

# 20 Probability: must, can't, may, might, could

- 1 We use **must**, **can't**, **may** and **could** with an infinitive (e.g. **be**, **go**, **come**, **earn**):

They **must** INFINITIVE  
earn a lot.

- 2 CERTAINTY She **must be** rich.

Look at this example with **must**:

Jane got top marks in her exams. She **must be** very clever. (= From what we know, we can be certain that Jane is very clever.)

We use **must** to say we are certain:

The Greens have two houses and two cars.

They **must earn** a lot of money. (= We can be sure that the Greens earn a lot of money.)

A: There's someone outside in an orange car.

B: It **must be** Susan. She's the only person I know with an orange car.

- 3 IMPOSSIBILITY She **can't be** poor.

Look at this example with **can't**:

Mark studied hard for his exams, but he got poor marks; he **can't be** very clever. (= From what we know, we can guess that Mark is not very clever.)

We use **can't** to talk about impossibility:

The Browns both have part-time jobs; they **can't earn** much money. (= We can guess that the Browns do **not** earn a lot of money.)

A: There's someone at the door. I think it's Bill.

B: It **can't be** Bill. He's in Australia.

- 3 POSSIBILITY

She { may  
might  
could } be in the garden.

Look at this example with **may**:

A: Eve's not in her room. Where is she?

B: She **may be** in the garden.

(= From what we know, **perhaps** she is in the garden.)

We use **may**, **might** and **could** for something that is possible but not certain, now or in the future:

My sister **might come** tomorrow.

(= From what we know, perhaps she **will** come.)

Now look at this example with **may not**:

A: I've phoned Jill, but there's no answer.

B: She **may not be** at home. (or She **might not be**...)

(= Perhaps she is not at home.)

**Could not** is not possible here.

## Practice

- A Complete the sentences using **must** or **can't** and one of the verbs from the box.

be   belong   speak   come   spend   have   like   live   want   remember

- 0 Anna lived in America for three years, so she must speak English.
- 0 Tom's brother doesn't know anything about medicine, so he can't be a doctor.
- 1 Jane has an incredible number of compact discs. She \_\_\_\_\_ music a lot.
- 2 Peter doesn't speak German, so he \_\_\_\_\_ from Germany.
- 3 This jacket \_\_\_\_\_ to Janet because it's not her size.
- 4 That man \_\_\_\_\_ around here because he doesn't know any of the street names.
- 5 Jack \_\_\_\_\_ a lot of clothes. He wears something different every day.
- 6 Sam's grandmother is over eighty years old, so she \_\_\_\_\_ the Second World War.
- 7 You've got ten cats already. You \_\_\_\_\_ to get another one.
- 8 Susan buys a new dress every day. She \_\_\_\_\_ a lot of money on clothes.

B Someone has robbed a bank. The police are sure that the criminal is one of these men. Look at the pictures and complete the sentences using *can't be*, *could be*, or *must be*.



Drake



Hall



Brown



Rogers



Smith

- 0 A witness says that the robber had short hair. If that's true, then it can't be Drake or Rogers, but it could be Hall.
- 0 A witness says that the robber had glasses. If that's true, then it can't be Brown or Drake. It must be either Hall or Rogers or Smith.
- 1 A witness says that the robber had black hair. If that's true, then it \_\_\_\_\_ Hall, but it \_\_\_\_\_ Brown.
- 2 A witness says that the robber had a moustache. If that's true, then it \_\_\_\_\_ Rogers but it \_\_\_\_\_ Drake or Brown.
- 3 A witness says that the robber didn't have a beard. If that's true, then it \_\_\_\_\_ Drake or Brown but it \_\_\_\_\_ Hall or Smith.
- 4 A witness says that the robber had a moustache, but no beard. If that's true, then it \_\_\_\_\_ Drake or Rogers. It \_\_\_\_\_ Hall.
- 5 A witness says that the robber had black hair and wore glasses. If that's true, then it \_\_\_\_\_ Rogers. It \_\_\_\_\_ Hall.
- 6 And if what everyone says is true, then it \_\_\_\_\_.

C Complete the dialogues with *must*, *can't* or *might* and one of the phrases in the box.

cost a lot of money	be a soldier	work long hours
go to Portugal	come this weekend	take much interest
also be at the shops	be at the gym	

- 0 Ruth: I think Ann's brother is in the army.  
James: He can't be a soldier; he's only 15.
- 1 Bob: What are you going to do next summer?  
Susan: I don't know. We \_\_\_\_\_, but it's not certain yet.
- 2 Fred: Mike's new flat is all electric—kitchen, heating, everything.  
Peter: That \_\_\_\_\_ in electricity bills.
- 3 Sam: Is Mary coming to see us this week?  
Sally: It depends on her work. She \_\_\_\_\_ if she finishes the project that she's doing.
- 4 Carol: Have Brian and Kim got any children?  
Tom: Yes, they have two children, but they \_\_\_\_\_ in them, because they never talk about them.
- 5 Andrew: Do you see your new neighbours very much?  
Sarah: No, they \_\_\_\_\_, because they are hardly ever at home.
- 6 Paul: Fred's gone out, hasn't he? Where has he gone?  
Ann: I don't know. He \_\_\_\_\_ or he \_\_\_\_\_.