

# Modal verbs for SPECULATION & DEDUCTION

## CERTAINTY

We can use “must”, “can’t” and “couldn’t” to express that we are fairly certain about something

**For present situation, the modal verbs “must” “can’t” and “couldn’t” are followed by the infinitive without to.**

- I haven’t slept for two days. You must be exhausted!
- I can hear singing, so we can’t be far from the stadium.

**The continuous form can also be used.**

- Why is he wearing his uniform? He couldn’t be going to school – it’s Saturday today.

**For past situations we use the same modal verbs + have + past participle (the perfect infinitive without to).**

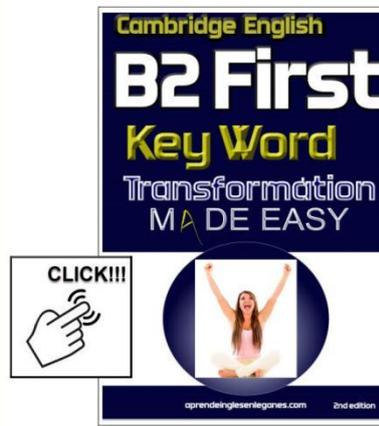
- I can’t find my book. I must have left it at school.
- This essay is poor. You can’t have spent long on it.

**The continuous form can also be used.**

- The road’s wet. It must have been raining.

**NOTE:** “mustn’t” is not normally used to make deductions about present or past situations. We use can’t instead.

- We’ve been walking for hours. It can’t be far from here. (**NOT** It mustn’t be far)



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## POSSIBILITY

If we are not certain about something but think it is possible, we can use “may (not)”, “might (not)”, or “could (but not could not).”

**For present situation, these modal verbs are followed by the infinitive without to. The continuous form is also possible.**

- John’s not answering my emails. He might be on holiday.
- He could be telling the truth, but it’s hard to believe.

**For past situations we use the same modal verbs + have + past participle ( the perfect infinitive without to). The continuous form is also possible.**

- I think we may have take the wrong road. This doesn’t look familiar.
- Sam looked sad. He might not have been feeling well.

**Note:** It is not possible to use “can” when speculating about present or past situations.

### Common Mistake - forming negatives

Negatives are formed by adding ‘not’ after the modal verbs, not after the auxiliary have.

**structure:** modal + not + have + past participle

		modal	not	have	past participle	
✓	He	may	not	have	been	there.
✗	He	may	have	not	been	there.