

Verbs: modals of past probability

You must have been a beautiful baby.

When we know that something happened in the past, we use a normal past tense. (He *did*, I *saw* them, etc.) If we are not completely sure, we use a modal (*must*, *may*, *might*, *could* + *have*). The choice of modal depends on the degree of certainty, as in the following table.

PROBABILITY	VERB	EXAMPLE
100% certain	past simple	She _____. (know) where the gold was.
95% almost certain	<i>must have</i> + past participle	We _____ (arrive) early
50% possible/likely	<i>could have</i> + past participle	She _____ (forget)
	<i>might/ may have</i> + past participle	We _____ (make) a mistake.
5% highly unlikely	<i>can't/couldn't have</i> + past participle	You _____ (lose) the keys.
0% impossible	past simple negative	He _____ (know) the code.

The following sentences are about an escaped criminal. Rewrite them using a modal from the above table, as in the example:



Example: It is almost certain that he left before breakfast.
He must have left before breakfast.

1. It is highly unlikely that he carried the gold by himself.
2. It seems likely that he had an accomplice.
3. He has almost certainly been spotted by the police by now.
4. It is possible that he headed towards London.
5. It's possible that he gave himself up.
6. It is almost certain that he realised how serious it was.
7. It is highly unlikely that he thought things through clearly.
8. Possibly he escaped by boat.
9. It's likely that he made contact with his friends.
10. It is highly unlikely that he committed suicide.