

MODAL MEANINGS IN CONTEXT

B2 | Teens / Adults | Grammar Practice | 35-45 minutes

Learn and practise | Distinguish deduction, possibility, obligation and permission.

1. READ: A late visitor

Read the conversation. Notice the bold grammar and how the speakers use it.

Mae: Ben's not here yet. He **must be** stuck in traffic.

Ash: He **might be**, but he **could have missed** the message about the new time.

Mae: Can we wait ten minutes?

Ash: Yes, but visitors **have to sign** in before reception closes.

Mae: **May I use** your phone to call him? Mine's dead.

Ash: Of course. He **doesn't have to bring** printed directions - I'll meet him downstairs.

2. GRAMMAR: The same modal can do different jobs

Choose a modal by meaning and context: a conclusion, a possible explanation, a rule or permission.

Use / form	Pattern	Example
Deduction / possibility	must / might / could	He must be late. He might be lost.
Obligation / no obligation	have to / don't have to	You have to sign in.
Permission / prohibition	may/can / mustn't	May I call? You mustn't smoke.

Contrast: You must leave. (obligation) / You must be tired. (deduction)

Past possibility: He could have missed it. **Unused option:** He could have called, but didn't.

Might not is possibly not; mustn't is forbidden; can't can express inability or deduction.

A. CHOOSE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. You must be tired. (Deduction / Permission.)
2. May I sit here? (Permission / Obligation.)
3. You mustn't smoke. (Prohibition / No obligation.)
4. He might be lost. (Certainty / Possibility.)
5. You don't have to book. (Optional / Forbidden.)
6. She can't be Jo: Jo is abroad. (Deduction / Ability.)
7. You have to sign in. (Obligation / Possibility.)
8. He could have called, but didn't. (Unused option / Proven event.)

Read each answer aloud. Explain which meaning or time clue helped you.

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Use it | Complete a context, write sentences and speak with a partner.

B. COMPLETE: Rules and possible explanations

Choose the option that matches the evidence, requirement or permission.

1. You _____ (must / might) sign in; it's compulsory.
2. I'm not sure, but Ben _____ (might / must) be delayed.
3. You _____ (mustn't / don't have to) smoke; it's forbidden.
4. You _____ (mustn't / don't have to) print it; the screen copy is fine.
5. _____ (May / Must) I borrow your phone, please?
6. That person in blue _____ (can't / mustn't) be Ben: he's wearing red today.

C. CHANGE THE SENTENCES

1-2: Express the given meaning.

Example: Perhaps she is late. (might) **She might be late.**

1. I'm sure he's tired. (must) _____
2. Perhaps she missed it. (might have) _____

3-4: Express the given meaning. Example: It's forbidden to enter. (mustn't) **You mustn't enter.**

3. It isn't necessary to book. (don't have to) _____
4. It's forbidden to take photos here. (mustn't) _____

D. WRITE ABOUT YOU

Write a deduction, a rule and a permission question. Label each meaning and add a reason or context.

Example: **She must be tired: she worked all night. You must wear ID. May I borrow a pen?**

E. SPEAK WITH A PARTNER

Plan a visit to a workplace. Explain rules and ask permission.

Then discuss a late arrival using deductions and possibilities. Identify the modal meanings.

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Answer key | Keep this page separate during student practice.

1. READ: A late visitor

Sample target language from the conversation:

Mae: Ben's not here yet. He **must be** stuck in traffic.

Ash: He **might be**, but he **could have missed** the message about the new time.

Ash: Yes, but visitors **have to sign** in before reception closes.

Mae: **May I use** your phone to call him? Mine's dead.

Ash: Of course. He **doesn't have to bring** printed directions - I'll meet him downstairs.

A. CHOOSE

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. Deduction | 2. Permission |
| 3. Prohibition | 4. Possibility |
| 5. Optional | 6. Deduction |
| 7. Obligation | 8. Unused option |

B. COMPLETE: Rules and possible explanations

- | | |
|------------|------------------|
| 1. must | 2. might |
| 3. mustn't | 4. don't have to |
| 5. May | 6. can't |

C. CHANGE THE SENTENCES

1. He must be tired.
2. She might have missed it.
3. You don't have to book.
4. You mustn't take photos here.

D. WRITE ABOUT YOU / E. SPEAK

Personal answers will vary. Check the target grammar.

Sample: He might be delayed. Visitors have to sign in. You don't have to bring a ticket. May I use the lift?

Teacher note: A focuses on functions. Would/could/can have several meanings; assess the whole context rather than a fixed label for each word.