

Past modals of deduction

Conversation

Lili: I've just been reading about Felix Baumgartner, you know, the guy who did the highest skydive ever, from 24 miles up. He reached over 800 miles per hour. That's faster than the speed of sound! You may have seen the video of it.



Neil: Yeah, I know who you mean. He must have been terrified. I mean, he can't have been sure he'd survive diving from that height.

Lili: Exactly! He couldn't have known what to expect. In fact, halfway through the dive he started spinning. He must not have expected that to happen.

Neil: So what did he do?



Lili: He might have put out his arms and legs, maybe. Or he could have used his body weight in some way. Anyway, he got the dive back under control and landed safely.

Neil: His family must have been relieved.

Lili: I bet he was, too!

Function

We use past modals of deduction to draw conclusions about the past. This may be based on evidence or on our assumptions. The choice of modal verb depends on whether we think our deduction is moderately probable or very probable.

Form

Past modals of deduction; modal + (not) have + past participle

Strong probability	Moderate probability/improbability	Strong improbability
(1)	(2)	(5)
	(3)	(6)
	(4)	(7)

Video



Practice

Rewrite the sentences with past modals of deduction.

1. Baumgartner almost certainly felt nervous as he waited to jump.
2. I'm sure it wasn't the first time he'd made a very high skydive.
3. It's possible that he made a number of practice jumps first.
4. I'm sure he didn't plan it alone and I expect he had a team of people behind him.
5. It's possible that he didn't know he would break the sound barrier.
6. It's possible that his family didn't want him to make the jump.

Now you do it

Use past modals of deduction to talk about what you think happened in the two of the events showed in the compilation footage and what the people must have felt.

