

STUDY REFERENCE

GRAMMAR The secret of success

Language Summary

Modal verbs in passive sentences

Use

You use **modal passive forms** to talk about a present or past ability, obligation, possibility, etc., when you want to focus on the object of the sentence rather than the subject.

- You use **must / must have** when you think something is/was very likely.

In the following sentence, you are not interested in who chose the performers, but in the fact that they were chosen.

*The public thinks that these performers **must have been chosen** for their talent.*

In the next sentence, paying for the tickets is an obligation, but we are **not** interested in who pays for it.

*The tickets **must be paid for** before attending the concert.*

- You use **can** when something is possible in the present.

*The fact that reality TV stars seem to have short careers **can be used** as evidence that they lack talent.*

- You use **can't / couldn't** when you think something is/was very unlikely in the present/past.

*These new stars **can't be** dismissed as "just lucky" too quickly.*



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Language Summary

Modal verbs in passive sentences cont.

Use

- You use **might / may / could** when you think something is / was possible in the present / past.

*A performance **might have been practiced** twenty or thirty times.*

*The new star **may have been dismissed** as “lucky” too quickly.*

*You **could be forgiven** for thinking that success is easy to attain.*

Form

- When you talk about **a present situation in the passive using a modal**, you use: object + modal verb + to be + past participle.

*You **could be forgiven** for thinking success had become easy for them.*

*These new stars **can't be dismissed** as “lucky” too quickly.*

- When you talk about a past situation in the passive using a modal, you use: object + modal verb + have + been + past participle

*These new stars **may have been dismissed** too quickly.*

*The public thinks that these performers **must have been chosen** for their talent.*

