

PRACTICAL ENGLISH FOR PROFESSIONALS

LESSON 17

MODAL VERBS: DEDUCTION ABOUT THE PAST

When we use modal verbs to talk about the PRESENT they are followed by an infinitive without 'to'. (LESSON 16)

When we use modal verbs to talk about the PAST they are followed by a perfect infinitive (have + past participle).

<p>We use must + perfect infinitive when <u>we feel sure about something in the past</u>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You must have been delighted when you heard you'd won the lottery. • The thieves must have come in through the window. Look – it's still open. • Oh no! Where's my car? Someone must have stolen it!
<p>We use might, may or could + perfect infinitive to say that <u>we think something was possible but we aren't sure</u>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thieves might have escaped by car but we can't be sure. • He should be here by now. He may have been delayed by a traffic jam or something. • I can't find my purse. I could have left it in the supermarket but I just don't know.
<p>We use can't + perfect infinitive when <u>we feel sure something didn't happen in the past</u>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I thought I saw John in town this morning but it can't have been him – he's in Greece this week. • I can't have left it in the supermarket – I had it on the bus on the way home. • You can't have read the instructions properly. They're perfectly clear.

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Complete the sentences using the verbs from the list:

must have misunderstood	could have been
must have written down	could have gone
must have rained	may have misunderstood
can't have gone (x2)	must have seen
might have handed in	

1. I don't know why there weren't any buses yesterday. They _____ on strike but I'm not really sure
2. You _____ her. She was standing right next to you.
3. We'll ask at reception. Someone _____ your keys.
4. He _____ to Russia. He hasn't got a passport.
5. I explained it but she _____ - my Japanese isn't very good.
6. He _____ to the city centre. He did say he wanted to go shopping.
7. It _____ a lot in the night. There are puddles everywhere.
8. I _____ the number incorrectly. I've just called a hospital not the restaurant.
9. She _____ to the beach. He hates being in the sun.
10. They _____ my directions. Why else are they late?