

Modal verbs of speculation and deduction

must

We use **must + infinitive** for obligation and strong recommendation, but also to say that we are **quite sure that something is true**.

- They are almost identical. They **must be** sisters.
- But I answered all the questions correctly. There **must be** a mistake.

We use **must be + –ing** with dynamic verbs to say that we are quite **sure that something is happening now**.

- What you are saying is not possible. You **must be kidding**.
- Can you hear the shouting? Our neighbours **must be arguing** again.

We use **must have + past participle** or **must have been + -ing** to say that we are quite sure that something **was true or happened in the past**.

- I can't find my wallet! I **must have dropped** it in the taxi.
- You **must have had** a real scare when you saw the crocodile.
- He was the only victim. He **must have been sleeping** when the fire started.

can't

We can use **can't + infinitive** to say that we are **quite sure that something is NOT true**.

- He **can't be** that famous. I've never heard his name before.
- She **can't be** married. I have never seen a ring on her finger.

We use **can't be + -ing** to say that we are quite **sure that something is NOT happening now**.

- They **can't be travelling** by bus. There is no bus service on Sundays.

We use **can't/couldn't have + past participle** or **can't have been + -ing** to say that we are **quite sure that something did NOT happen or was NOT true in the past**.

- You **can't/couldn't have seen** John last night. He was in hospital.
- She **can't/couldn't have passed** the test. She didn't even open the books.

Note that for negative deduction we use **can't** and NOT **mustn't**

- He **can't be** that famous. (NOT He **mustn't be** that famous.)

could/might/may

We can use **could/might/may + infinitive** to say that **it's possible that something is true** (but we are not sure).

- I can't get hold of him on the phone. He **could/might/may be** away.
- *We didn't do anything when we could and now it **could/might/may be** too late.*

We use **could/might/may be + -ing** to say that we are quite **it's possible that something is happening now** (but we are not sure).

- Tom isn't at the office. He **might/may be working** from home today.
- *'Why isn't he picking up his phone.'* *'She **might/may be driving.**'*

We can use **could/might/may have + past participle** or **might/may have been + -ing** to say that **it's possible that something was true or happened** in the past.

- It's been three days. They **could/might/may have finished** painting the house by now.
- *If they left at 9, they **could/might/may have already arrived**.*
- *She was home last night, but didn't answer the door. She **might/may have been having** a shower.*

We can use **could have + past participle** to say that something was possible in the past but did not happen.

- He **could have played** in the first division, but he had a terrible injury.
- He **could have had** better jobs if he had spoken English.

Note that we use **might not** or **may not** (NOT **could not**) to talk about a negative possibility.

- He seems too calm. He **might/may not be** aware of the risks.
- She **might/may not have heard** us. Knock again.

should/ought to

We use **should/ought to + infinitive** to talk about a situation that we expect to happen (present or future).

- He **should/ought to be** home by now. He is always home before 7.
- They **should/ought to arrive** before midnight.

We use **should have/ought to have + past participle** to talk about a situation expected to happen in the past. We can also use this form to express criticism.

- He **should/ought to have received** the parcel yesterday. I sent it two days ago.

- He **should/ought to have studied** more. Nobody fails if they study.

Expressions for speculation

bound/sure

Bound and **sure** are adjectives that are used to say that we are quite sure that something will be true or happen. We use them in the structure **be bound/sure + to** infinitive.

- The Jamaican **is bound/sure to win** the final.
- There **are bound/sure to be** some discrepancies during the meeting, so be prepared.

likely/unlikely

Likely and **unlikely** are adjectives. If something **is likely to happen** it means that it will probably happen or that it is expected to happen. If something is **is unlikely to happen** it means that it probably won't happen. We can use these two adjectives in two ways.

It is likely/unlikely that + clause

- **It's likely that** just in a few years we will change our economic model.
- **It's unlikely that** the police had anything to do about it.

Subject + **be likely/unlikely + to** + infinitive

- He **is likely to** win this game.
- They **are unlikely to** reach an agreement.

definitely/probably

Definitely and **probably** go before the main verb and after the auxiliary verb (if there is one) in (+) sentences.

- You'll **definitely** get the job. Nobody's got your qualifications and experience.
- He's **definitely** our best player.

And they go before the auxiliary verb in (-) sentences.

- They **definitely won't find** any evidence.
- She **definitely isn't seeing** anyone right now.

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MODAL VERBS REVIEW:

ADVICE had better, should, ought to

NECESSITY must, have to, have got to, need to, ought to

ABILITY can, to be able to

PERMISSION can, could, may, might, mustn't

CRITICISM could, should, ought to

OBLIGATION must, have to, ought to

SUGGESTION shall, can, could

PROHIBITION can't, mustn't, may not

OFFER can, shall, would you like me

REQUEST can, could, may, might,

MUST/MUST NOT // HAVE TO / DON'T HAVE TO

MUST + INFINITIVE is often used for personal opinions and feelings. We can use MUST to talk about the present or future, but not the past.

I must remember to buy a present for my sister. (my opinion)

She must do it next week. (future)

MUSTN'T (MUST NOT) + INFINITIVE refers to an obligation no to do something. MUSTN'T can be used to talk about the present or future, but not the past.

You mustn't drink cold drinks and eat ice cream. (prohibition)

You mustn't use this phone for private calls. (prohibition)

HAVE TO + INFINITIVE is used to express a strong obligation. It is used for facts, not for personal feelings. We can use HAVE TO in all forms.

In Ireland, you have to drive on the left. (strong obligation)

Does she have to go away so soon? (present simple)

I'll have to speak to him. (future simple)

She had to work yesterday. (past simple)

He may have to go to Holland. (modal verb)

-We use TO BE ABLE TO when we are talking about what happened in a particular situation. I lost my mobile a few days ago, but I was able to find it.

-TO BE ABLE TO is used in all tenses or with the infinitive.

-CAN has only two forms. (present + past) She hasn't been able to eat lately.

"He'd like to be able to play the guitar."

"She can't eat lately."

-Sometimes TO BE ABLE TO is possible instead of CAN/COULD I'm able to dance = I can dance.

-We use CAN/COULD with: UNDERSTAND, FEEL, SEE, HEAR, TASTE, SMELL, REMEMBER.

"I can smell something burning!"

"She could hear an owl last night."

-COULD is used for general ability in the past(1) or to show that something is or might be possible(2)

"She could speak fluent Spanish when she was 4.(1)"

"I could do it now, if you like.(2)"

SHOULDN'T // OUGHTN'T // HAD BETTER NOT:

SHOULD(N'T)/OUGHT(N'T) TO can be used when we talk about:

-PROBABILITY: That should/ought to be enough food for the three of us.

-RECOMMENDATION/ADVICE: This is delicious. You should/ ought to try some.

-RESPONSIBILITY/DUTY: You should/ought to visit your parents more often.

SHOULD(N'T) is used when we talk about:

-GIVING ADVICE with I: I should wait a little longer, if I were you.

SHOULD(N'T) is often used after verbs (DEMAND, INSIST, RECOMMEND, SUGGEST, PROPOSE) and a number of adjectives (ODD, STRANGE, SURPRISED, TYPICAL, FUNNY, INTERESTING, NATURAL, SURPRISING)

"I recommend that you should buy a more powerful computer."

"It's essential that you should be here on time."

-HAD BETTER (NOT) is used only for a particular situations.
We never use it to talk about the past or to make general comments.

"She'd better work harder if she wants to keep her job."

-HAD BETTER (NOT) can also be used to warn people as well as express desperate hope.

"He'd better get to the station by six or else he may miss the train."

POSSIBILITY AND CERTAINTY:

PRESENT INFINITIVE

POSSIBILITY

CERTAINTY: (P)

CERTAINTY: (N)

Perhaps she is busy.

I'm sure he is Polish.

I'm sure she isn't a nurse.
busy.

She may/might/could be

He must be Polish.

She can't be a nurse.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS

POSSIBILITY

INFINITIVE

CERTAINTY: (P)

CERTAINTY: (N)

It's possible she's watching TV.

I'm certain he's reading now.

I'm sure they won't be leaving soon.

She may/might/could be watching TV

He must be reading now.

They can't be leaving soon.

PERFECT INFINITIVE

POSSIBILITY

CERTAINTY: (P)

CERTAINTY: (N)

CRITICISM

It's likely they have left.

I'm sure he came back last week.

I'm certain she hadn't done it.

Why didn't she call for a taxi? They may/might/could have left.

He must have come back last week.

She can't have done it.

She should (ought to) have called for a taxi.

PERFECT CONTINUOUS INFINITIVE POSSIBILITY

CERTAINTY: (P)

CERTAINTY: (N) Perhaps she was cooking

I'm certain he has been drinking.

I'm sure they hadn't been working hard.

He must have been drinking.

They can't have been working hard.