

GRAMMAR

Modals of deduction

LEVEL

Intermediate (B1)

NUMBER

EN_B1_2112G

LANGUAGE

English



Learning outcomes

- I can identify the main modals of deduction and explain their use.
- I can use modals of deduction to explain a strange occurrence.





Warm-up

Match the words with the pictures.

What do you think the text on the next slide will be about?

1



2



3



4



5



6



a transom window

b bullet holes

c window secured with bars

d cash register

e laundrette

f fingerprint



The perfect crime

1. **Read** the first part of this true story. 2. **Answer** the question below.

On March 9, 1931, the mysterious murder of 31-year-old Isidor Fink became a top news story. Fink was an immigrant from Poland who owned a launderette in New York City. Late one Saturday night, a woman who lived behind the launderette reported hearing screams.

When a police officer arrived, he couldn't get into Fink's business because the door was locked from the inside and all the windows were secured with bars.

A child had to be lifted through the small transom window above the door because it was too small for any adult to squeeze through. Inside, Fink was found dead with two bullet holes in the left side of his chest and one through his left hand.

What are some reasons the police officer couldn't get into Fink's business?

The perfect crime

1. **Read** the second part of this true story. 2. **Answer** the question below.

There was no gun in the room and no money was stolen from the cash register. No fingerprints were found at the scene of the crime other than Fink's. Gun powder on his left hand showed that someone shot him at close range. Fink didn't have many friends, but he had even fewer enemies. His wife and family were still in Europe. He never unlocked and opened the door at night for people he didn't know because he was afraid of getting robbed. So how did the murderer get in and out of the launderette? And why was Fink killed?



Why do you think Isidor Fink was killed?

What happened?

Read these two statements a police officer and Fink's neighbour gave to detectives.



Fink can't have killed himself. The killer must have been in the laundry with him.



Fink might have left the door open.

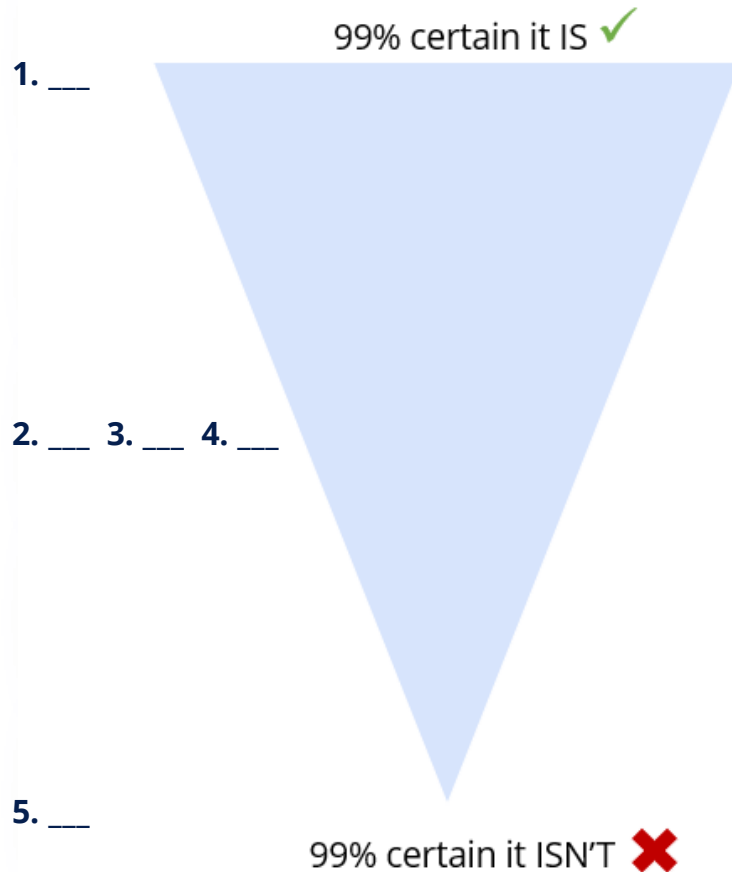
- Which sentence (blue, purple or pink) describes something we think is **possible**?
- Which sentence (blue, purple or pink) describes something we think is **not possible**?
- Which sentence (blue, purple or pink) describes something we feel **certain** about?





Modals of deduction

We use modals of deduction (verbs a-e) to talk about how **likely** or **unlikely** something is. **Arrange** these verbs on the diagram.



a can't

b must

c might

d may

e could

Modals of deduction for past events

1. **Read** the statements again. 2. **Review** the information in the blue box.



Fink **can't have killed** himself. The killer **must have been** in the laundry with him.

Fink **may have left** the door open.



- To use the modals of deduction to talk about past events, we use the **modal + have + past participle**

Modals of deduction for present events

1. **Read** the dialogue. 2. **Review** the information in the blue box.



Someone **might solve** Fink's murder one day.



Hmm, I'm not sure about that. It **can't be** easy solving such an old case.

- To use the modals of deduction to talk about present events, we use the **modal** + **the bare infinitive** form of the verb.



Form sentences

Form sentences from the prompts. Use the past participle if the sentence is about a past event.

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | must / have / to be / someone Fink knew /
The killer | > | The killer must have been someone
Fink knew. | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| 2 | might / to leave / the door / have / Fink /
unlocked | > | | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| 3 | to squeeze / have / The killer / through the
transom window / can't | > | | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| 4 | have / The killer / the gun away / must / to
take | > | | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| 5 | might / Some detectives working today / in
Fink's case / be interested | > | | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| 6 | might never / solved / Fink's case / be | > | | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |



Imagine it is the day after Fink's murder...

How do you think the people in Fink's life
must be/might be/can't be feeling, thinking,
and hoping?

Write a sentence in the chat!



Fink's family



Fink's neighbour



Detective



Fink's customers



Detective work: review the clues

What you think **must** have happened, **may/might/could** have happened, and what **can't** have happened to Isidor Fink?



Fink was 31-years old

There was no gun in the room

He was an immigrant from Poland

No money was taken

A woman heard screams

No other fingerprints were found

Door was locked from the inside

Windows had bars on them

Fink had bullet holes in his chest and left hand

Fink never unlocked or opened the door at night



Brainstorm

Now, it's your turn to **think of** any other mysteries you might have heard of!
Work in breakout rooms or as a class.

**What are some other
mysteries you've
heard of?**

**Share your ideas with the rest
of the class!**





Group activity

Complete the prompt in the pink box.



Look at the mysteries below.

Answer the questions using **must have**, **may/might/could have**, and **can't have**.

1



Stonehenge –
what could it have been
used for?

2



The Great Pyramid –
how could it have been
built?

3



Amelia Earhart –
what may have
happened to her?

4



Crooked Forest –
what might have made
the trees grow like this?



End of the lesson

Idiom

Don't let the cat out of the bag!

Meaning: If you let the cat out of the bag, you reveal a secret, usually by mistake

Example: She let the cat out of the bag when she told us who the killer was in the movie.



Additional practice



Transform the sentences

Read the sentences and use the words in **parentheses** to write sentences with ***must have*** and ***can't have***.

1 I rang the doorbell, but nobody answered.
(They / out)



They **must have been** out.

2 Her car looks brand new.
(It / expensive)



3 I waved at Guy, but he didn't wave back.
(He / seen / me)



4 My son failed his maths test.
(He / studied / enough)



5 Ursula can't find her wallet.
(she / left / work)



6 A lot of people are waiting at the bus stop.
(It / delayed)





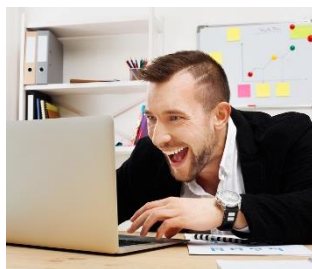
Discuss

Make **deductions** about each of the pictures. You can use **either modals of deduction** for **present** or **past events**.

1



2



3



4



5



She must be...

They can't have...



Match and complete the sentences

Write these sentences in a **different way** using **modal verbs**.

1 Perhaps John is not at work today.

a John **might not** be at work today.

2 I'm sure they drove to the conference together.

b The criminal _____ alone.

3 It's possible that Jane didn't see my email.

c They _____ to the conference together.

4 I think Dave went home early.

d Jane _____ my email.

5 Perhaps the criminal wasn't alone.

e Dave _____ home early.



Practise using the modals of deduction

Read the facts about Fink's murder and then choose the statement that makes the most sense.

1 Fink's wife and family were still in Europe

a. The killer must have been someone in his family.

b. The killer can't have been someone in his family.

2 Fink never unlocked and opened the door at night for people he didn't know because he was afraid of getting robbed.

a. Fink may have forgotten to lock the door.

b. Fink must have opened the door for a stranger.

3 Fink was found dead with two bullet holes in the left side of his chest and one through his left hand.

a. Fink must have died from the gunshot wounds.

b. Fink can't have died from the gunshot wounds.



Who is guilty?

A coffee cup has gone missing from the office. Who do you think took the cup? Why? The cup was taken from the office kitchen at 3pm yesterday.



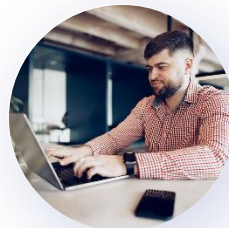
Zahin

- Never drinks coffee
- Usually works from home
- Currently on a business trip abroad



Sarah

- Normally gets a takeaway coffee from a café
- Left wallet at home yesterday



Jamie

- The cup belongs to Jamie
- He last saw Alan washing it up
- Dropped and broke his last mug



Alan

- Doesn't like hot drinks
- Doesn't own a water bottle
- Complains that there are never enough clean glasses



Jordan

- Told Jamie his cup was missing
- Says he last saw it on Zahin's desk
- Emptied the kitchen rubbish this morning



Complete the sentences

Complete the sentences with your own ideas. Use **modals of deduction** in the **present** or the **past**.

1 I heard a strange noise. I'm sure...

2 I think I recognise her face. She...

3 I don't know where the cat is. It...





Time to talk!

Take turns choosing a question below and **ask a classmate** to find out more about them.



- Are there any unsolved crimes that were big news in your country?
- What mystery would you like to be solved? Why?
- Do you think mystery is good to have in our lives? Why or why not?
- Do you think you would be a good detective in solving mysteries? Why or why not?
- Are there any mysteries from your childhood that were solved later in your life? What happened?



Answer key

P.3: 1. (c.) 2. (f.) 3. (e.) 4. (b.) 5. (d.) 6. (a.)

P.4: 1.) The police officer couldn't get into Fink's business because the door was locked from the inside and all the windows were secured with bars. The transom window was also too small.

P.6: Pink: describes something that we think is possible; **Blue:** describes something that we think is not possible 3.) **Purple:** describes something that we feel certain about.

P.7: 1.) must 2.) 3.) 4.) might, may, could 5.) can't

P. 10: 2.) Fink might have left the door unlocked 3.) The killer can't have squeezed through the transom window 4.) The killer must have taken the gun away 5.) Some detectives working today might be interested in Fink's case 6.) Fink's case might never be solved.

P. 18: 2.) It must have been expensive 3.) He can't have seen me 4.) He can't have studied enough 5.) She must have left it at work 6.) It must have been delayed

P. 20: 2) They must have driven to the conference together, 3) Jane might/could/may not have seen my email, 4) Dave might/could/may have gone home early, 5) The criminal might/could/may not have been alone

P.21: 1. (b.) 2. (a.) 3. (a.)



Summary

Modals of deduction

- must = 99% certain: She must have left for work already
- might/could/may = 50% certain: He may have left the door open
- can't = 1% certain: He can't have taken the watch

Modals of deduction for past events

- modal verb + present perfect
- e.g. *must + have been*
- The thief must have been tired after running away

Modals of deduction for present events

- modal verb + bare infinitive
- *can't + be*
- It can't be easy solving an old case

Useful phrases

- What do you think happened?
- It was the perfect crime
- If you want to solve the mystery, you/we/I...



Vocabulary

transom window

bullet holes

window secured with bars

cash register

laundry

fingerprint

can't

must

might

may

could





Image credits

P.13: ["Amelia Earhart 1928"](#) by ["World Wide Photos"](#) is part of the public domain.