

B2 - Modal verbs of deduction and speculation

NASA Takes UAPs Seriously

Read the first paragraph and predict what happened next.

It was just a normal day's flying for Alex Dietrich – until it wasn't. Streaking through the sky over the tranquil expanse of the Pacific Ocean, the US Navy lieutenant commander was taking her fighter jet on a training mission with a colleague in another plane. Then came a voice through the crackle of the radio.

What do you think they heard on the radio?

They can't have heard...

They may have heard...

They must have heard...

Check the
answer!



joannaesi

Read the second paragraph and check your answers. Predict what happened next.

It was an operations officer aboard the warship USS Princeton, asking them to investigate a suspicious object flitting around: on several occasions, it had been spotted 80,000ft (24.2km) high, before suddenly dropping close to the sea and apparently vanishing.

What do you think the object was?

It can't have been...

It may have been...

It must have been...

Check the
answer!



joannaesi

Read the third paragraph and check your answers. Predict what happened next.

When the two jets arrived at its last known location, close to the ocean's surface, the water seemed almost to be boiling. Moments later Dietrich saw it: what seemed to be a whitish, oblong object around 40ft (12m) long, hovering just above the water, which she described as resembling a Tic Tac. As they edged in closer, it was gone, accelerating off into the sky at what seemed an impossible speed.

What do you think the jet pilots saw?

She can't have seen...

She may have seen...

She must have seen...

Watch the video and decide for yourself!

It can't have been...
It may have been...
It must have been...



[YouTube](#)

Grammar: modal verbs of deduction and speculation (past)

must have + past participle

We use must have + past participle to talk about something that we were sure was true in the past.

**They must have seen a UAP.
It must have come from
space.**

may / might / could have + past participle

We use may / might / could have + past participle to talk about something that we thought was possible in the past.

**They might have seen a
plane.
It may have been a drone.**

can't / couldn't have + past participle

We use can't / couldn't have + past participle to talk about something that we were sure wasn't true in the past.

**They can't have seen a
balloon.
It couldn't have been a bird.**

Look at the photos of mysterious objects/creatures captured on camera. Speculate what they might have seen.

Reddit

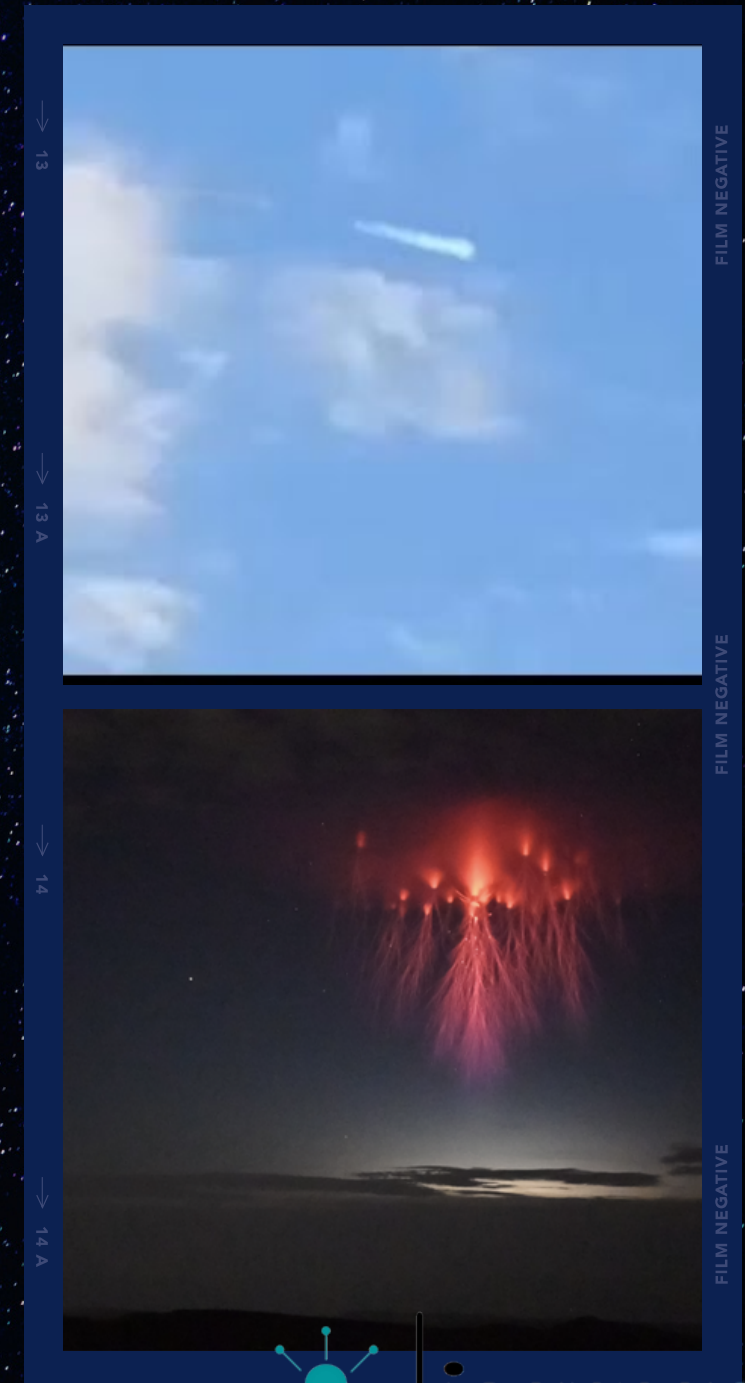
Facebook



They must have seen...because...
It must have been...because...
It can't / couldn't have been...because
It may / might / could have been...because...

YouTube

EarthSky



Read a possible conversation between the jet pilot and the operations officer below.

Operations officer: Can you investigate a suspicious flying object? It was spotted 80,000ft high before it suddenly dropped close to the sea and vanished. It may be a foreign jet.

Jet pilot: We are already here. It can't be a foreign jet. It's a whitish oblong object around 40ft long. It is hovering just above the water.

Operations officer: What is it then? Might it be a drone or a weather balloon?

Jet pilot: It can't be. It has just accelerated off into the sky at an impossible speed. It must be a UAP!

Look at the underlined phrases. How are they different from the modal verbs of deduction and speculation of the past?



Grammar: modal verbs of deduction and speculation (present)

must + infinitive

We use must + infinitive to talk about something that we are sure is true in the present.

It must be a UAP!

may / might / could + infinitive

We use may / might / could + infinitive to talk about something that we think is possible in the present.

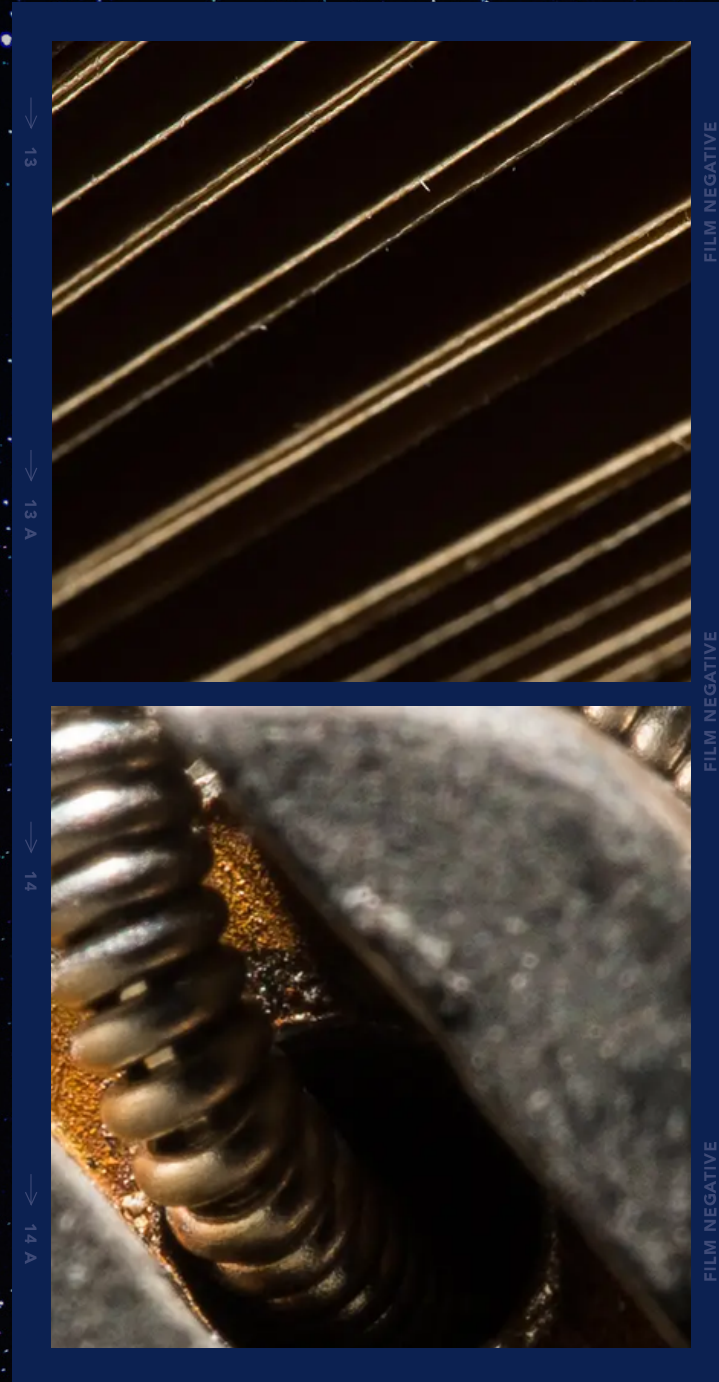
**It might be a foreign jet.
Might it be a drone?**

can't + infinitive

We use can't + infinitive to talk about something that we are sure isn't true in the past.

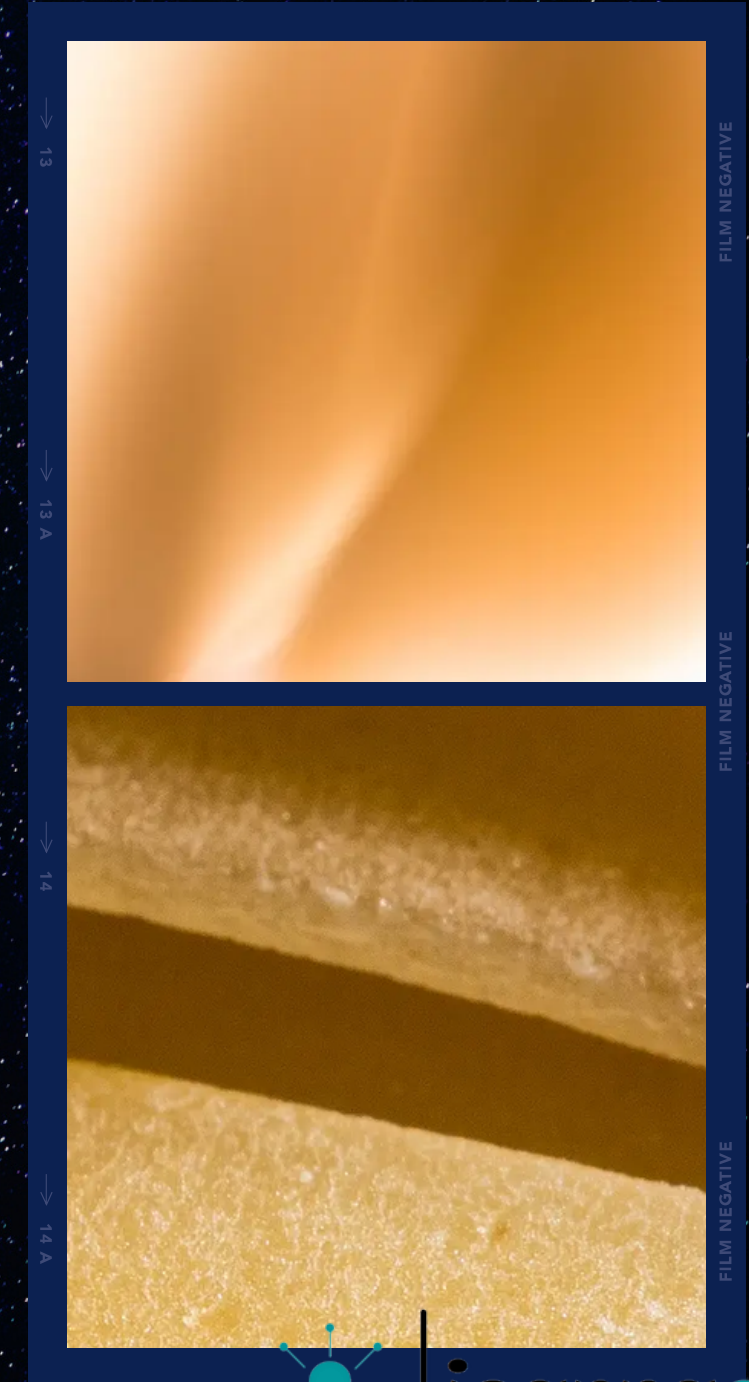
**It can't be a foreign jet.
It can't be a drone.**

Speculate what objects you think you can see.



Insider

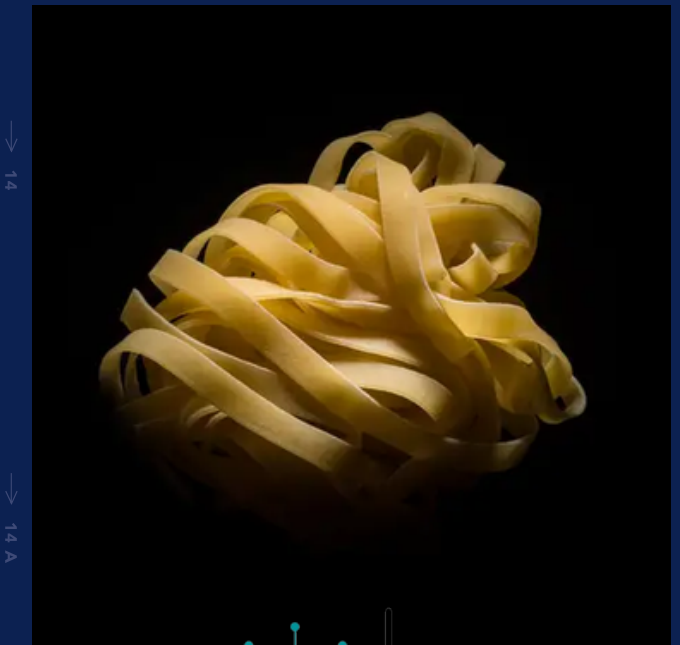
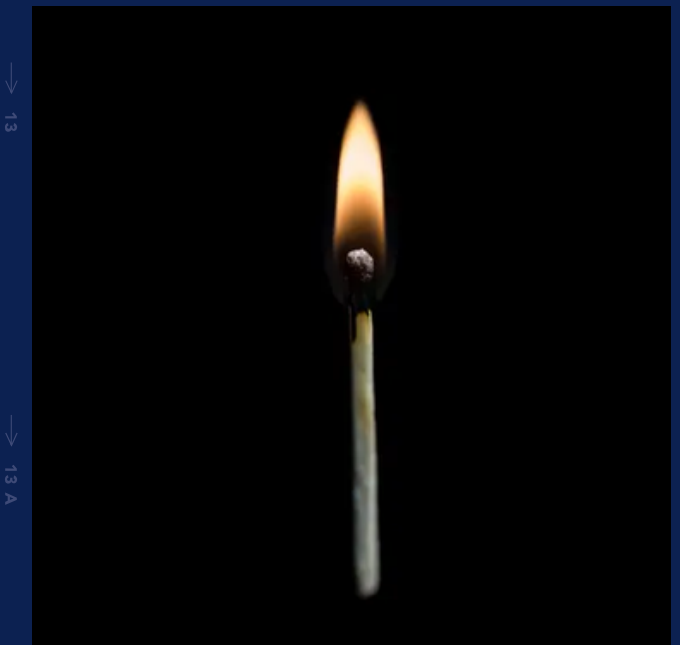
It must be...because...
It can't be...because...
It may / might / could be...because...



Check the answers. Were you correct?



It must be...because...
It can't be...because
It may / might / could be...because...



Read seven situations and complete the following sentences using present and past modal verbs of deduction and speculation.

1. She missed her morning bus and still hasn't arrived to work.

She _____ (be) running late for the meeting.

2. It is his birthday next week.

His friends _____ (be) planning a surprise party for him.

3. They were playing very well yesterday, but they lost.

The team _____ (win) the match if they had scored the penalty.

4. He was feeling a bit sick yesterday.

He _____ (be) at work today.

5. He is always on time!

He _____ (miss) the bus this morning.

6. She usually replies to messages right away.

She _____ (be) busy with work today.

7. Look at the clouds!

It _____ (rain) later in the afternoon!

Discuss

1. Why might there be more UAPs sightings now in comparison with the past?
2. Do you think all of the mysterious flying objects come from outer space?
3. Why do some people fake pictures of UAPs?
4. Do you think the government has been in touch with the aliens? Why (not)?
5. Why are people so fascinated with aliens and UAPs? Are you one of them? Why (not)?
6. Why do you think the name UFO (unidentified flying object) was changed to UAP (unexplained aerial phenomenon)?

