

35 Certainty, possibility, deduction: *can, could, may, might, must, will, should, ought to*

- To talk about something that it is possible to do at any time, use **can** or **may**.
With this use, **can** and **may** are often followed by the passive infinitive:
*Suitcases **can/may** be left in the left luggage office at the station.*
*Stamps **can/may** be bought at most shops which sell cards.*
- To talk about a future possibility, use **may** or **might**. We can also use **could**; **could** refers to a theoretical possibility:
*The parcel **may/might** arrive tomorrow.*
*I **may/might** see you next week.*
*You **could** go by train. (It is possible to take a train there if you wanted to do that.)*
- To talk about a present or future certainty, use **will** + simple or continuous infinitive:
*You can phone Sally: she'**ll** be at home now.*
*I'**ll** be there by 9 o'clock.*
*The meeting **will** start at 7.30.*
*We should go now: they'**ll** be waiting for us.*
*I'**ll** be standing on the platform when you arrive.*

- To talk about the possibility in the present, use **may**, **might** or **could** + simple infinitive (usually the verb **to be**) or continuous infinitive:
*'Where's Tony?' 'I don't know. He **may be** outside.'*
*'Whose is this?' 'It **could be** Emma's.'*
*Alison's not in the office today so she **may be working** at home.*
*I won't phone Jennifer now because she **might be having** a rest.*
- To talk about possibility in the past, use **may**, **might** or **could** + perfect infinitive (simple or continuous):
*It's 8.30 so she **may have left** by now.*
*I don't know why they're so late. I suppose they **could have got** lost.*
*Sue wasn't at the party last night. She **might have been feeling** too tired to come.*
- To make a deduction about something in the present, use **must** (positive deduction) or **can't** (negative deduction) + simple infinitive (usually the verb **to be**) or continuous infinitive:
*Jane's not at home so she **must be** on her way here.*
*The office is closed now so he **can't be** there.*
*Barbara's back at work now so she **must be feeling** better.*
*He **can't be driving** here: he hasn't got a car.*
- To make a deduction about something in the past, use **must** or **can't** (or **couldn't**) + perfect infinitive (simple or continuous):
*It's very wet outside so it **must have rained** in the night.*
*He **can't have forgotten** about the meeting: he talked to me about it only this morning.*
*You **must have been talking** on the phone for a long time last night: I phoned four times and it was engaged.*
*Eddie **couldn't have done** that robbery: he was with me the whole weekend.*
- We can use **should** or **ought to** + present infinitive to make assumptions about the present or the future and **should** or **ought to** + perfect infinitive to make assumptions about the past. We use **should** more frequently than **ought to**:
*The train got in half an hour ago so they **should be** here soon.*
*The sun's been shining all day so the sea **should be** quite warm now.*
*The weather's lovely there at this time of year so they **should be having** a nice holiday.*
*Let's go and see Cathy: she **ought to have finished** working by now.*

Notes

- We can use modals in short responses:
*'Are they at home now?' 'They **might be**.'*
*'I expect Debbie was very pleased with her results.' 'Yes, she **must have been**.'*
- In short responses, **do** often replaces other verbs:
*'Has he gone home?' 'He may have **done**.'*

Practice

- 35 Complete the sentences with *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *will*, *should*, *ought to* or *must* and an infinitive in the appropriate form.



- 1 Kerry's rather late. She must have missed (miss) the train.
- 2 Travellers' cheques can/may be exchanged (be exchanged) at most banks.
- 3 They're not answering the phone so they
..... (be) out.
- 4 Don't phone her now. It (be)
the middle of the night in Australia.
- 5 They (not move) house yet. I
saw them in town this morning.
- 6 I haven't seen Molly this week. I think she
..... (visit) her parents but I'm not sure.
- 7 Her exam results are coming out soon. She worked very hard so she
..... (do) well.
- 8 That woman's just fallen over. Let's go and see her: she
..... (be) hurt.
- 9 I don't know where she is. She
(not still play) tennis: it's been dark for the last hour.
- 10 I sent the letter two days ago so he
..... (get) it by now, but you can never be sure.
- 11 The encyclopaedias (be
found) on the second floor of the library.

- 12 Jim's been very quiet since his girlfriend went away. He (miss) her.
- 13 I (come) and visit you at the weekend. Anyway, I'll give you a ring to let you know.
- 14 She was with a man I didn't recognize. It (be) her brother because he looked a bit like her.
- 15 The roads are fairly quiet today so we (have) a good journey.
- 16 'Do you think Josephine (be) at home now?'
'No, she She (have) a swim. She always does at this time in the morning.'
- 17 'Why do you think Tricia was in such a hurry?'
'I don't know. She (run) to catch the bus.'
- 18 These glasses (be) Tim's: they look a bit like his.
- 19 It (not rain): the ground's completely dry.
- 20 I (join) the sports club in the summer but I haven't decided yet.
- 21 What a terrible thing to have happened. You (be) terrified.
- 22 I told her you were coming so she (expect) you.
- 23 They've just rung the bell so the children (be) out of the classrooms in a minute.
- 24 That looks like Jack but it (not be) him. He went to live in Australia last year.
- 25 I've got a stomachache this morning. I (eat) too much last night or I (have) some sort of virus.