

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.