

MODAL PERFECTS (PAST DEDUCTION & SPECULATION)

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1. What are Modal Perfects?

We use modal + have + past participle to talk about the past when we are not 100% sure what happened.

We make logical guesses based on evidence.

Main forms and meanings

Modal Perfect	Meaning	Example
must have + pp	Almost certain (strong deduction)	He must have forgotten the meeting.
might / may / could have + pp	Possible	She might have missed the bus.
can't / couldn't have + pp	Almost impossible	They can't have finished already.
should have + pp	It was a good idea (but they didn't)	You should have called me.

Notes

- We never use can have for deduction (wrong).
- Could have can also mean possibility in the past.

2. Quick Check – Circle the best option

1. The lights are off and the door is locked. They might have / must have / can't have gone out.
2. She looks very tired. She must have / can't have / should have slept badly last night.
3. He must have / might have / can't have stolen the money – he was with me all evening.
4. You should have / must have / can't have told me earlier. I could have helped you.
5. I'm not sure where my keys are. I must have / might have / can't have left them at work.

3. Match the evidence with the most logical conclusion

Evidence	Conclusion
1. Her car is not in the parking lot.	She must have prepared very well.
2. He looks completely relaxed and happy.	He might have forgotten.
3. The kitchen is a complete mess.	She must have already left.
4. She knew all the answers in the meeting.	He can't have failed the exam.
5. He promised to call but he didn't.	They might have had a party last night.

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Answer Key

2. Quick Check

1. must have
2. must have
3. can't have
4. should have
5. might have

3. Match the evidence with the most logical conclusion

Evidence	Conclusion
1. Her car is not in the parking lot.	She must have already left.
2. He looks completely relaxed and happy.	He can't have failed the exam.
3. The kitchen is a complete mess.	They might have had a party last night.
4. She knew all the answers in the meeting.	She must have prepared very well.
5. He promised to call but he didn't.	He might have forgotten.

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