

# MODAL VERBS OF DEDUCTION

When we are **not** 100% sure about things, we make deductions, using modals.

**Must**

**Can't**

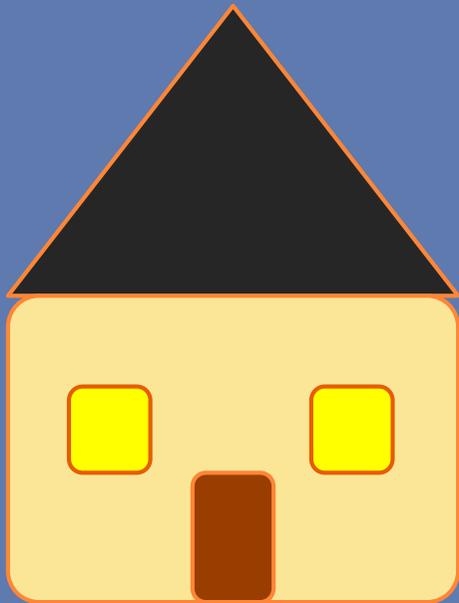
**May**

**Might**

**Could**

**Must**

When we feel sure that something is true or it's the **only realistic** possibility.

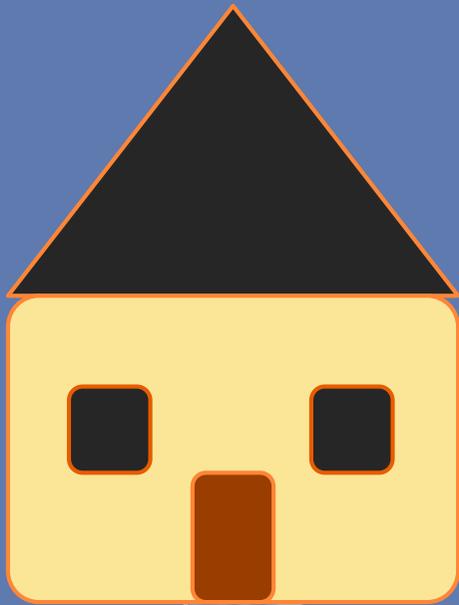


The lights are on...  
Mom **must** be home!



**Can't**

When we feel sure that something is **not** possible.



The lights are off...  
Mom **can't** be home!



Note that the opposite of **must** is not **mustn't**. It's **can't**.

**E.g. (+) They must be ill.**

**(-) They mustn't be ill. ❌**

**(-) They can't be ill. ✅**

When we think something is possible but we're not sure.

**May**

The doctor may help you with your problem.

**Might**

Our team might not win the match.

**Could**

He's not answering. He could be in a meeting.

They all have the same meaning, but may is more **formal** than might and could.

Don't confuse  
modals of **deduction**  
with modals of **obligation**.

E.g. She must be really clever.  
(deduction)

She must arrive early.  
(obligation)

## Exercises

1. That restaurant \_\_\_\_\_ be very good. It's always full of people.
2. That restaurant \_\_\_\_\_ be very good. It's always empty.
3. a: Who was the guy we saw with Anna yesterday?  
b: I'm not sure. It \_\_\_\_\_ be her brother.
4. He is listening to music. He \_\_\_\_\_ not hear the doorbell.
5. This bill \_\_\_\_\_ be correct. It's much too high.
6. They \_\_\_\_\_ be from France. I heard them talk yesterday.
7. I often see that man in this street. He \_\_\_\_\_ have a house near here.
8. He \_\_\_\_\_ be rich. Look at all those cars in the driveway.
9. I have to take my dog to a vet. He has been acting weird lately. He \_\_\_\_\_ be ill.
10. I don't know where she is. She \_\_\_\_\_ be at work.

### Answer Key

1. That restaurant **must** be very good. It's always full of people.
2. That restaurant **can't** be very good. It's always empty.
3. a: Who was the guy we saw with Anna yesterday?  
b: I'm not sure. It **might/may/could** be her brother.
4. He is listening to music. He **might/may** not hear the doorbell.
5. This bill **can't** be correct. It's much too high.
6. They **might/may/could** be from France. I heard them talk yesterday.
7. I often see that man in this street. He **must** have a house near here.
8. He **must** be rich. Look at all those cars in the driveway.
9. I have to take my dog to a vet. He has been acting weird lately. He **might/may/could** be ill.
10. I don't know where she is. She **must** be at work.