

48 Making a guess (2)

must, might, could, should + have

Everything's pink! You **must have put** something red in the machine.

No, I **can't have**. I always wash whites separately. Oh, I **might have put** John's red socks in with the sheets by mistake ...



1 Past forms

The perfect form of modal verbs is modal verb + *have* + past participle:

POSITIVE	<i>I might have (might've*) seen him. You should have (should've) been there. She must have (must've) done it.</i>
NEGATIVE	<i>I cannot (can't) have lost it. He might not (mightn't) have stopped. We could not (couldn't) have known.*</i>
QUESTIONS	<i>Could you have known? (No, I couldn't (have).) Should they have left? (Yes, they should (have).) What could she have done? Where should we have gone?</i>

* In spoken English we sometimes use short forms, e.g. *should've, shouldn't've, mightn't've*, etc.

Pronunciation ► 1.24

There is also a continuous form, modal verb + *have + been + -ing*:

He must have been driving too fast. They couldn't have been watching us.

2 Making a guess about a past situation

If we're certain that our guess is correct we use *must, can't* or *couldn't* + *have* + past participle:

Everything's pink! You must have put something red in the machine.

I can't have. I always wash whites separately.


Lester couldn't have been driving the car – he doesn't even own a car!

If we are less certain, we use *may (not), might (not)* or *could* + *have* + past participle:

'Where are the keys?' 'I don't know; I may have left them in the car.'

'Why isn't Ali here yet?' 'I don't know. Could he have forgotten the date?'

'Why haven't they phoned me back?' 'They might not have been getting their messages.'

 We use *mightn't have* + past participle, NOT *couldn't have* + past participle, if we are not certain:

I'm not sure; ✓ I mightn't have passed the exam. (= It's possible that I haven't passed it.)

✗ I couldn't have passed the exam.

3 Expectations about the past

We can talk about things we expected to happen in the past with *should + have* + past participle:

Check the post. That letter should have arrived by now.

You'd better phone the hospital. They should have had the test results this morning.

We can also use this form for an action that was planned but didn't happen:

We should have had our exam results last week, but they haven't arrived yet.

I should have gone swimming last Friday but the pool was closed for repairs.

Note that *was/were meant to* or *was/were supposed to* have a similar meaning:

The plane was meant to leave at six but there was a mechanical problem.

I was supposed to send her my email address but I forgot.

should have for criticism and regrets about the past ► Unit 51.3 *was going to* ► Unit 45.1