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Basics. Past Modals of Deduction

Medium | B1 | Intermediate | Auxiliary verb | Modal verb | Negation | Participle | Past tense | Verb | Perfect tense

1. Read the local sheriff's report about a strange light in the sky and choose the most logical deductions.

Old Man Jenkins claims he saw an alien spaceship, but he didn't have his glasses on, so he _____ easily mistaken a weather balloon for a UFO. Furthermore, the "crop circle" in his field has deep tractor tire tracks right through the middle, so extraterrestrials _____ created it!

Choose the correct option for each gap.

Blank 1

- **A)** could have
- **B)** must have
- **C)** can't have

Blank 2

- **A)** can't have
- **B)** must have
- **C)** might have

2. Help the amateur detective piece together the mystery of the missing chocolate cake. Choose the correct modal verb for each gap to complete her notes.

I left the cake on the counter, and now it's completely gone! Someone _____ taken it while I was outside watering the plants.

It _____ been my little brother, because he is currently at a summer camp in another state.

The dog _____ eaten it, but he looks completely innocent right now, and there's no frosting on his nose.

Choose the correct option for each gap.

Blank 1

- **A)** must have
- **B)** can't have
- **C)** should have

Blank 2

- **A)** couldn't have
- **B)** must have
- **C)** ought to have

Blank 3

- **A)** might have
- **B)** can't have
- **C)** would have

3. Help the amateur detective solve the Great Pizza Mystery by choosing the correct deduction.

Liam _____ the last slice of pizza because he was visiting his grandmother in another city all weekend!

Select one.

- **A)** must have eaten
- **B)** can't have eaten
- **C)** might have eaten
- **D)** shouldn't have eaten

4. Help the amateur detective solve the mystery of the missing chocolate cake by choosing the best deductions.

The kitchen window was locked from the inside, so the thief _____ entered through the garden. However, there are large, muddy paw prints on the counter, so Buster the dog _____ eaten the entire dessert!

Choose the correct option for each gap.

Blank 1

A) can't have
B) must have
C) should have

Blank 2

A) must have
B) can't have
C) would have

5. Help the forgetful professor retrace his steps by picking the most logical phrase.

I suppose I _____ my glasses in the staff room, but let me check my coat pockets just in case.

Select one.

A) must have left
B) might have left
C) can't have left
D) would have left

6. Help the hungry office worker brainstorm what happened to their missing turkey sandwich. Select ALL the sentences that correctly express a *possibility* (but not a certainty) about the past.

Select all that apply.

A) The new guy might have eaten it.
B) The new guy could have eaten it.
C) The new guy may have eaten it.
D) The new guy must have eaten it.
E) The new guy should have eaten it.

7. Read the texts between two confused friends at an empty concert venue. Choose the appropriate modal expression for each gap to complete their conversation.

Friend A: Where is everyone? The stage is completely empty. The band _____ their set early and gone home!

Friend B: They _____ yet. The tickets say the show starts at 9:00 PM, and it's only 8:30 PM right now!

Friend A: Oh no... do you think we _____ to the wrong venue?

Friend B: Let me check the ticket. Oh, oops. The concert is tomorrow.

Choose the correct option for each gap.

Blank 1

A) must have finished
B) can't have finished
C) should have finished

Blank 2

A) couldn't have played
B) must have played
C) ought to have played

Blank 3

A) might have come
B) can't have come
C) would have come

8. Review the referee's notes on a highly suspicious pet race. Select ALL the options that correctly complete the sentence to express that the turtle winning the 100-meter dash is a logical *impossibility*.

That tiny turtle _____ the race in under ten seconds!

Select all that apply.

A) couldn't have won
B) can't have won
C) shouldn't have won
D) might not have won

9. Complete the archaeologist's notes about a bizarre and highly unscientific discovery in an ancient Egyptian tomb.

We found a modern digital watch resting next to the mummy. The ancient Egyptians _____ invented this technology! Professor Jones was the only person in the tomb yesterday, so he _____ dropped it while taking photographs.

Choose the correct option for each gap.

Blank 1

A) couldn't have
B) must have
C) ought to have

Blank 2

A) must have
B) can't have
C) wouldn't have

10. Complete the traveler's confused diary entry about a strange photo from their vacation. Choose the correct past modal phrase for each blank.

I just found a picture of myself wearing a giant, neon sombrero in Madrid. I _____ it at that street market, because I definitely didn't pack one in my suitcase!

However, I _____ a lot of money for it, because I still had almost all my cash the next morning.

My friends _____ me to wear it as a joke, but honestly, my memory of that evening is a bit fuzzy!

Choose the correct option for each gap.

Blank 1

A) must have bought
B) can't have bought
C) should have bought

Blank 2

A) can't have paid
B) must have paid
C) would have paid

Blank 3

A) might have dared
B) must have dared
C) couldn't have dared

11. Help Inspector Clouseau eliminate impossible theories about the locked-room mystery. Select ALL the options that correctly complete the sentence to express that escaping through the window was *impossible*.

The window was painted shut from the inside, so the thief _____ through it!

Select all that apply.

A) couldn't have escaped
B) can't have escaped
C) mustn't have escaped
D) had not to escape

12. Help Sarah figure out what happened in her apartment while she was at work by selecting the correct logical conclusions.

My roommate's winter coat and car keys are still on the table, so she _____ left for her weekend trip yet. However, the television screen is warm. She _____ turned it on this morning, or maybe it was just my cat sleeping on top of it again.

Choose the correct option for each gap.

Blank 1

- **A)** can't have
- **B)** must have
- **C)** might have

Blank 2

- **A)** might have
- **B)** can't have
- **C)** should have

13. Play detective and deduce why the family dog walked into the house completely drenched. Select ALL the sentences that use grammatically valid past modals of deduction to explain this mystery.

Select all that apply.

- **A)** He must have jumped into the neighbor's pool.
- **B)** He might have chased a frog into the pond.
- **C)** He can have turned on the garden hose.
- **D)** He must has taken a bath by himself.

14. Finish the terrified babysitter's text message to her best friend.

The front door is locked from the inside, so the pizza delivery guy _____ the one making those spooky noises upstairs!

Select one.

- **A)** ought to have been
- **B)** must have been
- **C)** might be
- **D)** couldn't have been

15. Complete the dog owner's realization as she looks at her very messy pet.

Look at Buster's muddy paws! He _____ through the neighbor's prize-winning petunia bed again.

Select one.

- **A)** can't have dug
- **B)** should have dug
- **C)** must have dug
- **D)** might dig