negative Past Possibilities:

- John's not here. He **might not have** known about the meeting.
- If she hasn't called you back, she **may not have** listened to your voicemail yet.

Remember that **couldn't have** is only used when we are certain that something is logically *impossible* in the past:

- She **couldn't have** taken the car; she doesn't have a key.

Summary

- Use **must** (present) and **must have** (past) when you are very certain that something is/was true
- Use **can't** (present) and **couldn't have** (past) when you are very certain that something is/was impossible
- Use **should/shouldn't** (present) and **should have / shouldn't have** (past) to talk about things you expect to be true, although you don't have complete certainty
- You can also use **should have / shouldn't have** for judging actions in the past to be good or bad
- Use **might** (most common), **may**, or **could** to talk about present and future possibilities
- Use **might have, may have, or could have** to talk about past possibilities
- For a possibility that something did NOT happen, use **might not have** and **may not have**

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Quiz – Lesson 10: Modal Verbs for Deduction

Exercise 1 – Complete the blanks with must, can't, or might:

1. Look at that guy's enormous muscles. He _____ work out a lot.
2. Michelle _____ want to participate in the festival - it seems like the type of thing she'd be interested in. Why don't you ask her?
3. She goes camping every weekend. She _____ really love the outdoors.
4. He worked hard on his report, then accidentally deleted the file from his computer. He _____ be upset.
5. You _____ be right - but I'm going to check to make sure.
6. We're not sure if this painting is an original. It _____ be worth thousands of dollars.
7. I _____ not be able to go to the football game. It depends on whether I can get the afternoon off from work.
8. He's working full-time and studying for his Ph.D. That _____ be easy.
9. You just ate a huge dinner! You _____ be hungry again already!
10. Wow - look at that diamond necklace. It _____ cost a fortune.

Exercise 2 – Now complete the blanks with must, should, shouldn't, or couldn't:

1. I'm so thankful for your help with this project. I _____ have done it without you!
2. The repairs I made _____ have fixed the problem, but they didn't - so I'll have to take another look.
3. It _____ have rained a lot last night - there are puddles everywhere.
4. I _____ have watched that horror movie; it gave me nightmares.
5. We _____ have known about this; nobody told us anything about it.
6. If you've been trying to lose weight, then you really _____ have eaten all that ice cream.
7. He _____ have finished a 500-page book in a single day!
8. She never showed up. She _____ have forgotten about our appointment.
9. He broke two of the plates while washing the dishes. He _____ have been more careful.
10. They ate every bite of their dinner - they _____ have enjoyed the food.

Answers – Quiz – Lesson 10

Exercise 1:

1. Look at that guy's enormous muscles. He **must** work out a lot.
2. Michelle **might** want to participate in the festival - it seems like the type of thing she'd be interested in. Why don't you ask her?
3. She goes camping every weekend. She **must** really love the outdoors.
4. He worked hard on his report, then accidentally deleted the file from his computer. He **must** be upset.
5. You **might** be right - but I'm going to check to make sure.
6. We're not sure if this painting is an original. It **might** be worth thousands of dollars.
7. I **might** not be able to go to the football game. It depends on whether I can get the afternoon off from work.
8. He's working full-time and studying for his Ph.D. That **can't** be easy.
9. You just ate a huge dinner! You **can't** be hungry again already!
10. Wow - look at that diamond necklace. It **must** cost a fortune.

Exercise 2:

1. I'm so thankful for your help with this project. I **couldn't** have done it without you!
2. The repairs I made **should** have fixed the problem, but they didn't - so I'll have to take another look.
3. It **must** have rained a lot last night - there are puddles everywhere.
4. I **shouldn't** have watched that horror movie; it gave me nightmares.
5. We **couldn't** have known about this; nobody told us anything about it.
6. If you've been trying to lose weight, then you really **shouldn't** have eaten all that ice cream.
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