

## The scene of the crime: epistemic modal verbs to speculate about past events B2/C1

### Lesson 1

#### Before the lesson:

Copy the worksheets.

#### Stage 1 – 10 - 20 minutes: awareness raising and noticing and focus on form

1. Hand out the picture worksheet 1, one for each student, or project the document and get them to work individually to match the 5 numbered pictures to the sentences. Put the class in pairs to compare their responses. If you monitor carefully, you will know if they have them all right so there is no need to belabour feedback. The right answers are 1B, 2E, 3D, 4C, 5A.
2. Now get the class to look at the structure of the sentences and elicit the form to the board. If this is the first time they have encountered the structure, this may take a long time and have to be carefully and thoroughly explained. With other groups, this may just be a bit of revision.  
The essential structure is SUBJECT + MODAL VERB (*must, might, could*) + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE. It is very important that they have this and have a note of it to take away.

#### Stage 2 – 15 minutes: focus on meaning, pronunciation and stress

1. Look again at all the sentences with a focus on the modal. Only one sends the message that you are sure of what you say. Which is it? (E: *He must have been arrested*). All the others are **speculative**. Do not be tempted to try to distinguish between *could* and *might* – they mean the same.
2. This is a point where, should you wish to, you can insert some drilling of the weak form of *have* in the structures: /kə.dəv/, /'maɪ.tɪv/ or /'maɪ.təv/ /'mə.stɪv/ or /'mə.stəv/. Don't go on too long – there is the opportunity to insert some more pronunciation work later.
3. Now focus the class on stress and intonation and read the sentences aloud, stressing the modal with a rising tone or stressing main verb with a falling tone. Get the class to tell you which sounds like a 50-50 guess and which sounds much less sure. Like this:  
50-50: *He might have **lost** it / She might've got **caught** in the **rain** / He might've **hurt** his **head** / His car could've broken **down** / He must've been **arrested***  
vs.  
Less sure: *He **might** have lost / She **might've** got caught in the **rain** / He **might've** hurt his head / His car **could've** broken down / He **must've** been arrested*  
Notice: with the last sentence, stressing the modal actually makes you sound even surer. In other words, **stressing the modal makes the modal function stronger**.
4. Now see if anyone can tell you what the opposite of *He must've been arrested* is. The answer is *can't've* or *couldn't've* and they both mean the same.
5. Now you can drill the pronunciation again but this time focusing on the negative forms: /'ka:ntəv/, /kə.dntəv/ etc.
6. **IMPORTANT:** Now is the time to make the aspect of the verb forms quite clear. You may have taught your students that have + the past participle forms the present perfect and is therefore a present tense referring to a past, not a past tense. Good for you if you have. However, with these modal verbs, that is not the case. We are speculating here about **finished past events fixed in time**. It is not necessarily the perfect aspect of the verb. It may look like it but the function is different.

#### Stage 3 – 15 minutes: controlled production

1. Now hand out or project the second worksheet (pictures only) and get the class to work in pairs to come up with alternative explanations for each picture. **The task** is to come up with something unlikely but believable for each picture. For example, *She might've walked under a waterfall, He might've been a hat-god worshipper, He could've walked across the Sahara* etc. For one picture at least they must come up with a negative using *can't've* / *couldn't've* (for example, *He couldn't have been in a city*) and for one picture they must come up with an obvious idea for *must've* (for example, *She must've got her hair wet*).
2. When they have done that **and** made a note, they should change partners or mingle to compare their ideas. Monitor very carefully to check and intervene to correct form and pronunciation during this stage –

the content is not so important so you can just select some amusing or interesting ideas for general consumption at the end.

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**Stage 4 – 10 minutes**

1. This stage involves them in making deductions about each other that may or may not be true. Secretly, give each learner a slip of paper on which the names of two classmates are written. They take 5 minutes to come up with one speculation for each person concerning what *might have / must have / could have / can't have* happened in their lives.
  2. When they have done that, they mingle and say (not read) their ideas to each other and talk about which person it is. The trick is to see if they can recognise which sentence is about them.
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**Lesson Two:**

This lesson builds on the first but could stand alone purely as a practice lesson.

**Stage 1 – 10 minutes**

1. Project or pin up the graphic of the murder scene. Tell the class that it is a police photograph and get them to speculate, using present-tense modals about what it might be. For example, *It must be a murder scene, It might be a crime scene, It can't be a TV image (too graphic), That must be blood on the floor* etc.
  2. Now show them the plan of the shop and ask who drew it. Now they can speculate in the past. For example, *It might have been a journalist, I think it must have been a police officer but it could have been a forensic scientist* etc. The scene is of a robbery and murder in a jeweller's shop. The body of the jeweller lies behind the counter in a pool of blood. Other clues are as you see them. Make sure the class understand all the clues and have located them. You will probably have to teach some lexis here (and make sure they can pronounce it because they'll need it for the practice procedures).
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**Stage 2 – 20 minutes**

1. Show / hand out the dialogue of the two police officers discussing what they know and beginning to speculate about the crime and what happened.
  2. The task here is to continue the dialogue in pairs or groups of three (if you want to do this in threes, you may need to amend the dialogue, adding a third police officer). At this stage, your job is to monitor and intervene to correct form, meaning and pronunciation. The focus here is on speculating, not on being sure.
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**Stage 3 – 20 minutes**

1. Now re-form into groups or, if the class is small enough, do this as a whole-class activity. The students should act out their dialogues to other students in the class using the speculative modals in the past.
  2. When they have done that, do it again with a different audience. If time permits, do it a third time.
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**Stage 4 – 15-20 minutes**

1. Re-form the class in different pairs and get them to come up with a theory of what actually happened in the shop. To do this, add more pieces of information that:
    - a) the back door leads into a closed yard with high walls all around it. There is no way out.
    - b) the jeweller had recently started an affair with a married woman.
    - c) someone had seen the jeweller arguing on the street with a woman outside his shop in the morning.
    - d) the cash till contained over €500
    - e) the blood is not the jeweller's blood (wrong blood group)(The new facts are on the final handout.)
  2. The learners must now revise their theories to fit the facts and then (in small groups) compare their responses and try to persuade the others that they have the right theory.
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Worksheet 1

Match the pictures to the sentences:



A

He might've lost it



B

She might've got caught in the rain



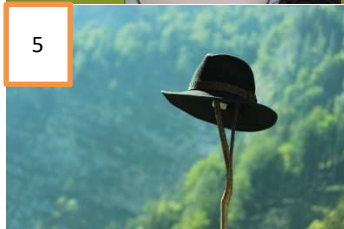
C

He might've hurt his head



D

His car could've broken down



E

He must've been arrested

Worksheet 2

# Alternatives:



1

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



2

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



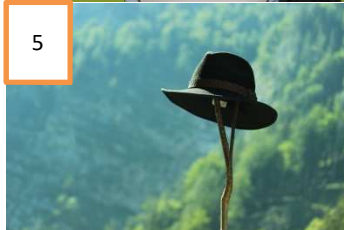
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- 1.
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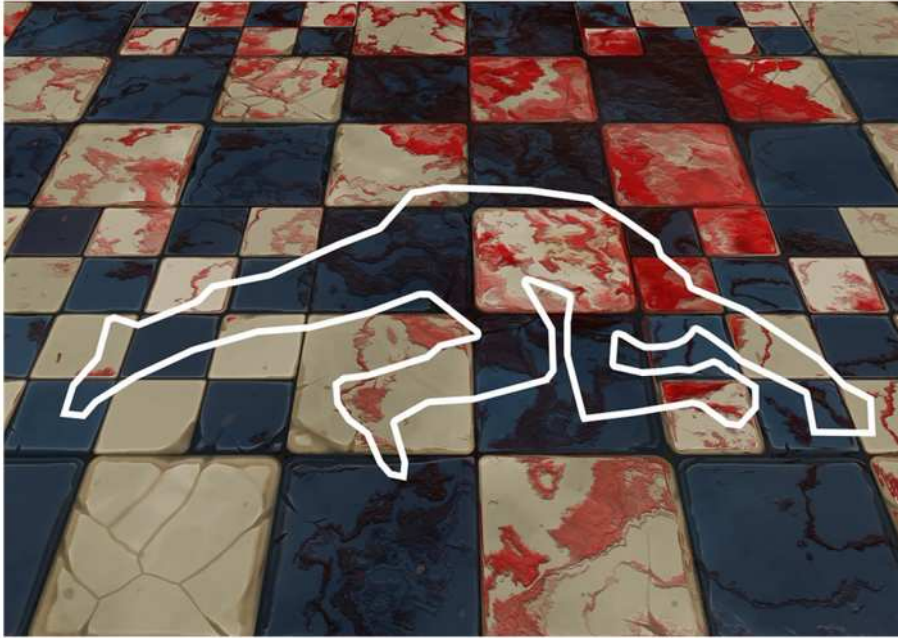
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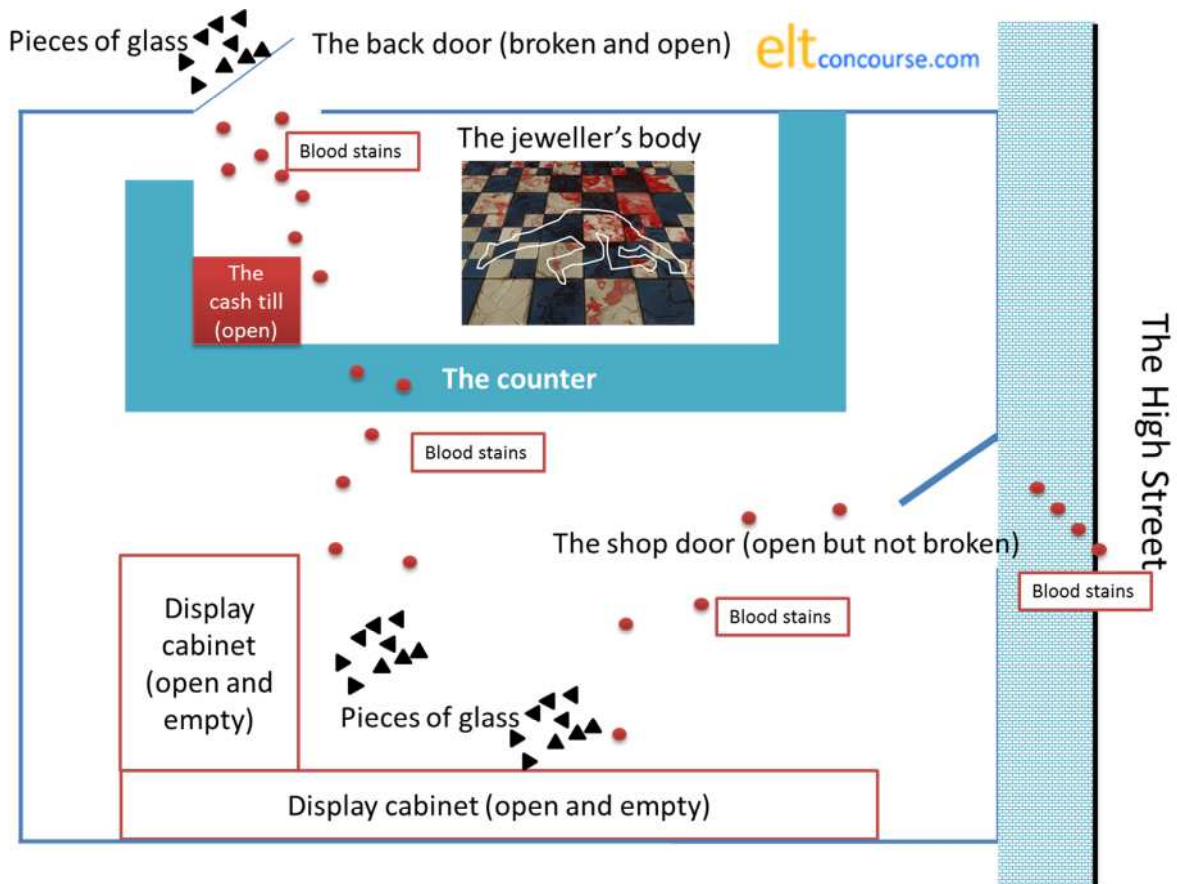
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- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

# The scene of the crime



# THE SCENE OF THE CRIME



## Dialogue:

Sergeant Holmes	OK. What do we have?
Police Constable Watson	Well, it looks clear to me. The attacker must have got in by breaking down the back door. There's glass everywhere. The jeweller must've discovered him and there was a fight. He must've stabbed the jeweller, broken into the cabinets and escaped through the front door.
Sergeant Holmes	I'm not so sure. The broken glass on the outside is a puzzle and the bloodstains on the counter are strange. Let's think what might've happened ...
Police Constable Watson	Well, I suppose the robber might have ...

New facts:

- a) the back door leads into a closed yard with high walls all around it. There is no way out.
- b) the jeweller had recently started an affair with a married woman.
- c) someone had seen the jeweller arguing on the street with a woman outside his shop in the morning.
- d) the cash till contained over €500
- e) the blood is not the jeweller's blood (wrong blood group)