

15 must, have, will and should for deduction and assumption

156 must used for deduction

A

Forms

Present

must + present infinitive: *He must live here*, or

must + continuous infinitive: *He must be living here*.

Past

must + perfect infinitive: *He must have lived here*, or

must + continuous perfect infinitive: *He must have been living here*.

Note the difference between the past forms of *must* used for deduction and the past equivalent of *must* used for obligation: *had to*.

must is not used for negative deduction (see 159) and is not normally used in the interrogative except when querying a deduction with *must*:

There's a lot of wise from upstairs. It must be Tom. ~ Why must it be Tom? Other people use that flat.

Examples

He has a house in London and another in Paris, so he must be rich.

I've had no sleep for 48 hours. - You must be exhausted.

He develops his own films. That must save him a lot of money.

I keep meeting him on the bus. He must live/must be living near by.

The police are stopping all cars. They must be looking for the escaped prisoner.

What explosion? I didn't hear any. ~ You must have heard it! The whole town heard it!

He must have taken sleeping pills last night. He didn't wake up till lunch time.

I waited under the clock! - So did I, but I didn't see you! We must have been waiting under different clocks.

It was a head-on collision, but the drivers weren't hurt. ~ They must have been wearing their seat belts.

157 must (deduction) compared to may/might

The difference is best seen by examples:

(a) Imagine that we have three keys on a ring and we know that one of these keys opens the cellar door. We might begin by picking one key and saying:

This may/might be the key. (Perhaps this is the key.)

But after trying two keys unsuccessfully, we will pick up the third key and say *This must be the key*. No other choice remains.

(b) *I wonder why Tom hasn't answered my letter. ~ He may/might be ill.* (Perhaps he is ill. But there are other possibilities also: he may be away or too busy to answer.)

But imagine that Bill never has any visitors. If an ambulance stops at his door the neighbours will say *Bill must be ill*. This is the only possible explanation of the arrival of the ambulance.

(c) Similarly, when considering a past action:

He may have come by train. (Perhaps he came by train. But there are other possibilities: he might have come by taxi or bus.)

But *He must have come by taxi* implies that he had no choice. There was no other way of making this journey.

158 have/had used for deduction

This is an American usage which is sometimes heard in Britain.

have/had here is chiefly used with *to be*:

There's a tall grey bird fishing in the river. ~ It has to be/must be a heron.

had + *to be* can express the speaker's feeling of certainty in the past:

There was a knock on the door. It had to be Tom. (She was sure it was Tom.)

had + *to be* can also be an alternative to *must* + perfect infinitive:

I wonder who took the money. ~ It had to be Tom/It must have been Tom. He's the only one who was there.

But, to avoid confusion, the student is advised to stick to the must forms,

159 **can't and couldn't** used for negative deduction

- A Negative deductions about a present event can be expressed by **can't/couldn't** with the present infinitive of the verb **be** or with the continuous infinitive of any verb:

CHILD: Can I have some sweets? I'm hungry.

MOTHER: You can't/couldn't be hungry. You've just had dinner.

ANN (looking through binoculars): An aeroplane is pulling up people from the boat!

TOM: I can't/couldn't be an aeroplane. It must be a helicopter.

He says he's still reading 'The Turn of the Screw'. ~ He can't/couldn't still be reading it. I lent it to him ages ago and it's quite a short book.

- B Negative deductions about a past event are expressed by **can't/couldn't** + the perfect infinitive or continuous perfect infinitive of any verb:

A man answered the phone. I suppose it was her husband. ~ If can't/couldn't have been her husband. He's been dead for ages.

I took a Circle Line train to St Paul's. ~ You can't/couldn't have taken the Circle Line. It doesn't go through St Paul's. You must have been on the Central Line.

couldn't must be used when the deduction is made in the past or introduced by a verb in the past tense:

She said I couldn't have come on the Circle Line.

He said it couldn't be an aeroplane.

Otherwise either **can't** or **couldn't** can be used.

160 **will and should** for assumption

- A **will** used for assumptions about present or past actions

will here can be used with the present infinitive (for non-deliberate actions only) or with the continuous or perfect infinitive:

Ring his home number. He'll be at home now. (I'm sure he's at home.)

He'll be expecting a call from you. (I'm sure he's expecting a call.)

He'll have finished his supper. (I'm sure he has finished his supper.)

It's no use asking Tom: he won't know. (I'm sure he doesn't.)

Will Bill be at the club now, do you think? (Do you think he is?)

- B **should** used for assumptions about present or past actions

should here is used mainly with the present infinitive (for non-deliberate actions only) in the affirmative or negative. It is sometimes also possible with the continuous and perfect infinitives:

The plane should be landing now. (I expect it is landing.)

The letter should have arrived by now. (I expect it has arrived.)

Assumptions with **should** are less confident than assumptions with **will**:

Tom should know the address. (I expect Tom knows it.) But

Tom'll know the address. (I'm sure Tom knows it.)

He should have finished by now. (I expect he has finished.) But

He'll have finished by now. (I'm sure he has finished.)

should is not used for assumptions which displease the speaker:

*Let's not go shopping now. The shops will be very crowded. (**should** would not be used.)*

But for the opposite (agreeable) assumption, either word could be used:

Let's go shopping now. The shops will be/should be fairly empty or

The shops won't be/shouldn't be too crowded.

will and **should** can also express assumptions about the future:

He should/will have plenty of time to get to the station.

They shouldn't/won't have any difficulty in finding the house.

will + present infinitive used for assumptions about the future is not restricted to non-deliberate actions. (See also 209.)

ought to can be used in the same way as **should** in B and C above:

The plane ought to be/should be taking off in a minute.

But **should** is the more usual form.