



CLICKBAIT & FAKE NEWS

SPEAKING

LESSON A2-B1

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Read the three headlines below. Two of them are real news stories, and one is completely fake.
Discuss the headlines and decide which one is the lie. Use the Useful Language box.

"It must be real because..."
"It might / could / may be true, but..."
"It can't be true because..."

A new app can wash
your dishes through
smartphone vibrations.

A man bought a private
island for \$100 by
accident.

Scientists taught
spinach to send emails.





Read the three headlines below. Two of them are real news stories, and one is completely fake.
Discuss the headlines and decide which one is the lie. Use the Useful Language box.

FALSE

A new app can wash your dishes through smartphone vibrations.

TRUE

A man bought a private island for \$100 by accident.

A man wanted to buy a small piece of land at an online auction. By mistake, he bought a private island for only \$100. At first, he was very surprised. Later, he learned more about the island and decided to keep it.

TRUE

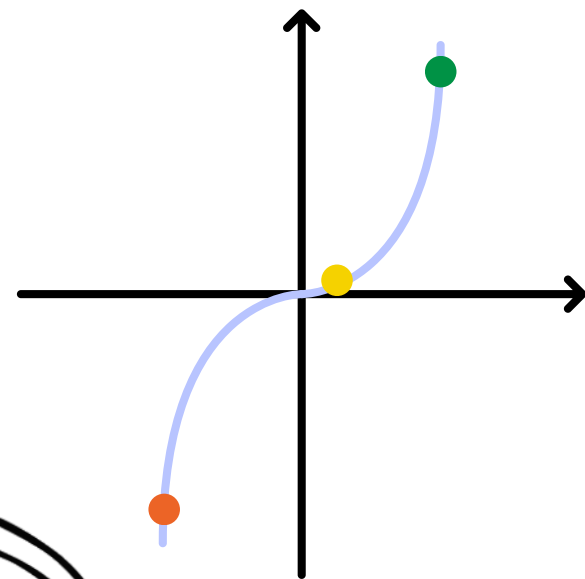
Scientists taught spinach to send emails.

Scientists put very small sensors inside spinach leaves. The spinach can find dangerous chemicals in the ground or water. When the plant finds these chemicals, the sensors notice a small change inside the plant. They send this information to a computer. Then the computer sends an email to the scientists. This helps people find pollution faster and protect nature.



MODAL VERBS OF SPECULATION

The Scale of Certainty



MUST = "I'M SURE IT IS TRUE"

Subject + must + Verb
(infinitive)

Use when you have strong logical evidence.

- He has a luxury office and expensive shoes. He must be rich.
- The street is wet. It must be raining.

MIGHT / MAY / COULD = "MAYBE"

Subject + might / may /
could + Verb (infinitive)

Use when you are guessing or expressing a possibility.

- Don't click that link! It might be a virus.
- The sky is dark. It could rain later.
- She isn't answering. She may be busy.

CAN'T = "I'M SURE IT IS IMPOSSIBLE"

Subject + can't + Verb
(infinitive)

Use when you have evidence that something is completely false.

- A dog talking like a human? That can't be real!
- He just woke up. He can't be tired already.





Read the article about clickbait. As you read, highlight or underline all the modal verbs of speculation.

We see them every day on our screens: "You won't believe what this 90s actor looks like now!" or "The one simple fruit that melts fat instantly!" These are clickbaits — sensational, exaggerated headlines designed to make us click on a link. You might think that clickbait is a modern internet invention, but it isn't. In the 1890s, famous American newspapers fought for readers by using giant, scary headlines about wars that never happened, or monsters in the city. Back then, people called it "Yellow Journalism." Today, the technology is different, but the goal is the same. To a modern media company, more clicks mean more money from ads. So, for them, writing boring headlines can't be an option. But why do we still fall for these tricks? Psychologists say it must be connected to how our brains work. Humans hate not knowing things. When a headline tells us only half of a story, it creates a "curiosity gap." Our brain feels uncomfortable, and we think: "I might miss some vital information if I don't click."

Furthermore, modern social media networks make the problem worse. Computer algorithms are programmed to show people posts that get a lot of reactions. A regular, balanced news article may get ignored, but a shocking headline could go viral in a few minutes. However, we should be extremely careful. Clicking on these links can't give us high-quality news. In fact, it might be dangerous. Some clickbait links could contain viruses, or they may try to steal your personal passwords. So, next time you see a headline that sounds too dramatic, stop for a second. It must be a trap, and you could be the next fish on their hook!





Answer the questions.

What was "Yellow Journalism" in the 1890s, and how is it similar to modern clickbait?

If a headline looks too amazing or shocking, why must we be careful? What could happen if we click on it?

According to psychologists, what is the "curiosity gap" and how does it make us click on links?

How may fake news and clickbait change the way people read the news in the future? Will we stop trusting the internet completely?

How do you think social media algorithms decide which posts to show you first?

Imagine you are a journalist. Why might it be difficult to write honest, balanced news in today's world?



Fill in the gaps with the correct modal verb of speculation.
Discuss the comments about media literacy and news habits.

 @nikky666



 Share

If you read a shocking story on a random blog and no other big news channel is reporting it, it _____ be true. They _____ be the only ones with this information. It _____ be a complete fake.

What do you do first when you see a shocking headline?

 @nyaddicted



 Share

My friend is offline all the time and never checks the news. She _____ feel very peaceful because she doesn't see any bad news. On the other hand, she _____ miss some really important updates about her city. She _____ know what is happening in the world at all!

Do you think a "digital detox" could make people happier?

 @alex_kvz



 Share

This article has perfect grammar, but the writing style feels very cold and repetitive. It _____ be written by a human — it _____ be the work of an AI generator. But we are not 100% sure; it _____ just be written by a very tired journalist.

Do you think AI could replace human journalists completely?

 @fshn_monster



 Share

Your younger brother clicks on every 'free prize' link on Telegram. He _____ understand how internet scams work. He _____ lose his account, or he _____ download a virus on his phone if he keeps doing this.

How can/could we teach children and older people to protect themselves from online scams and fake news?



Fill in the gaps with the correct modal verb of speculation.
Discuss the comments about media literacy and news habits.

 @nikky666



 Share

If you read a shocking story on a random blog and no other big news channel is reporting it, it **can't** be true. They **can't** be the only ones with this information. It **must** be a complete fake.

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 @alex_kvz



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This article has perfect grammar, but the writing style feels very cold and repetitive. It **can't** be written by a human — it **must** be the work of an AI generator. But we are not 100% sure; it **might/could** just be written by a very tired journalist.

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Your younger brother clicks on every 'free prize' link on Telegram. He **can't** understand how internet scams work. He **might/could** lose his account, or he **might/could** download a virus on his phone if he keeps doing this.

How can/could we teach children and older people to protect themselves from online scams and fake news?

Complete the sentence using your own ideas about fake news, social media, and the internet.



If a news article has no author's
name, it might...

Complete the sentence using your own ideas about fake news, social media, and the internet.



When an influencer shows a perfect
life in every photo, they must...

Complete the sentence using your own ideas about fake news, social media, and the internet.



A headline that promises you can
make \$10,000 in one hour can't...

Complete the sentence using your own ideas about fake news, social media, and the internet.



If my parents send me a shocking rumor on Viber or WhatsApp, it could...

Complete the sentence using your own ideas about fake news, social media, and the internet.



In 50 years, traditional TV news
portals may...

Complete the sentence using your own ideas about fake news, social media, and the internet.



People who share clickbait articles
without reading them must...



You work for a popular online magazine.
You have three boring, honest stories, but your boss demands sensational "clickbait" headlines to get more views.

Local library gets 50 new books.



Scientists have discovered that eating
broccoli helps improve memory.



A teenager spent 3 hours playing a
video game on his phone.



A student fell asleep during an
online English lesson.



Every new clickbait headline you create
must include **a modal verb of speculation.**





Match the beginning of each sentence with the most logical ending.
Explain why these endings are logical, using the modal verbs in the sentences.

If you spend five hours scrolling TikTok before sleep...

—

A. he can't have much free time for real-life friends.

When a stranger on social media suddenly asks you for financial help or a quick loan...

—

B. you might feel extremely tired and anxious the next morning.

If a person posts 50 selfies on Instagram every single day...

—

C. it must be a low-quality clickbait platform that only cares about money.

If you read a shocking news update but cannot find any other source online...

—

D. it could be collecting your personal data for advertising purposes.

When a social media app asks for permission to access your microphone and contacts...

—

E. it must be a rumor or a fake story created to get quick clicks.

When a news website has thousands of colorful pop-up ads...

—

F. it can't be a safe situation; they might be using a hacked profile.



Match the beginning of each sentence with the most logical ending.
Explain why these endings are logical, using the modal verbs in the sentences.

If you spend five hours scrolling TikTok before sleep...

B

A. he can't have much free time for real-life friends.

When a stranger on social media suddenly asks you for financial help or a quick loan...

F

B. you might feel extremely tired and anxious the next morning.

If a person posts 50 selfies on Instagram every single day...

A

C. it must be a low-quality clickbait platform that only cares about money.

If you read a shocking news update but cannot find any other source online...

E

D. it could be collecting your personal data for advertising purposes.

When a social media app asks for permission to access your microphone and contacts...

D

E. it must be a rumor or a fake story created to get quick clicks.

When a news website has thousands of colorful pop-up ads...

C

F. it can't be a safe situation; they might be using a hacked profile.



Answer the questions. Explain your opinion in 2-3 sentences.

1

Why do you think some people still click on headlines like "You won't believe what this actor looks like now!" even though they must know it is a waste of time?

2

How could the rise of realistic AI video face-swaps (deepfakes) change the way we watch the evening news? Will we be able to trust anything at all?

3

Why might older generations (like our parents or grandparents) be more vulnerable to fake news on messengers? What must we do to help them?

4

If we only follow people who have the same opinions as us on social media, how might this affect our ability to think critically?

5

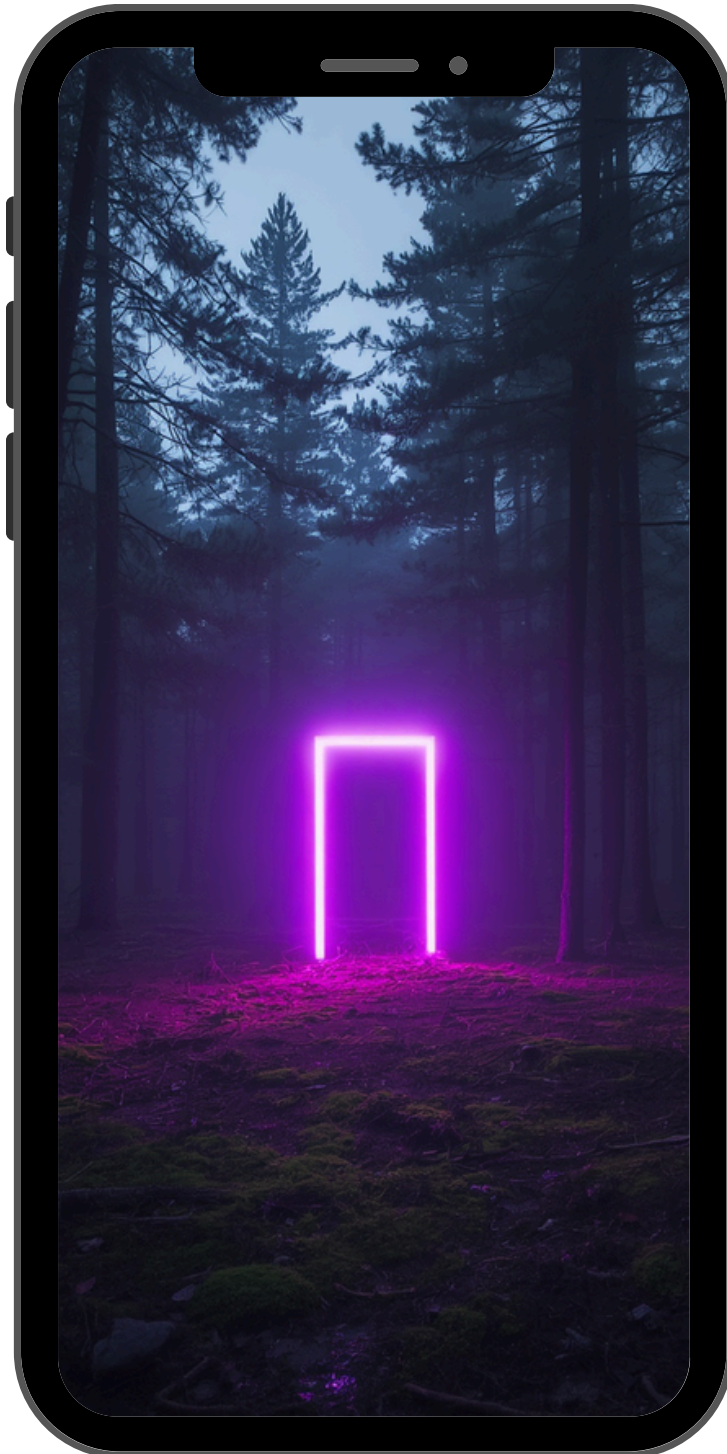
Who must be punished for spreading fake news: the person who wrote the article, the social media platform that hosted it, or the user who shared it without checking?

6

Imagine a world with zero fake news. How could daily life be different? Do you think a world like this can't exist because humans naturally love gossip?



Look at the description and imagine this picture. What is the most logical explanation for this glowing door?
Choose one of the theories below and defend it to your partner using must, might, could, or can't.



A hiker in Europe just found a glowing portal in the woods. Scientists can't explain how it got there. It might lead to a parallel universe!

————— ” —————



- Theory A: It's just a clever graphic designer who edited a normal forest photo to get likes.
- Theory B: A local artist put a battery-powered LED frame in the woods for an exhibition.
- Theory C: A film crew left a prop behind while shooting a sci-fi movie.



NAME 3

For each item you name, you must briefly explain why or how using a modal verb of speculation (must, might, could, can't).

1 Name 3 red flags in a news headline which mean it can't be a professional article.

2 Name 3 topics that scammers might use to make people panic and click a dangerous link.

3 Name 3 indicators on an Instagram photo which suggest the picture must be heavily photoshopped or AI-generated.

4 Name 3 safe sources of information where you could verify a shocking rumor you read online.

5 Name 3 reasons why people might write and spread fake news even if they know the information is completely false.

