

61 Making deductions

Modal verbs can also be used to talk about how likely or unlikely something is. They can be used to guess and make deductions about what has happened or is happening now.

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61.1 SPECULATION AND DEDUCTION

The modal verbs “might” and “could” are used to talk about something with uncertainty.

“Might” and “could” can be used to talk about uncertainty.

John has a sore ankle. It **{ might could }** be broken.

The modal verb doesn't change with the subject.

The modal verb is usually followed by the base form of the main verb.



“Might not” is used to describe negative things that are not certain.

It's not very swollen, so it **might not** be serious.

“Not” goes after the modal verb.



“Must” is often used to speculate about the present.

John **must** be very bored at home. He's usually so active.



“Cannot” and “can't” are used when someone is certain something is impossible.

John's leg **{ cannot can't }** be broken. He walked to the doctor.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

Fay's got a sore throat and isn't feeling well. She **might** have a cold.



I was so sick last week that I **couldn't** get out of bed.



My eyes are itchy and I have a runny nose. It **could** be hay fever.



I **can't** have the flu because I don't have a high temperature.



61.2 SPECULATION AND DEDUCTION ABOUT THE PAST

"Must have" with a past participle is used to speculate about the past when the speaker is sure something happened.

He just disappeared. Aliens **must have taken** him.

Past participle ↗



"Must" can be replaced with "may," "might," or "could" when the speaker is not sure whether something happened or not.

They **{ might
may
could }** have taken him to another planet.



"Can't" or "couldn't" can be used to refer to something that the speaker is certain did not happen.

It **{ can't
couldn't }** have been aliens, they don't exist.



FURTHER EXAMPLES



Bethan didn't return my call yesterday. She **must have** been busy.



She **might have** forgotten to call me back.



She **might not have** written down my number correctly.



Paula **can't have** been at the party last night, she was at work.



I didn't see who knocked on the door, but it **may have** been the mailman.



What happened to my vase? The cat **must have** knocked it over.