

2-13 EXPRESSING DEGREES OF CERTAINTY: PRESENT TIME

<p>--Why isn't John in class?</p> <p>100% sure: He is sick.</p> <p>95% sure: He must be sick.</p> <p>less than 50% sure: { He may be sick. He might be sick. He could be sick.</p>	<p>"Degree of certainty" refers to how sure we are--what we think the chances are--that something is true.</p> <p>If we are sure something is true in the present, we don't need to use a modal. For example, if I say, "John is sick," I am sure; I am stating a fact that I am sure is true. My degree of certainty is 100%.</p>
<p>--Why isn't John in class?</p> <p>(a) He must be sick. (Usually he is in class every day, but when I saw him last night, he wasn't feeling good. So my best guess is that he is sick today. I can't think of another possibility.)</p>	<p>Must is used to express a strong degree of certainty about a present situation, but the degree of certainty is still less than 100%.</p> <p>In (a): The speaker is saying: "Probably John is sick. I have evidence to make me believe that he is sick. That is my logical conclusion, but I do not know for certain."</p>
<p>--Why isn't John in class?</p> <p>(b) He may be sick.</p> <p>(c) He might be sick.</p> <p>(d) He could be sick. (I don't really know. He may be at home watching TV. He might be at the library. He could be out of town.)</p>	<p>May, might, and could are used to express a weak degree of certainty.</p> <p>In (b), (c), and (d): The speaker is saying: "Perhaps, maybe,* possibly John is sick. I am only making a guess. I can think of other possibilities."</p> <p>(b), (c), and (d) have the same meaning.</p>

**Maybe* (spelled as one word) is an adverb: *Maybe he is sick.* *May be* (spelled as two words) is a verb form: *He may be sick.*

□ EXERCISE 24—ORAL (BOOKS CLOSED): From the given information, make your "best guess" by using **must**.

Example: Alice always gets the best grades in the class. Why?

Response: She must study hard./She must be intelligent.

- (. . .) is yawning. Why?
- (. . .) is sneezing and coughing. Why?
- (. . .) is wearing a wedding ring. Why?
- (. . .) is shivering and has goose bumps. Why?
- (. . .)'s stomach is growling. Why?
- (. . .) is scratching his arm. Why?
- (. . .) is going to get married in five minutes. His/her hands are shaking. Why?
- (. . .) has already had two glasses of water, but now he/she wants another. Why?
- (. . .) is smiling. Why?
- (. . .) is crying. Why?
- You just picked up a telephone receiver, but there is no dial tone. Why?
- There is a restaurant in town that is always packed (full). Why?
- I am in my car. I am trying to start it, but the engine won't turn over. I left my lights on all day. What's wrong?
- Every night there is a long line of people waiting to get into (a particular movie). I wonder why.
- Don't look at your watch. What time is it?

□ EXERCISE 25—ORAL (BOOKS CLOSED): Respond by using "I don't know" + *may/might/could*.

Example: (. . .)'s grammar book isn't on her desk. Where is it?

Response: I don't know. It *may/might/could* be in her book bag.

1. (. . .) isn't in class today. Where is s/he? (*I don't know. S/he . . .*)
2. Where does (. . .) live? (*I don't know. S/he . . .*)
3. What do you think I have in my briefcase/pocket/purse?
4. What kind of watch is (. . .) wearing?
5. I can't find my pen. Do you know where it is?
6. How old do you think (*someone famous*) is?

□ EXERCISE 26: Complete the sentences by using *must* or *may/might/could* with the expressions in the list or with your own words.

<i>be about ten</i>	<i>be very proud</i>	<i>✓ like green</i>
<i>be at a meeting</i>	<i>feel terrible</i>	<i>miss them very much</i>
<i>be crazy</i>	<i>fit Jimmy</i>	
<i>be rich</i>	<i>have the wrong number</i>	

1. A: Have you noticed that Professor Adams wears something green every day?

B: I know. He *must like green.*

2. A: Ed just bought his wife a diamond necklace with matching earrings.

B: That's expensive! He _____

A: He is.

3. A: Look at the man standing outside the window on the 15th floor of the building.

B: He

A: I agree. Only a nut would do something like that.

4. A: Where's Ms. Adams? She is not in the office.

B: I don't know. She

A: If you see her, would you tell her I'm looking for her?

B: Certainly, Mr. Finch.

5. A: Hello?

B: Hello. May I speak to Ron?

A: I'm sorry. You There's no one here by that name.

6. A: I've heard that your daughter recently graduated from law school and that your son has got a scholarship to the state university. You

B: We are.

7. A: You're coughing and sneezing, blowing your nose, and running a fever. You

B: I do.