

Learn**English** Teens

Grammar videos: Modals of deduction



Remember to watch the video first! Then read the conversation between Sophie and Nur, an English language student that Sophie met when she was travelling in Indonesia.





We use the modal verbs *might*, *may* and *could* + an infinitive form without *to* when we think it is possible that something is true. We use *must* when we are sure it is true and *can't* when we are sure it isn't true.



So, we can use *might*, *may* and *could* for making guesses?

Nur

Yes. They're all used when we are not sure about something, but we think that it is possible that it is true.

They might be some kind of small pig.

But could I also say, 'They **could be** a kind of pig' or 'They **may be** a kind of pig'?



Sophie



Yes, you could. The meanings are really similar. You can choose whether to use *may*, *might* or *could*.

Ah, OK. So if I'm *not sure* about something I can use *may*, *might* or *could* and the meaning is almost the same. That's easy to remember.

Yes, that's right. But there's something else which affects the meaning, and that's *how* you say it; the 'intonation'. If you stress *may*, *might* or *could* it sounds less probable.

It **could** be mango juice. (less likely)
It **could** be mango juice. (more likely)



OK, and if I'm sure about something, what modals do I use?

We use *must* if we think something is true and *can't* if we think something isn't true.

So, it **must** come from an animal.

That looks like tomato juice, but it can't be, that would be too easy.



www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglishteens

© The British Council, 2012 The United Kingdom's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations. We are registered in England as a charity.



Learn**English** Teens

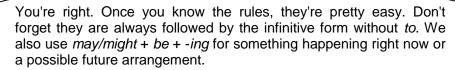
Grammar videos: Modals of deduction



Do the verb forms change in the third person?

No, they don't change. They are the same in the first, second and third person.

Great! I think I like these modals!



That **might be** Mum **phoning** from Bali.

She might be going to Australia.





You also used 'it could be a kind of pig' for describing something in the present.

Yes, but that was with the verb *to be*, a stative verb. We use the *-ing* form with active or dynamic verbs.



I see. Is there anything else to be careful about?



Yes, if you are talking about possibility in the past you need the modal + *have* + past participle.

She might have taken those photos in China.

I may have thrown it away by mistake.

Hmm. I think I may need to practise these verbs a bit.



Yes, you might be right!

Watch the video on our website!



www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglishteens

© The British Council, 2012 The United Kingdom's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations. We are registered in England as a charity.