

Certainty and Possibility

Learning Objectives: To review the use of adverbs and modals for expressing past and future certainty and possibility

Preparation Time: 10 minutes

Completion Time: 45 minutes

Skill/Grammar: certainty and possibility

Age/Level: Cambridge English First Exam

Resources: [Disasters: Certainty and Possibility – Worksheet](#)

Preparation (10 minutes)

- Write causes of the end of the world that have appeared in movies on separate pieces of paper. These causes may include the following, but also add in any new ideas from current movies. Leave some cards blank for student ideas.

A large meteor hits the Earth.

The Earth goes into a black hole.

A large volcano makes the air poisonous.

There is a dangerous disease.

Pollution makes the air poisonous.

There is a new ice age.

There is a world war.

Robots take over the world.

Aliens attack our planet.

Bees all die and plants cannot grow.

Flares from the sun hit the Earth.

Someone wakes up and realises the Earth was just a dream.

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

- Ask students if they have watched any disaster movies that have shown the end of the world. Elicit possible ideas and hold up the relevant piece of paper when an idea is mentioned, or write the new idea on a blank piece of paper.
- Stick the pieces of paper up on the board and ask students to discuss in small groups how likely they are to happen. Do not feed back at this stage.

Presentation (20 minutes)

- Write 'It will happen.' on the board and ask students how they could change this to show different degrees of certainty and possibility. Give an example if necessary.

It will definitely happen.

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It will probably happen.
It will possibly happen.
It probably won't happen.
It definitely won't happen.

It may/might/could happen.
It may/might/couldn't happen.

- Point out that the first five sentences use adverbs. The last two sentences use modals. Point out that these sentences are talking about the future.
- As a whole class, ask students to comment on the likelihood of the movie disasters using the target language.
- Ask students if they know the cause of a real disaster that happened in the past – the reason why dinosaurs became extinct.
- Students look at the list of possible causes (Language Focus exercise 2 on the **Worksheet**) and decide how likely they are.
- Write 'It happened.' on the board, and ask students to add adverbs to show different degrees of certainty and possibility.
- Ask students what they think happens to the modals when we are talking about past certainty and probability. Elicit or teach the following.

It definitely happened.
It probably happened.
It possibly happened.
It probably didn't happen.
It definitely didn't happen.

It must have happened.
It may/might/could have happened. It
may/might have happened.
It cannot / couldn't have happened.

- Once the students have the language, repeat exercise 2 of the Language Focus.

Practice (10 minutes)

- Tell students that they will practise using the modals of certainty and possibility to complete this multiple choice cloze.

Practice Answer Key:

1 B	6 B
2 D	7 A
3 B	8 A

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4 B

9 C

5 A

Closure (10 minutes)

- Ask students what they know about climate change. In small groups, they discuss disasters which may have been caused by climate change, and what problems may occur in the future. Encourage students to express certainty and possibility by using adverbs and modals from the lesson.

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Language Focus

- 1 Think of disaster movies you have seen or heard about. What events could end the world? How likely are those disasters to really happen?
- 2 65 million years ago there was a real disaster and the dinosaurs all died. Below is a list of possible causes of this disaster. How likely do you think each cause is?

There was an ice age which killed all cold-blooded creatures.
There was a dangerous disease which killed all the dinosaurs.
There was an exploding star which caused a lot of radiation.
There was a large volcano which poisoned the air.
Birds and animals started eating dinosaur eggs.
Other insects and animals ate all of the dinosaurs' food.
A meteor hit the earth causing storms, fires, tsunamis and pollution.

Practice

Read the text below and decide which answer (A, B, C or D) best fits each gap. There is an example at the beginning (0).

Example:

0 A may hit **B may have hit** C could hit D can have hit

Meteors

Experts think that a large meteor ⁰..... the Earth about 65 million years ago, and this ¹..... to the death of the dinosaurs. It must have

² ³

..... a very big meteor. Scientists think that it might over 5 kilometres across. It ⁴..... been much larger than this, though, as we know that many birds and other animals survived.

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Researchers know that a meteor ⁵..... hit the planet in the near future. They know this because meteors hit the Earth all the time. Most of them are very small and burn up in the atmosphere, but larger meteors do hit the Earth from time to time.

In 2004, scientists spotted a 390-metre-wide meteor which they called Apophis. It will pass close by the Earth in 2029 and there is a possibility that Apophis ⁶..... the Earth in 2036. The impact could ⁷..... 100,000 times more powerful than a nuclear bomb, and it might ⁸..... several thousands of kilometres of land. Scientists all agree that we ⁹..... keep watching Apophis.

1	A could lead	B could have led	C could led	D could have lead
2	A be	B was	C were	D been
3	A measure	B have measured	C measured	D has measured
4	A must not	B cannot have	C had not	D could not had
5	A will	B might have	C will might	D may
6	A cannot hit	B may hit	C hits	D might have hit
7	A be	B was	C have	D been
8	A destroy	B have destroyed	C destroyed	D destroys
9	A can	B cannot	C must	D mustn't

Follow-up questions

Many people think that climate change will cause environmental disasters. Discuss what disasters may have been caused by climate change, and what problems may occur in the future. Try to use adverbs and modals to show possibility and certainty.