

Degrees of Certainty

	Past		Present		Future	
Certainty	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
100 %	Was	Wasn't	Is	Isn't	Will	Will not, won't
99%		Couldn't have, Can't have		Couldn't, Can't		Cannot, Can't
95%	Must have	Must not have	Must	Must not		
90%					Should, Ought to	Could not
50% or less	May have, Might have, Could have	May not have, Might not have	May, Might, Could	May not, Might not	May, Might, Could	May not, Might not

NOTE: *Should* and *Ought to* are used to express degrees of certainty in the future only! Expressions like *should have been* or *ought to have arrived* express an expectation of something that did not happen. They do not express a degree of certainty.

EXPRESSING CERTAINTY

Directions: Work with a partner. Read each conversation and consider the information in parentheses. Then complete the conversation with a belief modal that expresses the appropriate degree of certainty.

1. Part A: What's wrong with Alicia? She's been looking strange ever since the class ended.
 Part B: She _____ be depressed. (I don't think she did very well on the test.)
 Part C: She _____ be depressed. (I saw her exam. She got a very low grade.)
2. Part A: Are the clothes in the dryer ready yet?
 Part B: They _____ be dry now. (They usually take 45 minutes to dry, and

it's been almost 40 minutes since we put them in.)

Part C: They _____ be dry now. (They usually take 45 minutes to dry, and they've been in the dryer for almost an hour.)

3. Part A: Do you think they've finished repairing your car by now?

Part B: It _____ be ready now. (It's 2:00 P.M., and they said it'd be ready at noon.)

Part C: It's noon. It _____ be ready. (They said they would probably finish by noon.)

4. Part A: Whose black coat is this? Someone forgot to take it after the party.

Part B: It _____ be Dante's. (I saw him wearing a black coat when he arrived.)

Part C: It _____ be Dante's. (He wears a lot of black.)

5. Part A: (The phone rings at 10:30 P.M.) Who could be calling so late?

Part B: It _____ be Chris. (She looked very worried today and said she wanted to talk to me sometime.)

Part C: It _____ be Chris. (She said she was going to call after ten o'clock.)