

Modals of probability and possibility

In the present

Question: Is he a teacher? or Might he be a teacher? or Could he be a teacher?

ANSWER: (How certain are you?)

	TRUE	FALSE
100% CERTAIN	He is a teacher.	He isn't a teacher.
90% CERTAIN	He must be a teacher.	He must not be a teacher.
50% CERTAIN	He may be a teacher.	He may not be a teacher.
LESS THAN 50% CERTAIN	He might be a teacher.	He might not be a teacher.
LESS THAN 50% CERTAIN	He could be a teacher.	*He couldn't be a teacher. *He can't be a teacher.

* He couldn't be a teacher. = **90% certain he is NOT a teacher**

* He can't be a teacher. = **90% certain he is NOT a teacher**

In the past

Question: Was he a teacher? or Might he have been a teacher? or Could he have been a teacher?

ANSWER: (How certain are you?)

	TRUE	FALSE
100% CERTAIN	He was a teacher.	He wasn't a teacher.
90% CERTAIN	He must have been a teacher.	He must not have been a teacher.
50% CERTAIN	He may have been a teacher.	He may not have been a teacher.
LESS THAN 50% CERTAIN	He might have been a teacher.	He might not have been a teacher.
LESS THAN 50% CERTAIN	He could have been a teacher.	*He couldn't have been a teacher. *He can't have been a teacher.

* He couldn't have been a teacher. = **90% certain he is NOT a teacher**

* He can't have been a teacher. = **90% certain he is NOT a teacher**

In the present progressive

Question: Is he teaching? or Might he be teaching? or Could he be teaching?

ANSWER: (How certain are you?)

	TRUE	FALSE
100% CERTAIN	He is teaching.	He isn't teaching.
90% CERTAIN	He must be teaching.	He must not be teaching.
50% CERTAIN	He may be teaching.	He may not be teaching.
LESS THAN 50% CERTAIN	He might be teaching.	He might not be teaching.
LESS THAN 50% CERTAIN	He could be teaching.	*He couldn't be teaching. *He can't be teaching.

* He couldn't be teaching. = **90% certain he is NOT teaching**

* He can't be teaching. = **90% certain he is NOT teaching**

In the past progressive

Question: Was he teaching? or Might he have been teaching? or Could he have been teaching?

ANSWER: (How certain are you?)

	TRUE	FALSE
100% CERTAIN	He was teaching.	He wasn't teaching.
90% CERTAIN	He must have been teaching.	He must not have been teaching.
50% CERTAIN	He may have been teaching.	He may not have been teaching.
LESS THAN 50% CERTAIN	He might have been teaching.	He might not have been teaching.
LESS THAN 50% CERTAIN	He could have been teaching.	*He couldn't have been teaching. *He can't have been teaching.

* He couldn't have been teaching. = **90% certain he is was NOT teaching**

* He can't have been teaching. = **90% certain he was NOT teaching**

In the future

Question: Will he teach? or Might he teach? or Could he teach?

ANSWER: (How certain are you?)

	TRUE	FALSE
100% CERTAIN	He will teach.	He won't teach.
90% CERTAIN	He must teach. He will probably teach.	He must not teach. He probably won't teach.
50% CERTAIN	He may teach.	He may not teach.
LESS THAN 50% CERTAIN	He might teach.	He might not teach.
LESS THAN 50% CERTAIN	He could not teach.	He couldn't teach. He can't teach.