



Learn English Through Stories

T Series

Upper - Intermediate

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Modal Verbs 2 by K S Sandhu

A Mysterious Exhibition

Emma and her friend Alex decided to visit the new contemporary art exhibition in the city centre. They had heard it was remarkable, full of innovative and sometimes puzzling works.

“Look at this one, Alex,” said Emma. “It must be a portrait of someone famous. The colours are so strong and emotional.”

Alex stepped closer. “I’m not sure. It could be a landscape. The shapes might represent mountains at sunset. Or it might not be anything real at all – it looks quite abstract.”

A young gallery guide joined them. “This piece is by a renowned British artist. Many visitors think it must have taken months to create.”

Emma smiled. “It’s intriguing. The artist might be trying to show how technology is changing our lives. These lines could be computer circuits.”

Alex laughed. “You’re probably right. It can’t be a simple picture. The artist should have explained it better in the description!”

They moved to the next room, which was full of avant-garde installations – strange objects made from metal and glass.

“What on earth is this?” asked Alex, pointing at a large silver sculpture. “It looks enigmatic. It might be a robot from the future.”

Emma thought for a moment. “It could be part of a jet engine, but I doubt it. It must be something related to communication. Look at all those wires! The artist may have wanted to show how connected we are through phones and the internet.”

The guide smiled. “Many people make the same speculation. Actually, the artist says it represents modern relationships. Some visitors think it must have been inspired by mobile phones.”

“Interesting,” said Alex. “In the past, people couldn’t contact each other so easily. Today we can call or message anyone. But sometimes I think we should have kept life simpler.”

Emma nodded. "True. Look at this smaller piece over there. It can't be a phone, it's too big. It might be an old computer from the 1980s. Or it could be a symbol of how quickly technology becomes outdated."

As they continued walking, they saw a video installation showing people staring at their screens.

"This one is quintessential of our time," said Emma. "We must be careful not to lose real conversations. We might feel more connected, but sometimes we feel more alone."

Alex checked his watch. "It's already six o'clock. The gallery should have closed ten minutes ago, but luckily it's open late tonight."

Emma replied, "We could stay a bit longer. There's one more room. The paintings there might be even more puzzling."

On the way out, Alex said, "I really enjoyed this. Art like this makes you think. Some pieces are so mysterious you can't be completely sure what they mean – and that's what makes them special."

Emma agreed. "Yes, and it reminds us how much technology has changed everything. We might not always notice it, but it has transformed our world in remarkable ways."

Questions:

question1: Who went to the contemporary art exhibition?

question2: What did Emma think the first painting must be?

question3: What did Alex think the painting could represent?

question4: What did the gallery guide say about the silver sculpture?

question5: What did Emma think the large silver sculpture might represent?

question6: Why did Alex say people should have kept life simpler?

question7: What did Emma say the smaller piece couldn't be?

question8: What time did Alex check on his watch?

question9: What did Emma and Alex think about modern technology after seeing the exhibition?

question10: What did Alex say makes the art pieces special?

Answers:

answer1: Emma and her friend Alex.

answer2: A portrait of someone famous.

answer3: Mountains at sunset or something abstract.

answer4: It represents modern relationships and was possibly inspired by mobile phones.

answer5: Something related to communication (with lots of wires).

answer6: Because today we can contact people so easily, but life feels less simple.

answer7: A phone (because it was too big).

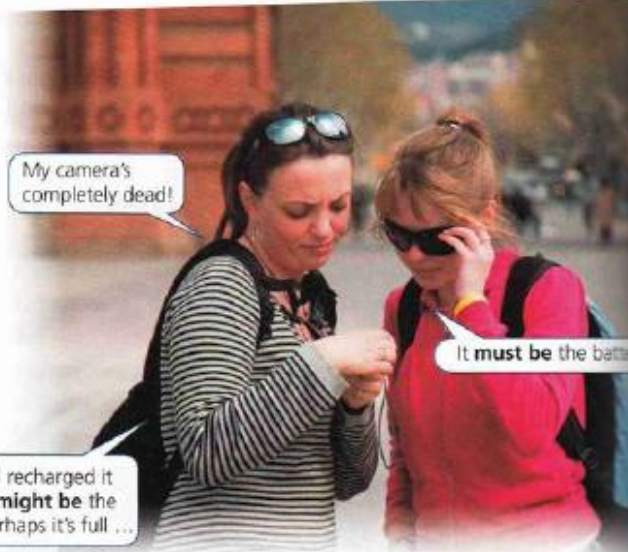
answer8: Six o'clock.

answer9: Technology has changed everything and we must be careful not to lose real conversations.

answer10: They are mysterious and you can't be completely sure what they mean.

47 Making a guess (1)

may, might, could, must, can't, should



My camera's completely dead!

It **can't** be that. I recharged it yesterday. But it **might** be the memory card. Perhaps it's full ...

It **must** be the battery.

1 Making a guess about a present situation

When we are completely certain about something, we don't use modal verbs:
*The camera **isn't** working because the battery **hasn't** been charged.*

But sometimes we make a guess. If we're certain our guess is correct, we use *must* or *can't*:
*'It **must** be the battery.'* *'It **can't** be that. I recharged it yesterday.'*
*Lucy's just bought a new car – she **must** be earning plenty of money.*
*'Is that Marina at the door?' 'It **can't** be her, she's on holiday.'*

⚠ With this meaning, the opposite of *must* is *can't*, NOT *mustn't*:
*I filled the petrol tank yesterday. ✗ It ~~mustn't~~ be empty. ✓ It **can't** be empty.*

🔊 Pronunciation ▶ 1.23

If we are less certain that our guess is correct we use *may (not)*, *might (not)* or *could*:
*It **might** be the memory card. Perhaps it's full ...*
*There **could** be life on other planets.*
*The manager **may** be in a meeting. I'll just check for you.*
*Steve **might not** be living at home any more – I heard he was looking for a flat to rent.*

⚠ We use *may not* or *might not* (not *could not*) if we are not sure about our guess:
✗ This small shop ~~could not~~ have batteries.
*✓ This small shop **might not** have batteries. (= Perhaps they don't have any batteries.)*
We don't often ask people to guess with *must*, *may* or *might*. We prefer to use *Could* or *Do you think?*:
Could it be the battery? Do you think Jerry's at home today?

2 Making a guess about the future

If we make a guess about the future, we use *may (not)*, *might (not)* or *could*, but NOT *couldn't*:
*If we wait for a few days, the prices **might** be cheaper.*
*I **could** get a part-time job next summer. The tickets **may not** arrive in time.*

⚠ *✗ The engineer ~~could not~~ be able to fix it. ✓ The engineer **might not** be able to fix it.*

3 Expectations

When we expect something to be true, or have a strong feeling our guess is correct, we use *should* or *shouldn't*:
*You can phone Henry at work. He **should** be in the office by now.*
*Don't take any food. There **should** be plenty to eat once you get there.*
*Allow half an hour to get through security at the airport – it **shouldn't** take longer than that.*

Practice

1 Do the sentences in each pair have the same (S) or different (D) meaning? Write S or D.

- 0 A Could she be an engineer?
B Do you think she's an engineer? 5
- 1 A Perhaps we will buy some new computers for the office.
B We may buy some new computers for the office.
- 2 A We are visiting our grandparents next weekend.
B We might visit our grandparents next weekend.
- 3 A She can't be his daughter.
B I'm sure she isn't his daughter.
- 4 A They might not get married in the spring.
B They won't get married in the spring.
- 5 A He must be very angry.
B Perhaps he's angry.
- 6 A She should be there on time.
B I think she'll be there on time.

2 GRAMMAR IN USE Read the conversation and choose the correct words in *italics>. In two places, both answers are possible. 3.29 Listen and check.*

- LUCAS This is a nice painting. Wow. Five thousand pounds!
It (0) *must* / *can* be by someone famous.
- JODIE Let me see ... er, it's by Darren Hudson. I've never heard of him.
- LUCAS He (1) *could* / *might* be one of those new Canadian artists.
- JODIE No, he (2) *mustn't* / *can't* be. All the artists in this exhibition are British.
- LUCAS Oh. Look at this one. What do you think it is?
- JODIE I don't know. It (3) *could* / *can* be a person. Yes. I think it's a woman.
- LUCAS I'm not so sure. It (4) *could* / *might* not be a person. I think it looks more like a tree.
- JODIE No, it (5) *mustn't* / *can't* be that. Look, you can see the eyes, just there.
- LUCAS Oh, yes, I hadn't noticed them.
- JODIE There's another one like it over there. (6) *May it be* / *Do you think it's* by the same artist?
- LUCAS It (7) *might* / *may* be. Let's have a look ... no, it's got a different name on it.
- JODIE Well, I don't like any of these paintings, anyway. Why don't we go to the Bloomsbury Gallery? There (8) *can* / *should* be lots of nice pictures there.
- LUCAS Yes, but it's already five o'clock. It (9) *might* / *could* not be open by the time we get there.
- JODIE I think it's open until 6.30. I think we (10) *must* / *could* get there in time.



3 Look at the photos and complete the sentences below with your own ideas.

- A 0 It could be *part of a jet engine*
- 1 It can't be
- 2 It might not be
- 3 It must be
- B 1 It can't be
- 2 It might be
- 3 It could be
- 4 It must be

A



B



Answers

UNIT 47

1 1 S 2 D 3 S 4 D 5 D 6 S

2 1 could/might 2 can't 3 could 4 might
5 can't 6 Do you think it's 7 might/may
8 should 9 might 10 could

3 Model answers

A1 *a car engine*

2 *part of a mobile phone*

3 *part of a computer*

B1 *a puzzle*

2 *an emergency alarm*

3 *the heating control*

4 *the TV control*