

Modals of Deduction: Certainty and Possibility

INTERMEDIATE

Focus: Must vs. Can't, Continuous Forms, and Logical Inference

When we are almost certain about something based on **evidence** or **logic**, we use specific modal verbs. We do not use these verbs to state facts, but to show our logical conclusion.

1. Present Certainty: *Must* vs. *Can't*

We use these forms to deduce the present situation.

- **MUST + Infinitive (I am sure it is TRUE)**
 - Use this when you have strong evidence that something is true.
 - *Context*: "He has three Ferraris and a big house."
 - *Deduction*: "He **must be** rich." (I am sure he is rich).
- **CAN'T + Infinitive (I am sure it is IMPOSSIBLE)**
 - Use this when you have strong evidence that something is **not** true.
 - *Context*: "She just ate a huge lunch."
 - *Deduction*: "She **can't be** hungry yet." (I am sure she is not hungry).
 - *Note*: We generally do not use *mustn't* for deduction. Use *can't*.

2. Continuous Deduction (Actions happening *now*)

When we deduce what is happening at this exact moment, we use the continuous form.

- **Structure**: Must / Can't + **be + verb-ing**
- *Evidence*: "I hear typing sounds coming from his room."
- *Deduction*: "He **must be working** on his essay."
- *Evidence*: "His car is in the garage and the lights are off at his office."
- *Deduction*: "He **can't be working** late tonight."

3. Past Continuous Deduction (Duration in the past)

When we see evidence *now* caused by an action that continued for some time in the *past*.

- **Structure**: Must + **have been + verb-ing**
- *Evidence*: "The ground is very wet and there are puddles everywhere."
- *Deduction*: "It **must have been raining** heavily last night."

Summary Table

Certainty	Time	Structure	Meaning (Evidence)
95% Yes	Present	must + verb	I am sure it is true.
95% No	Present	can't + verb	I am sure it is impossible.
95% Yes	Now (Action)	must be + -ing	I am sure it is happening now.

Practice: Logical Deduction

A. Fill in the Blanks (Context & Deduction)

Instruction: Read the context situation carefully. Complete the second sentence using **must** or **can't** plus the correct form of the verb (**infinitive**, **be -ing**, or **have been -ing**).

- Use **must** if the evidence suggests it is true.
- Use **can't** if the evidence suggests it is impossible.
- Pay attention to whether the action is a **state**, happening **now**, or happened over a duration in the **past**.

1. Look at all those books on her desk and her stressed face. She _____ (study) for the final exam right now.
2. He just left the office five minutes ago, and his house is thirty minutes away. He _____ (be) home yet.
3. The grass is completely white this morning and it is freezing outside. It _____ (snow) all night.
4. You have been working in the garden all day in this heat! You _____ (be) absolutely exhausted.
5. They are shouting at each other and look very angry. They _____ (have) a good time together.
6. Look at the finish line! The runner is gasping for air and sweating profusely. He _____ (run) very fast for the last hour.
7. That woman looks exactly like the Queen, but the Queen is in London today. That _____ (be) her.
8. The kitchen smells distinctively of burnt sugar and flour. Someone _____ (bake) a cake earlier.
9. Nobody is answering the phone, but the lights are on and the car is in the driveway. They _____ (be) in the garden.
10. He always gets 100% on his math tests. He _____ (be) very intelligent.
11. She is wearing a heavy winter coat and a scarf in July? She _____ (feel) very hot!
12. My keys are not in my pocket or on the table. I _____ (leave) them in the car door when I parked.
13. The children are sitting quietly and watching the screen with their eyes wide open. They _____ (watch) their favorite cartoon right now.
14. Look at the wet footprints leading from the pool to the house. The kids _____ (swim) recently.

Answer Key

1. **must be studying** (Action happening now)
2. **can't be** (Logical impossibility in the present)
3. **must have been snowing** (Evidence of past duration seen now)
4. **must be** (Logical certainty about a state)
5. **can't be having** (Action happening now - negative deduction)
6. **must have been running** (Evidence of past duration seen now)
7. **can't be** (Logical impossibility)
8. **must have been baking** (Evidence of past duration/process)
9. **must be** (Logical certainty about location)
10. **must be** (Logical certainty about a trait)
11. **must be feeling** (Or *must feel* - deduction about current sensation)
12. **must have left** (Logical conclusion about a past event - *Note: simple 'must have left' is acceptable here, though prompt focused on continuous, 'must have been leaving' doesn't fit contextually*)
13. **must be watching** (Action happening now)
14. **must have been swimming** (Evidence of past activity)
15. **must be** (Logical certainty - fixed expression)