

3.2 Present and past speculation

Speculating about the present

When speculating about a present situation, we use a **modal verb + infinitive**. We use:

- **must**, to express a strong belief that something is true:
*John **must** be very happy working at the zoo.*
- **might, may** and **could** when we think that it's possible that something is true:
*The lions **might/may/could** be very hungry now.*
- **can't**, to express a strong belief that something isn't true:
*It **can't** be a domestic cat. It's too big.*

Speculating about the past

When speculating about a past situation or event, we use a **modal verb + have + the Past Participle form of the main verb**.

We use:

- **must have**, to express a strong belief that something happened:
*You **must have lost** your mobile at the zoo.*
- **might have, may have** and **could have**, when we think that it's possible that something happened:
*Lucy **might/may/could have missed** the train.*
- **can't have** and **couldn't have**, to express a strong belief that something didn't happen:
*Peter **can't/couldn't have gone** home.*

1 Choose the correct option.

- 1 The key *can't / must* be somewhere here but I can't find it right now.
- 2 You *can't / may* remember me – we met on a trip to China last year.
- 3 What, you forgot your ticket and passport? You *might / can't* be serious!
- 4 You failed the exam, so your answers *must / can't* have been wrong.
- 5 I'm not sure if you are right. You *could / can't* have made a mistake.

2 Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verbs in brackets.

- 1 I might _____ (leave) my mobile at the hotel but I don't remember.
- 2 Susan has been travelling for the last two weeks – she must _____ (be) very tired by now.
- 3 Wendy's accent is a bit strange. She could _____ (be) Northern Irish, but I'm not sure.
- 4 You can't _____ (see) Joe in town at noon – he was at home with me.
- 5 Thomas was really upset last week. He must _____ (have) problems at home.

3 Choose the correct option, A, B or C.

- 1 We _____ go to Greece this summer, but we haven't decided yet.
A must B might C can't
- 2 They _____ have visited that museum. It's closed.
A might not B couldn't C mustn't
- 3 They _____ know this place. They've been here many times.
A may B can't C must
- 4 I don't know why Pat hasn't arrived yet. She _____ have missed the bus.
A must B could C can't
- 5 It _____ be Diana's tent. She never goes camping.
A must B may C can't
- 6 Greg _____ have reached his destination yet. It's only 7 p.m.
A could B can't C mustn't
- 7 Ben knew everything about Gothic painting. Definitely, he _____ have studied art history.
A couldn't B might C must
- 8 It's impossible to keep a puma as a pet. She _____ have lied.
A must B can't C might

4 Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning as the first. Use modal verbs.

- 1 I am sure a cruise down the Nile is very expensive.
A cruise down the Nile _____ very expensive.
- 2 I am sure Kate hasn't eaten that local speciality. She's allergic to seafood.
Kate _____ that local speciality. She's allergic to seafood.
- 3 I am sure they are not at the office. Pam called me from the airport an hour ago.
They _____ at the office. Pam called me from the airport an hour ago.
- 4 Maybe we will spend a few days near the sea, I'm not sure.
We _____ a few days near the sea.
- 5 I am sure they have brought a lot of souvenirs from their trip. They always do.
They _____ a lot of souvenirs from their trip.
- 6 Let's ask Ian. Maybe he has been to Japan.
Let's ask Ian. He _____.
- 7 We'd better take a map. Maybe it is not the right way.
We'd better take a map. It _____ the right way.
- 8 I don't know why Janet is still not here. Maybe she got stuck in traffic. I don't know why Janet is still not here.
She _____ in traffic.