

Modals of deduction

We use the **modal verbs** *must*, *may*, *might*, *could*, and *can't* to make deductions.

To make deductions about the present, we use **modal + infinitive**:

She **must be** at home now.

They **might arrive** early.

To make deductions about the past, we use **modal + have + past participle**:

I **must have forgotten** to lock the door.

We **could have been** hurt in the car accident.

We use **must** to talk about things we think are true:

Sally has passed all her exams. She **must be** very pleased.

We use **can't** to talk about things we think are not true:

You **can't be** forty. You look so young.

We use **may**, **might** and **could** to talk about things we think are probably true:

Pom **may** call later.

It **might** rain this afternoon.

He **could** be upstairs.

May, **might** and **could** have very similar meanings.

When we make deductions about the past, **couldn't** and **can't** have the same meaning:

I don't believe you. James **can't/couldn't have said** that.

1 Complete the conversations using the verbs in parentheses and *must*, *can't* or *might* in the present or past.

- A: I can't find Sam. Do you know where she is?
B: No, but she loves swimming, so she _____ (go) to the beach.
- A: Noriko's English is much better this year than last year.
B: Yes, I know. She _____ (have) lessons.
- A: I think Sue and Janice are sisters, you know.
B: They _____ (be) sisters. They don't look like each other at all!
- A: I stayed up all last night to finish this report.
B: Oh really? You _____ (be) exhausted!
- A: I haven't seen Jane for a long time, you know.
B: I'm not sure, but I think she _____ (go) on vacation.
- A: Is this your suitcase?
B: No, that _____ (be) mine. My suitcase is black, not red.
- A: Frank is off work today.
B: I know. I'm not sure, but I think he _____ (be) sick.
- A: Kevin's just bought a new car. It's a Jaguar, I think.
B: Wow! That _____ (cost) him a lot of money.

2 Circle the correct answers.

- It's the middle of the winter. The ocean *might* / *must* be very cold.
- Jenny is terrible at volleyball. She *can't* / *might* be on the school team.
- That *could* / *can't* be the man I saw. He has the same hair.
- She was in the hospital for a month, so she *must* / *might* have been very sick.
- Nobody is here. I think everyone *might go* / *have gone* home.

★ Challenge!

Take turns making deductions with a partner.

Frank is asleep. He must be very tired.