

# Must, can't, may, might, could

1 We use **must**, **can't**, **may** and **could** with an infinitive (e.g. **be**, **go**, **come**, **earn**):

They **must** INFINITIVE  
earn a lot.

2 CERTAINTY She **must** be rich.

Look at this example with **must**: *Jane got top marks in her exams. She **must** be very clever.* (= From what we know, we can be certain that Jane is very clever.)

We use **must** to say we are certain:

*The Greens have two houses and two cars.*

*They **must** earn a lot of money.*

(= We can be sure that the Greens earn a lot of money.)

A: *There's someone outside in an orange car.*

B: *It **must** be Susan. She's the only person I know with an orange car.*

3 IMPOSSIBILITY She **can't** be poor.

Look at this example with **can't**:

*Mark studied hard for his exams, but he got poor marks; he **can't** be very clever.*

(= From what we know, we can guess that Mark is not very clever.)

We use **can't** to talk about impossibility:

*The Browns both have part-time jobs; they **can't** earn much money.* (= We can guess that the Browns do not earn a lot of money.)

A: *There's someone at the door. I think it's Bill.*

B: *It **can't** be Bill. He's in Australia.*

4 POSSIBILITY

*She { **may** **might** **could** } be in the garden.*

Look at this example with **may**:

A: *Eve's not in her room. Where is she?*

B: *She **may** be in the garden.* (= From what we know, perhaps she is in the garden.)

We use **may**, **might** and **could** for something that is possible but not certain, now or in the future:

*My sister **might** come tomorrow.* (= From what we know, perhaps she will come.)

Now look at this example with **may not**:

A: *I've phoned Jill, but there's no answer.*

B: *She **may not** be at home.* (OR *She **might not** be ...*) (= Perhaps she is not at home.)

Could not is not possible here.

## Practice

A Complete the sentences using **must** or **can't** and one of the verbs from the box.

be belong speak come spend have like live want remember

- Anna lived in America for three years, so she **must speak** English.
- Tom's brother doesn't know anything about medicine, so he **can't be** a doctor.

- 1 Jane has an incredible number of CDs. She ..... music a lot.
- 2 Peter doesn't speak German, so he ..... from Germany.
- 3 This jacket ..... to Janet because it's not her size.
- 4 That man ..... around here because he doesn't know any of the street names.
- 5 Jack ..... a lot of clothes. He wears something different every day.
- 6 Sam's grandmother is over 80 years old, so she ..... the Second World War.
- 7 You've got ten cats already. You ..... to get another one.
- 8 Susan buys a new dress every day. She ..... a lot of money on clothes.

**B** Someone has robbed a bank. The police are sure that the criminal is one of these men. Look at the pictures and complete the sentences using *can't be*, *could be* or *must be*.



► A witness says that the robber had short hair. If that's true, then it *can't be* ..... Drake or Rogers, but it *could be* ..... Hall.

► A witness says that the robber had glasses. If that's true, then it *can't be* ..... Brown or Drake. It *must be* ..... either Hall or Rogers or Smith.

1 A witness says that the robber had black hair. If that's true, then it ..... Hall, but it ..... Brown.

2 A witness says that the robber had a moustache. If that's true, then it ..... Rogers but it ..... Drake or Brown.

3 A witness says that the robber didn't have a beard. If that's true, then it ..... Drake or Brown but it ..... Hall or Smith.

4 A witness says that the robber had a moustache, but no beard. If that's true, then it ..... Drake or Rogers. It ..... Hall.

5 A witness says that the robber had black hair and wore glasses. If that's true, then it ..... Rogers. It ..... Hall.

6 And if what everyone says is true, then it ..... .

**C** Complete the dialogues with *must*, *can't* or *might* and one of the phrases in the box.

cost a lot of money	be a soldier	work long hours	go to Portugal
come this weekend	take much interest	also be at the shops	be at the gym

► Ruth: I think Ann's brother is in the army.  
James: He *can't be a soldier*... ; he's only 15.

1 Bob: What are you going to do next summer?  
Susan: I don't know. We ..... , but it's not certain yet.

2 Fred: Mike's new flat is all electric – kitchen, heating, everything.  
Peter: That ..... in electricity bills.

3 Sam: Is Mary coming to see us this week?  
Sally: It depends on her work. She ..... if she finishes the project that she's doing.

4 Carol: Have Brian and Kim got any children?  
Tom: Yes, they have two children, but they ..... in them, because they never talk about them.

5 Andrew: Do you see your new neighbours very much?  
Sarah: No, they ..... , because they are hardly ever at home.

6 Paul: Fred's gone out, hasn't he? Where has he gone?  
Ann: I don't know. He ..... or he ..... .