FCE 9.1

OK. In this lesson, we will look at **modals of speculation and deduction**. Look at the advertisement (*advert* in the UK) below. What do you think it is selling?



The sample sentences show various ways of answering this question.

*Well, it **could be** advertising ...*

*Or perhaps it **might be** for ...*

*I think it **must be** an advertisement for ...*

*It **can't be** for ___ because ...*

The modals used above—*could, might, must, can't*—are all used to speculate about a subject, but they show different degrees of certainty.

The modal verbs in the first pair of examples above—*could* and *might*—indicate that the speaker is unsure. (It is also possible to use *may,* though less common, but *can* is not used in this way.)

Is the speaker unsure in the second pair of examples? Which words tell you? The answer is the modals *must* and *can't*.

Now look at this example: *It couldn't possibly be an advert for chocolate*. Is the speaker unsure?

With the period (*full stop* in the UK), the statement shows certainty, so we can add *couldn't* to the list of modals that show speculation and deduction.

Does the meaning change if the full stop is replaced by a question mark? Say the sentence and the question aloud. The meaning does change, but the question would sound better with extra words at the end. It is common to add a tag question in this case: *It couldn't possibly be an advert for chocolate, could it?* (Remember, a tag question is a short phrase added to the end of a statement to turn it into a question or to ask the listener to confirm if the statement is true.)

The box at right summarizes the modals of speculation and deduction with examples.

Modals 2: Speculation and deduction

- *could, might, may* are used to speculate about something the speaker or writer is unsure about:
  It could be a sea eagle, though the feathers look too dark.
  That star you're looking at might in fact be Jupiter.
  The answer may be to readvertise the job.
- *must* is used to indicate certainty:
  That car must be doing over 50 mph at least!
  It must be possible to make a booking on the Internet.
- *can't/cannot* and *couldn't/could not* are also used to indicate certainty, in relation to impossible ideas and situations:
  It can't be her birthday – she had a party in August.
  You cannot be serious!
  They couldn't possibly be here before lunchtime.
- *couldn't/could not* can also be used in questions, sometimes with *possibly*, to speculate about something:
  It couldn't possibly be a case of mistaken identity, could it?
  Couldn't it be a computer error?
- *could have, might have, may have* are used to express uncertainty about something in the past:
  It could have been Greg you saw on the bus – he often catches the 206.
  The dinosaurs might have survived without the meteor impact.
  I think I may have met you before.
- *couldn't have / can't have* are used to express certainty that something in the past was impossible or didn't happen:
  He couldn't have damaged your bike – he was with me all evening.
  It can't have been raining, as the path is completely dry.
- *must have* is used to express near-certainty about something in the past:
  It must have been cold that winter.
  Jan must have arrived home by now.

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Now read the text about a TV advert. Potentially new vocabulary is noted. How many modals of speculation/deduction are used? _____

The best ad missed the boat at Cannes

This is the title of an article by Bob Garfield, an American expert on advertising. He was writing about the International Advertising Film Festival, which takes place some time after the main film festival in Cannes.

For Bob, the best ad of the year was from Delvico Bates, Barcelona, for *Esencial* hand cream. The ad shows a woman riding her bike, which has a very squeaky chain. The woman gets off the bike, opens her jar of *Esencial* and rubs some of the cream onto the chain. Then she rides away – but the squeak remains. Why? Because, as the voice-over says, '*Esencial* moisturises, but it has no grease.'

Why is this ad so good? It can't be for its special effects, because there aren't any. Might it be the music? No, there isn't even a jingle. Could it be that the woman is a celebrity? No. Bob's verdict: 'It's a vivid demonstration of brand non-attributes. Inspired. Cunning. Brilliant.' In other words, by showing failure in a different context, the quality of the product is reinforced – grease is good for bike chains, but not for the skin.

So surely this ad must have won at Cannes? No. The simple truth is that it couldn't win, because the agency failed to enter it in time for the festival deadline!

voice-over = es la voz de una persona que no aparece en la pantalla, pero que narra o explica lo que está pasando en un video, comercial o película

jingle = es una canción o melodía corta y pegadiza que se usa en los anuncios de radio o televisión para que la gente recuerde una marca fácilmente

celebrity = es una persona famosa y ampliamente reconocida por el público (como un actor, músico o deportista) que a menudo se usa en publicidad para promocionar productos

verdict = es la decisión oficial

brand = es la identidad única de una empresa o producto; la marca

• **cunning** = describe a alguien que es muy inteligente para lograr lo que quiere, a menudo usando el engaño, la picardía o la habilidad de manera oculta

In the final paragraph, it says "*So surely this ad must have won at Cannes?*" Here, the modal is referring to a past action. In English, *have* is used with modal verbs to form the past in English. Here are some rules for forming the past of modals:

- **Always use "have":** Never use "has" or "had" after a modal verb (e.g., say *she could have gone*, never *she could had gone* or *she could has gone*). The simple form of a verb is always used after a modal.
- **Followed by a past participle:** The main action verb that comes after **have** must be in its past participle form (e.g., *gone, done, seen, called*)

Let's practice. Say whether the speaker is sure or unsure in sentences a-c below.

a) Their latest TV commercial must have cost a fortune to produce.

b) There's one commercial showing a man sitting in an armchair on a mountain peak. That couldn't have actually happened - it must be done by special effects.

c) Advertising has come a long way in the last forty years. Audiences of the 1960s might have been totally overwhelmed by an action-packed commercial of today!

Complete the following sentences with *must, might* or *could* (both are possible), *can't* or *couldn't* (both are sometimes possible).

a) This _____ possibly be the new Coca-Cola advert, though why on earth are they using polar bears?

b) The ad for the Pentium chip _____ be the best of the year. The way they manage to make a computer chip appear interesting is inspired!

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c) Here's an ad that shows a picture of 30 different puddings. I1_____ just be advertising desserts, surely?
d) Do you remember that ad for a fizzy drink? It _____ have been very successful as they had to withdraw it almost immediately.
e) Those ads for iPads_____ be very successful. They've had so many hits on the internet!
f) Product placement on TV shows_____ be more effective than actual commercials. It depends on how many people are watching at the time, I suppose.

Let's end this lesson with a listening exercise. **You are going to hear two people talking about some TV commercials. In Part 1, which of these aspects are mentioned by the speakers? Tick the ones you hear.**

- [ ] a) puzzling beginning
- [ ] b) a storyline with flashbacks
- [ ] c) a dramatic ending
- [ ] d) a setting that is out of the ordinary
- [ ] e) a surprising location
- [ ] f) a well-known personality
- [ ] g) a powerful slogan
- [ ] h) an extravagant production

Now, listen to Part 2, where one particular advert is discussed. Answer the questions below by selecting W for woman or M for man in the boxes.

a) Who didn't like the advert?
b) Who was surprised by part of the advert?
c) Who agrees that Ray was an effective character?
d) Who liked the music in the advert?

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