

CALLAN

English

Student's transition material

Stage 11 (2nd edition) – Stage 12 (3rd edition)

Modal + "be" + "-ing"

may be sleeping

When we put "be" + "-ing" after a modal, it communicates the idea of an action in progress. You are already familiar with this from the future continuous form: "I will be working when you arrive this afternoon", for example.

We can use "be" + "-ing" after other modals as well. For example, instead of saying "Perhaps Olivia is sleeping", we can say "Olivia may be sleeping". If I say "You must be looking forward to the weekend", I mean that I feel sure you're looking forward to the weekend.

Note that "should" + "be" + "-ing" can have two very different meanings. The sentence "The police should be investigating the crime" can mean either that they are not investigating the crime even though it is their duty, or it can mean that I think they are probably investigating the crime.

What does it communicate when we put "be" + "-ing" after a modal?

When we ..., it communicates the idea of an action in progress.

So, what do I mean if I say "The firm must be running short of money"?

If you say "The firm must be running short of money", you mean that you feel sure the firm is running short of money.

What do you think your mother (best friend etc.) might be doing now?

I think ...

Do you think the governments of the world should be working together more closely to reduce pollution?

Yes, I think ... ~ No, I don't think ...

In a car, if you think the driver ought to be going more slowly, do you say anything or just keep quiet?

In a car, if I think ..., I ...

Can you think of anything you'd rather be doing right now than learning English with me?

Yes, I can ... than ... ~ No, I can't ... than ...

What?

I'd rather be ...

Now, I will give you a sentence, and you say a sentence with a similar meaning, but with the modal I ask you to use:

“I think Jim’s probably working in his office.” Make a sentence with “should”.

Jim should be working ...

“I’m sure Tom isn’t studying; I can hear snoring coming from his room!” Make a sentence with “can’t”.

Tom can’t be studying; I can hear ...

“Emily isn’t attending her brother’s wedding ceremony at the moment because she missed her train.” Make a sentence with “would”.

Emily would be attending ... if she hadn’t missed ...

“I’ll be annoyed if I discover my daughter isn’t doing her homework at the moment.” Make a sentence with “had better”.

My daughter had better be doing ...