ENGLISH GRAMMAR · DEEP DIVE

# Must Be, Might Be, Can't Be

The same modal verbs used a second way: not to say what someone has to do, but to say how sure you are that something is true, from 'it must be' down to 'it can't be'.

B2 · deduction · must / might / can't · modal perfect

**must be**

Nearly certain it is true.

**≈ 95% yes**

The lights are off: they must be out.

**may / might / could be**

Possibly true.

**≈ 50%**

It might be true, but I doubt it.

**can't be**

Nearly certain it is not true.

**≈ 95% no**

He can't be at home: his car is gone.

| TIME | FORM | EXAMPLE |
|---|---|---|
| now | modal + be / verb | You must be tired. |
| now, in progress | modal + be + -ing | She must be working late. |
| past | modal + have + participle | He must have left already. |
| past, in progress | modal + have been + -ing | He might have been sleeping. |

## 1 How sure are you?

*Write must, might, can't or should.*

1 You _____ be tired after that long journey.

2 That _____ be right: check it again.

3 It _____ be true, but I doubt it.

4 He _____ be at home: his car is gone.

5 She _____ know: she has worked here for years.

6 They _____ be here by now, surely.

7 The parcel _____ arrive tomorrow morning; I'm not sure.

8 Someone's at the door. It _____ be the postman; he always comes at ten.

9 You _____ be hungry: you've just eaten a huge lunch!

10 Take an umbrella; it _____ rain later.

## 2 Deductions about the past

*Complete with must have, can't have, might have or should have + the participle of the verb in brackets.*

1 He _____ (leave) already: his coat is gone.

2 You _____ (see) him: he was with me all day.

3 She _____ (forget) about the meeting; I'm not sure.

4 The train _____ (arrive) by now. Where is it?

5 The ground is wet. It _____ (rain) in the night.

6 They _____ (win): they were losing 3–0 at half time.

7 She must be _____ (work) late again tonight.

8 He might have been _____ (sleep) when you called.

## 3 Spot the mistake

*Each sentence has one mistake. Write the correct sentence on the line.*

1 He mustn't be at home; his car is gone.

_____

2 He must left already.

_____

3 It couldn't be true, but I am not certain.

_____

4 You must to be tired after that journey.

_____

5 She must have been work late last night.

_____

6 The train should arrived by now.

_____

**Remember** The opposite of must be is can't be, never mustn't be: mustn't only forbids.

## 4 The empty flat

*Write one or two words in each gap.*

When I got home, the door was open. Someone [1] _____ have opened it: I always lock it. My flatmate [2] _____ be the one; she's in Spain this week. The TV was still warm, so whoever it was must [3] _____ been watching it a few minutes earlier. Then I heard a noise in the kitchen. It [4] _____ be a burglar, I thought, or it [5] _____ be the cat. In fact it was my brother! "You [6] _____ have told me you were coming!" I said. "I texted you," he said. "You [7] _____ have seen it." He [8] _____ be right: my phone was off all day.

## 5 Sure, or not sure?

*Sort the sentences by how certain the speaker is.*

It must be him. | It can't be him. | She's bound to know. | He must have left.

It might be him. | It could be him. | It may be true. | She might have forgotten.

**nearly certain**

**possible**

### Where are the answers?

The answers, with an explanation for each one, are in the LinguaBite app. Open this Deep Dive and scroll to Downloads at the bottom of the article: once you have downloaded this worksheet, its answers appear there after a couple of days, so you do the exercises first. You can choose 1, 2 or 3 days in the app's Settings.

Scan the code: with LinguaBite installed it opens the article in the app; without it, it takes you to linguabite.com.

`linguabite.com/deepdive/en-GB/english-modals-deduction`