



What Is Critical Thinking?

From the trial of Socrates to the present day—claims, evidence, assumptions, and why changing your mind is a result rather than a defeat.

Level: Upper Intermediate (B2 CEFR)

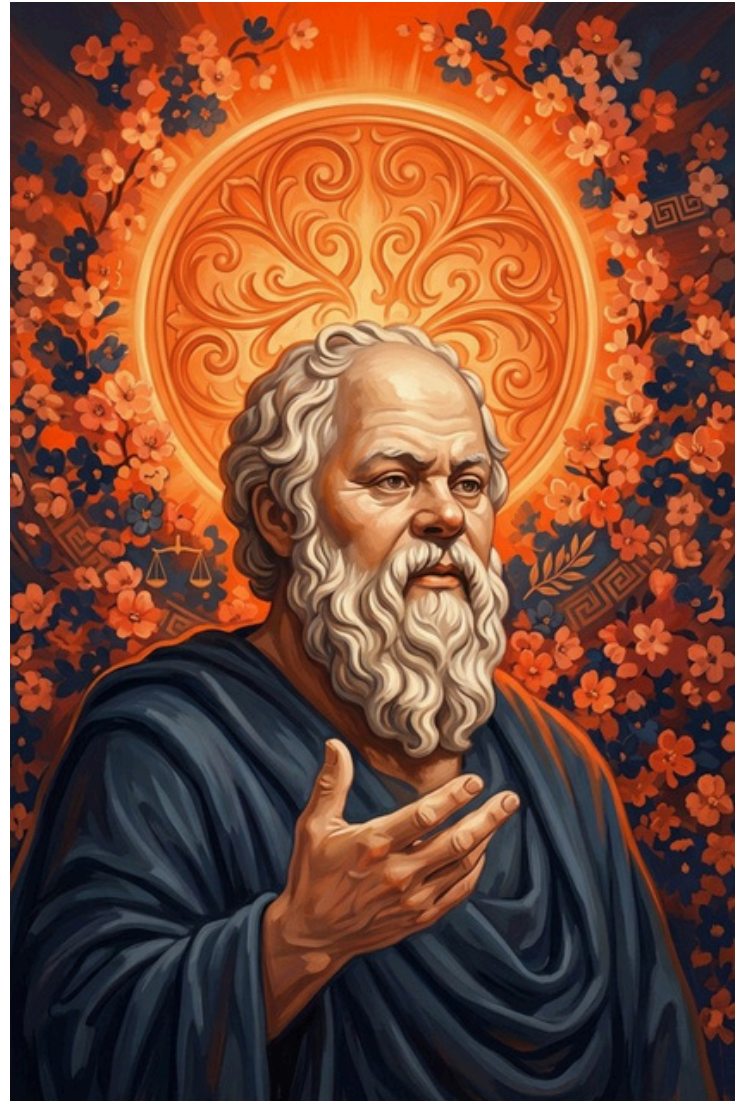
Duration: 90–120 minutes · 1:1 General English Coaching

Skill Focus: Reading, Speaking, Vocabulary, Grammar, Listening

Grammar Focus: Modals of deduction & probability



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**1**

warm-up

Discuss these questions before we begin. (8–10 min)

1. Think of something you believed a few years ago that you no longer believe. What changed your mind?
Follow-ups: Was it a single moment or a gradual shift? · Did anyone try to convince you, or did you work it out yourself?
2. When you read something surprising online, what makes you decide whether to trust it?
Follow-ups: Does it matter who shared it? · Would you trust the same claim less from a stranger?
3. Have you ever found two sources giving completely different information about the same thing? How did you decide which to believe?
Follow-ups: What did you check first? · Is it always possible to decide, or do some questions stay open?
4. Are we more critical of information we disagree with than information we already agree with? Why might that happen?
Follow-ups: Can you think of an example from your own experience? · Is this a fault, or is it just efficient?
5. In your own words, what does it actually mean to “think critically”? Is it the same as being sceptical?
Follow-ups: Can some one question too much? · What would that look like in practice?



2

video comprehension**Watch the video before completing the exercises. (8–12 min)**▶ Watch here: youtube.com/watch?v=vNDYUlxNIAA**SCAN
ME****Part A — True or False**

T/F	Statement
---	Socrates was feared mainly because he claimed to have the answers to difficult questions.
---	The conversations between Socrates and Euthydemus recorded by Plato and Xenophon were invented rather than transcribed from real events.
---	Euthydemus ends his conversation with Socrates more confident about the nature of justice than when he began.
---	The video says the Socratic Method always produces definitive answers.
---	According to the video, a good Socratic teacher should be modest and genuinely curious rather than intellectually superior.

Part B — Comprehension

- Main idea:** In one or two sentences, how would you describe the Socratic Method to someone who has never heard of it?

- Detail:** What two charges were brought against Socrates at his trial?

- Example:** In the dialogue with Euthydemus, how does Socrates challenge the young man's first definition of injustice?

- Reasoning:** Why does Socrates compare himself to a midwife? What does the comparison suggest about his role?

- Application:** The video mentions medicine, law and the sciences. Why would this method be useful in fields so different from philosophy?



2

video comprehension**Part C — Critical Response****Part C — Your Response**

The video suggests that a method which produces no definitive answers can still be valuable — that clarifying a question is worth something even when it does not resolve it.

Do you agree? Give at least one clear reason for your view, and if possible an example from your own experience or work.





3 pre-reading vocabulary

Read, repeat, and master these words before reading the article.(10–12 min)

 Match each word to its definition. The definitions have been shuffled — **no row matches the word beside it**. Write the correct letter in the Answer box.

#	Word	Answer	Def.	Definition
1	Evidence		A	strong enough to make someone believe it
2	Assumption		B	the person, organisation, or place information originally came from
3	Claim		C	a decision or opinion formed after considering the facts
4	Biased		D	to question something closely and thoroughly
5	Reliable		E	to state something firmly and confidently
6	Convincing		F	to judge the quality, value, or strength of something
7	Source		G	to change a position or opinion after new information
8	Judgement		H	facts or information that support whether something is true
9	Interrogate		I	something you accept as true without checking or noticing it
10	Assert		J	a statement that something is true, offered without proof
11	Assess		K	unfairly favouring one side or point of view
12	Revise		L	able to be trusted to be accurate or honest

Use Them

Complete each sentence with a suitable word from the table. Change the form if you need to.

- He stated it as fact, but it was really just a _____ — nobody had shown it was true.
- Before quoting the figure, I wanted to check whether the _____ was trustworthy.
- I had to _____ my opinion once I saw the full report.
- The argument sounded _____, but there was very little _____ behind it.
- A review written by the company itself is likely to be _____.



4

reading**The Question That Killed Socrates: Twenty-Four Centuries of Doubt (30–35 min)**

 Read the whole article once without stopping. Don't worry about every word — look for the main argument.

¶ 1 In the spring of 399 BC, a jury of Athenian citizens condemned an elderly man to death for asking questions.

¶ 2 The charges against Socrates were corrupting the young and failing to honour the city's gods. The deeper offence was harder to write down. For decades he had stopped people in the street and asked them what they meant by the words they used most confidently — justice, courage, piety — and then asked again, and again, until the confident answer collapsed. He claimed to know nothing himself. That was part of what made him unbearable.

¶ 3 Athens had reasons to be nervous. The city had recently lost a long war, endured a brutal oligarchy, and watched two men who had studied with Socrates turn against the democracy. It was easier to believe that the questioner had produced the traitors than to examine what had actually gone wrong. The accusation felt right, and it came from respectable men, and it confirmed something the city already suspected. That combination has always been enough. We tend to accept a claim quickly when we trust its source and when believing it costs us nothing we are attached to — and Athens was not attached to Socrates.

¶ 4 What is striking is how thoroughly the verdict was reversed by history. Within a generation, Plato and Xenophon had turned their teacher's conversations into literature, and the method that killed him began a long career of respectability.

¶ 5 By the Renaissance it had entered the medical schools. Students were asked to defend a diagnosis while a physician questioned the reasoning behind it, and here the technique acquired something Athens had never demanded of it: a standard of proof. In a philosophical dialogue, an argument survives if it withstands questioning. In a clinical one, it also has to match the patient. The distinction between what a person asserts and what can actually be demonstrated — between a claim and its evidence — became a practical matter of life and death. Astronomy, botany and mathematics adopted the same habit soon after. An idea was no longer strong because a respected authority had stated it. It was strong because it survived examination.

¶ 6 The Reformation showed the limits of this. As the method was turned on questions of faith, it became clear that the same tool could be used in two very different ways. Reformers questioned doctrines they already doubted with real rigour, and defended doctrines they already held with equal energy. The questioning was genuine; its direction was not neutral. This is a pattern that recurs whenever the method meets a subject people care about. We examine most carefully the claims we were already inclined to reject, and we let the claims that suit us pass. The assumption underneath our own position is rarely the one we choose to interrogate, because it does not present itself as an assumption at all. It presents itself as the obvious starting point.

¶ 7 In the 1870s the method entered American law schools, where professors began confronting students with hypothetical cases designed to break their reasoning. The point was not to find the right answer. It was to discover what a rule would do in circumstances nobody had imagined when the rule was written. That approach survives in the Supreme Court, where justices still test a proposed interpretation by asking where else it would lead.





4

reading**Article, continued**

¶ 8 Twenty-four centuries after the trial, the method has been absorbed into medicine, science, law and education, and the man who developed it is quoted approvingly by institutions that would almost certainly have found him intolerable in person. This is the part worth noticing. Every era in this history adopted questioning as a way of testing other people's reasoning. Very few adopted it as a way of testing their own. Athens questioned Socrates rather than itself. The Reformation questioned its opponents. Law students are trained to dismantle an argument, and rather less often trained to abandon one.

¶ 9 The harder version has always been the same, and it is not complicated to describe. It means treating a change of mind as a result rather than a defeat — noticing that the evidence has moved, and moving with it, even when the position you are leaving is one you argued for publicly. Socrates never framed this as scepticism. He compared himself to a midwife: someone who helps other people deliver their own ideas, including the ones they did not know they were carrying. Refusing to believe anything would have struck him as a waste of a conversation.

¶ 10 It should also be said that the method has never promised certainty. Euthydemus, in one famous dialogue, is questioned about justice until he no longer knows what justice is, and the dialogue ends there. He does not leave with an answer. He leaves knowing that the answer he arrived with was not one he had earned.

¶ 11 That is a smaller result than it sounds, and a more durable one. Athens executed a man for producing it. It has taken most of recorded history to admit he had a point.

A — Gist

1. State the article's main argument in one sentence.

2. The writer says the method has been "absorbed" everywhere, yet still calls the harder version rare. What is the difference between the two?

B — Structure

What is the purpose of each paragraph? Choose from: *introduces a problem · explains a historical development · challenges a common belief · gives an example · states the central argument*

Paragraph Purpose

¶ 3

¶ 5

¶ 8



4

reading**C—Detailed Comprehension & D — Claim, Evidence or Opinion**

1. What political events had recently affected Athens before the trial? (¶ 3)

2. Why does the writer say the accusation against Socrates “felt right” to Athenians?

3. What did medical training add to the method that philosophy alone had not demanded? (¶ 5)

4. Explain in your own words why the writer says the Reformation “showed the limits” of the method.

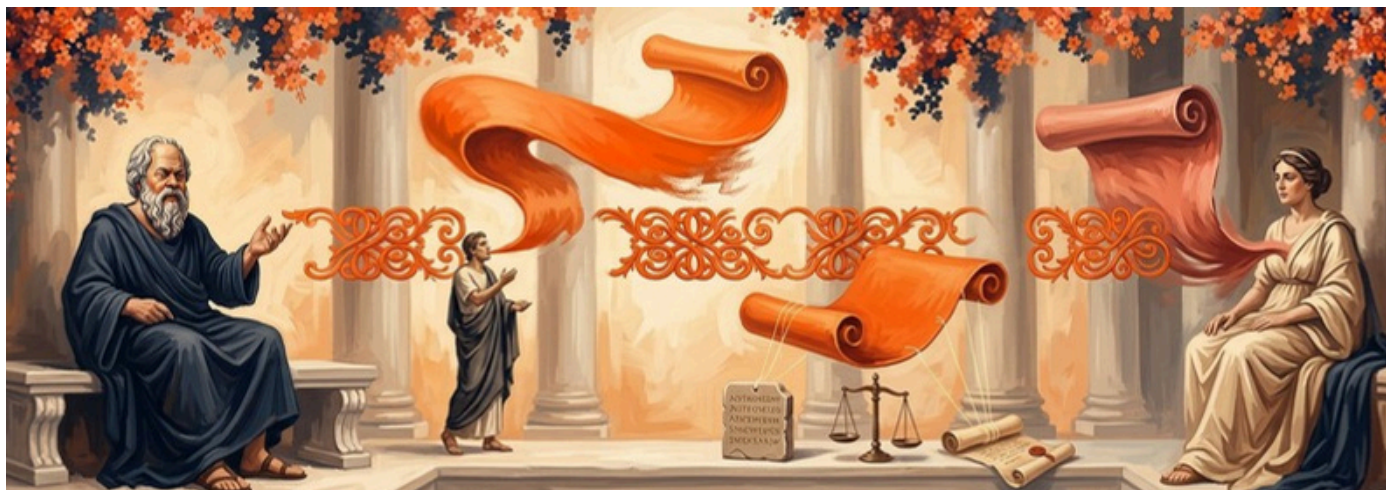
5. Why does an assumption rarely get examined, according to ¶ 6?

6. How does the final paragraph connect back to the opening sentence of the article?

D — Claim, Evidence or Opinion

Label each statement C (claim), E (evidence) or O (opinion) — then briefly explain your choice.

C/E/O	Statement	Why?
---	In 399 BC an Athenian jury condemned Socrates to death.	
---	Refusing to believe anything is not a form of intelligence.	
---	Every era adopted questioning to test others' reasoning, but rarely their own.	
---	Plato and Xenophon wrote dialogues based on Socrates' conversations.	
---	A change of mind should be treated as a result rather than a defeat.	





4

reading**E—Find the Assumption & F — Evaluate the Argument****E — Find the Assumption**

In each situation, what is the person assuming without saying it?

1. The Athenians concluded that because two of Socrates' students betrayed the democracy, Socrates must have caused it.

2. A student says: "This argument has survived every objection in the seminar, so it must be correct."

3. A reader says: "I've questioned my beliefs carefully, so I can't be biased."

F — Evaluate the Argument

Focus on the argument in ¶ 8: that societies have adopted questioning as a way of testing other people's reasoning far more readily than their own.

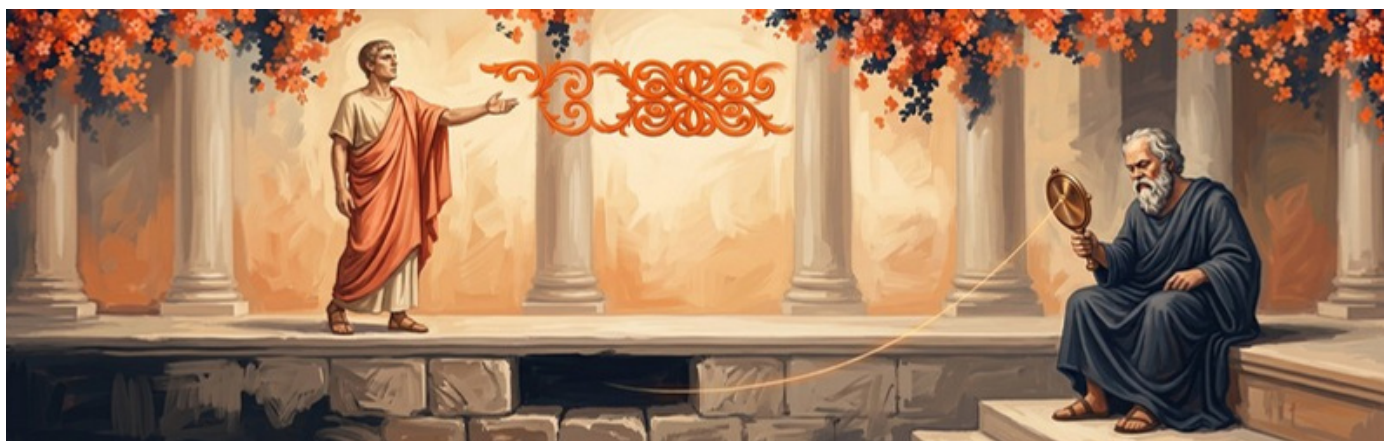
1. What is the main claim?

2. What reason does the writer give to support it?

3. What evidence is offered? Is it the same thing as the reason?

4. Do you find the evidence convincing? Why, or why not?

5. What additional information would make this argument stronger?





4

reading**G—Vocabulary in Context & H — Personal Response****G — Vocabulary in Context**

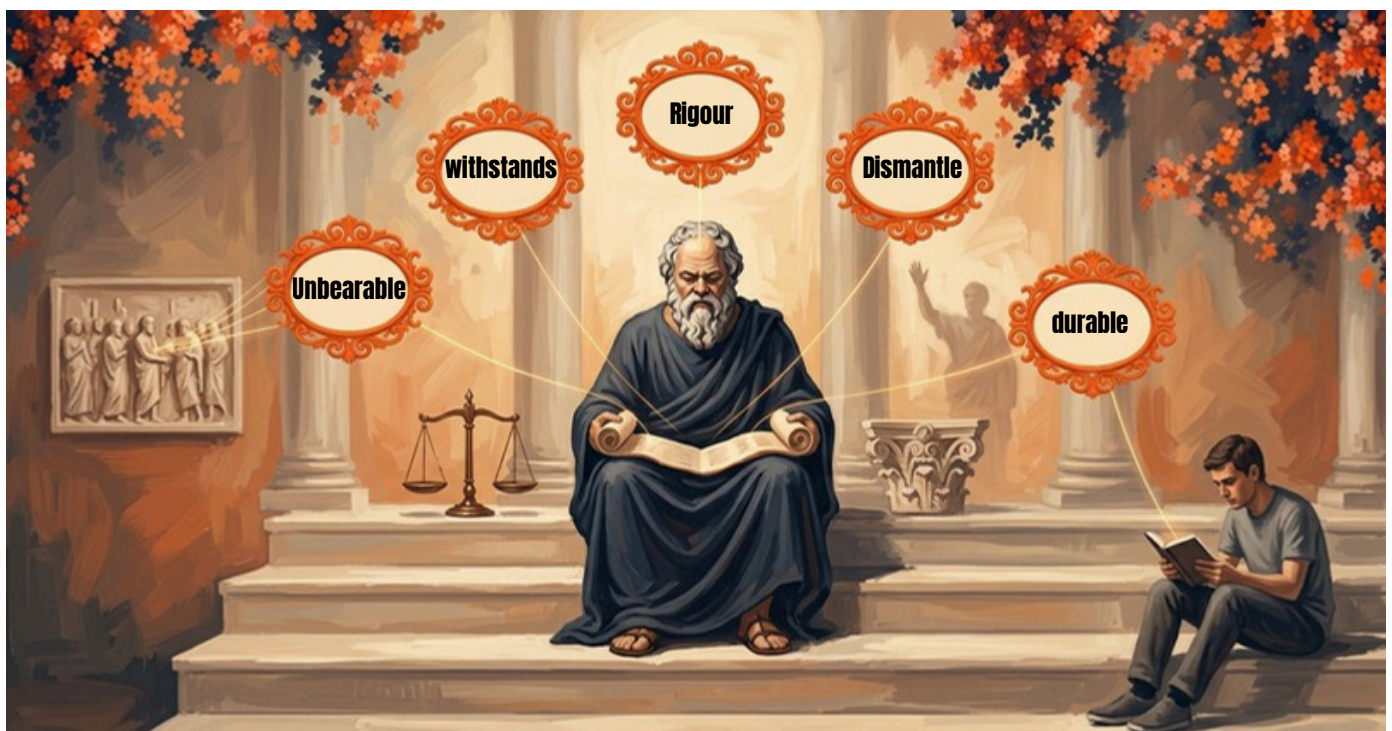
Work out the meaning of each word from how it is used in the article. Don't use a dictionary.

Word (paragraph)	What do you think it means here?
unbearable (¶ 2)	
withstands (¶ 5)	
rigour (¶ 6)	
dismantle (¶ 8)	
durable (¶ 11)	

Then: which clues in the sentence helped you decide?

H — Personal Response

Which part of this article do you think is most useful in real life? Explain your choice and give a concrete example — from work, study, news, or a conversation you've had.





5

listening**"Six Minutes to Change Your Mind" — a university seminar (10–12 min)**

 **Audio:** A philosophy tutor, Dr Marsh, questions a student, Adam, about something he said earlier in the seminar. Notice how few statements the tutor actually makes.

A — Comprehension

1. What claim did Adam make before the break?

2. What example does Adam give that does not fit his own claim?

3. Why does Adam think his uncle applies different standards at work and at home?

4. What position does Adam hold by the end of the conversation?

5. Why does Dr Marsh argue *against* Adam's revised position near the end?

B — Gap-Fill**WORD BANK**

assume · revise · obvious · tidy · confidently

1. "I _____ so. That's the whole point of teaching critical thinking, isn't it?"
2. "Not directly, no. It just seems _____."
3. "So would you like to _____ the claim, or defend it?"
4. "I think so. It's less _____."
5. "Mostly because I'd said the first version quite _____."



5

listening**C—Speaker Position & D — Personal Response****C — Speaker Position**

For each statement, write **Adam**, **Dr Marsh**, or **both**.

Who?	Statement
-----	Believes at the start that education is the main explanation.
-----	Is uncertain and says so openly during the conversation.
-----	Argues against a position they may not actually hold.
-----	Changes their mind during the conversation.

D — Personal Response

Whose approach do you find more useful in a real discussion — Dr Marsh's (asking questions rather than stating a position) or a more direct approach where both people argue openly for their views? Explain your reasoning, and note one situation where the other approach would work better.





6

grammar — modals of deduction

Expressing how certain you are when the evidence is incomplete. (12–15 min)

1 — Notice

- The article cites specific dates and names, so the writer **must** have researched it.
- The post has no source at all, so the figure **might** be invented.
- That study was published last week — he **can't** have read it before writing this.
- She's quoting a number nobody else reports. She **may** have misunderstood the original.
- Three accounts agree on the details, so the story **could** be accurate.

2 — Guided Discovery

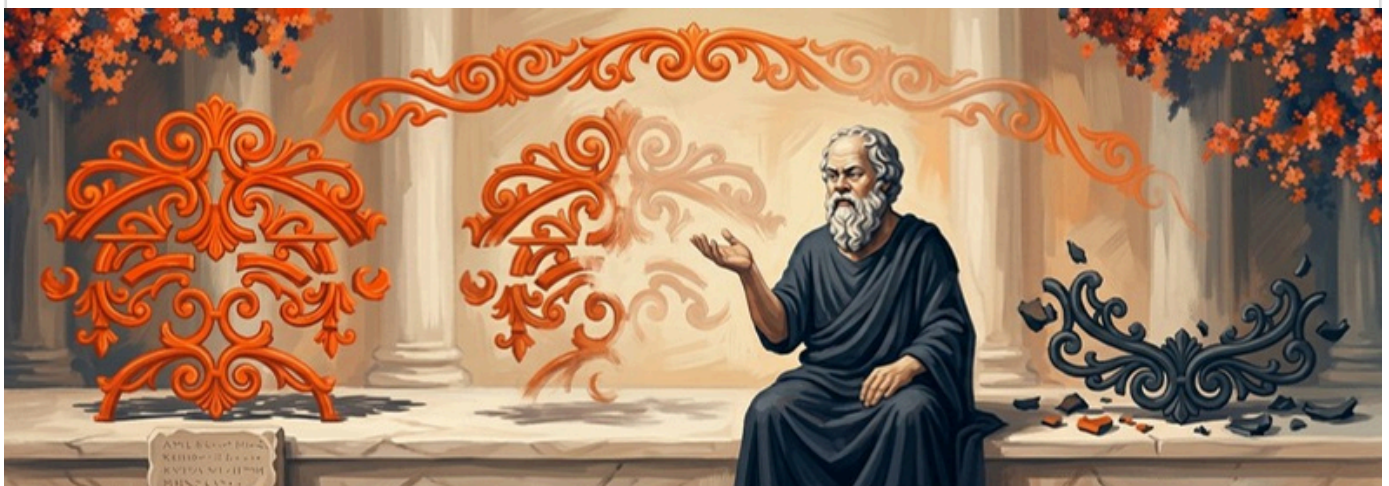
Sort the five sentences above into three groups. Which show **strong certainty**? Which show **possibility**? Which show **impossibility**?

Then: which two sentences talk about the *past* rather than the present? What is different about their form?

3 — How It Works

Certainty	Modal	Present / Past
Almost certain (yes)	must	must be reliable · must have known
Possible	may / might / could	might be biased · may have misunderstood
Almost certain (no)	can't	can't be correct · can't have seen it

📌 For the past, use **modal + have + past participle**. Note: for impossibility we say *can't have*, not *mustn't have*.





6

grammar — practice**4—Controlled Practice & 5—Meaning Choice****4 — Controlled Practice**

Complete with *must, might, may, could* or *can't* — present or past form.

1. Every major newspaper reports the same figure, so it ___ be roughly accurate.
2. The website was created yesterday. It ___ be a long-established source.
3. She didn't mention the study at all — she ___ (not / see) it.
4. There's no author name. The article ___ have been written by anyone.
5. He spent six months on the research, so he ___ (know) the topic extremely well.
6. The graph has no scale, so the increase ___ be much smaller than it looks.
7. They published a correction the next day, so they ___ (realise) the error quickly.
8. That quotation is from 1890. Socrates ___ have said it.

5 — Meaning Choice

Choose the better option and explain what difference it makes.

1. The source (must / might) be unreliable — I've never heard of it.
2. He (can't / may not) have read the whole report; it was published this morning.
3. Their conclusion (could / must) be right, but I'd want more data first.
4. She quoted the study accurately, so she (must / could) have read it properly.
5. The two reports contradict each other, so one of them (can't / might not) be correct.





6

grammar — production

6—Rewrite · 7—Personal Application · 8 — Speaking

6 — Rewrite

Rewrite each sentence using a modal of deduction, keeping the meaning.

1. I'm certain the author didn't check the original study.

2. It's possible that the journalist misread the percentage.

3. I'm sure Athens felt threatened by him.

4. Perhaps the two accounts describe different events.

7 — Personal Application

Give a possible explanation for each situation, using a modal of deduction.

1. A product has hundreds of five-star reviews, all posted in the same week.

2. A news story disappears from a website a few hours after publication.

3. A friend forwards you a warning message that has no date and no source.

4. Two surveys on the same question reach opposite conclusions.

8 — Speaking Extension

Take any one situation above and talk it through with your teacher: *What might be the reason? What could explain this? What must have happened?* Justify whichever modal you choose — why that level of certainty and not a stronger or weaker one?



7

discussion & application

Bring together the video, article and seminar. (15–18 min)

1. Have you ever changed your mind publicly about something? How did it feel?
Follow-ups: *Did anyone react badly? · Would you do it again?*
2. The article argues we question others more readily than ourselves. Do you recognise this in how people around you discuss things?
Follow-ups: *Is it worse online than in person? · Why might that be?*
3. Adam decided that critical thinking is less about ability and more about choosing to use it. How convincing is that?
Follow-ups: *What would change your view? · Can you think of a case where the opposite is true?*
4. Someone tells you: "Questioning everything just makes people cynical and paralysed." How would you respond?
Follow-ups: *Is there a point where questioning becomes unhelpful? · Where exactly is that line?*
5. Athens executed Socrates for asking questions. Are there still places or situations today where questioning carries a real cost?
Follow-ups: *Professional as well as political? · Have you seen this yourself?*

 **Useful language:** "I'd argue that..." · "That's true to some extent." · "I'm not entirely convinced..." · "Another way of looking at it is..." · "That would only be true if..."

Final Critical Thinking Challenge

"If thousands of people believe something, there is probably some truth in it."

Work through all five steps: **1** Do you agree or disagree? · **2** Explain why. · **3** Give an example. · **4** Argue the opposite view as fairly as you can. · **5** Give your final judgement.



**homework****Complete before the next lesson · approx. 20–30 minutes.****Part 1 — Vocabulary in Use**

Choose 6 of the 12 target words. Write an original sentence for each, about information, media, online content, advertising, or a decision you've made. At least 2 sentences should use a collocation or expression from the lesson (for example *weigh the evidence*, *question an assumption*, *revise a position*).

Part 2 — Grammar in Context

Complete these using *must*, *might*, *may*, *could* or *can't* (present or past):

- The article has no author — it ___ have been written by an expert, but there's no way to tell.
- She's been studying this for years, so she ___ know the subject well.
- That photo is from 2011, so it ___ show last week's event.
- The company deleted the post within an hour. They ___ have regretted publishing it.
- Nobody else reports this figure, so it ___ be a mistake.
- He ___ have misunderstood the question — his answer doesn't match it.
- The two witnesses agree completely, so one of them ___ be lying.
- There's no evidence either way, so we ___ only guess.

Then write **3 original sentences** making deductions about an everyday situation.

Part 3 — Main Task: “Can You Change My Mind?”

Choose a claim you've heard recently — from social media, advertising, news, a friend, a workplace conversation, online reviews, or popular advice. Record a **2–3 minute voice message** (or write **220–280 words**) answering:

- What is the claim, and where did you encounter it?
- Why might people believe it?
- What evidence supports it, and how reliable is that evidence?
- What assumptions could be involved?
- Has your own opinion changed, and why?

Language targets: at least 5 target vocabulary items · at least 3 modals of deduction · at least 2 opinion or qualification expressions.

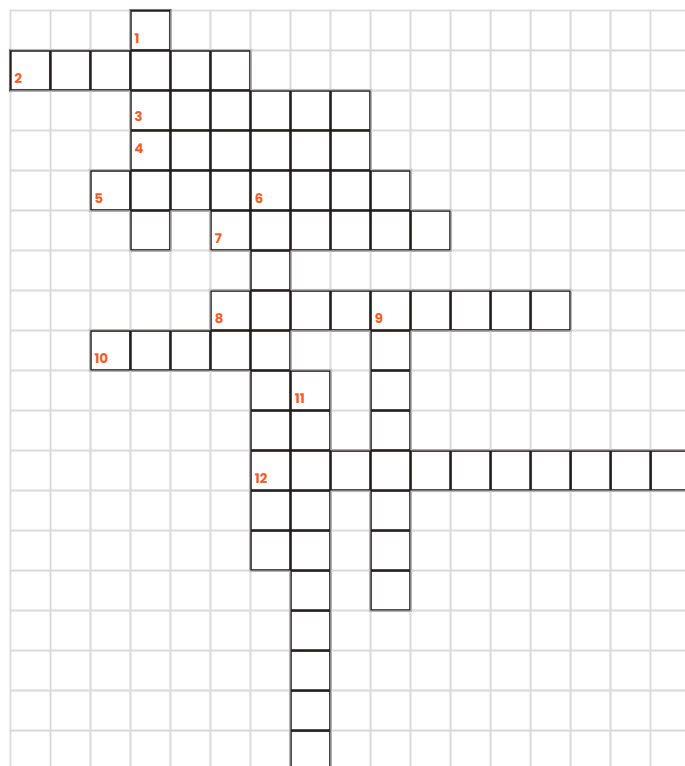




8

crossword

A solo home work activity — complete independently after the lesson.

**ACROSS**

- 2. Amend (6)
- 3. Declare (6)
- 4. Origin (6)
- 5. Trustworthy (8)
- 7. Evaluate (6)
- 8. Verdict (9)
- 10. Contention (5)
- 12. Question (11)

DOWN

- 1. Prejudiced (6)
- 6. Presupposition (10)
- 9. Proof (8)
- 11. Persuasive (10)





Video Reference

This lesson's video section is based on a TED-Ed animation explaining the Socratic Method, narrated by a single presenter. As this is copyrighted content, we are not able to reproduce the full script here. Please watch the original at the link below before completing Section 2.

youtube.com/watch?v=vNDYUlxNIAA

What's covered: The video opens with Socrates on trial in Athens, accused of corrupting the youth and refusing to recognise the city's gods — charges that arose not because he claimed to have answers, but because he asked too many questions. It explains that he avoided formal lectures, engaging people instead in long conversations about morality and society, often claiming to know nothing himself and responding to answers only with further questions.

Two of his students, Plato and Xenophon, later recreated this process in *invented* dialogues. In one, a young man named Euthydemus confidently classifies lying and theft as unjust, before Socrates asks whether a general deceiving a hostile army is acting unjustly. Euthydemus revises his position — such acts are just against enemies, unjust against friends — but is then asked about a commander lying to his own troops to raise morale. He ends the conversation less certain than he began.

Socrates described himself as a midwife whose questions help others give birth to their own ideas. The method draws out unexamined assumptions and challenges them. It does not always produce definitive answers, but it clarifies questions and removes contradictory reasoning.

The video then traces the method's later uses: clinical medicine in the Renaissance, then astronomy, botany and mathematics; questions of faith after the Protestant Reformation; American legal education in the 19th century; and the Supreme Court today. It notes that success depends on the teacher — who should be knowledgeable, modest, genuinely curious, and affirming rather than intimidating. It closes on Socrates' own trial and death, and on the image of a philosopher still curious at the end.



 **Audio Transcript**

Dr Marsh: You said something interesting just before the break. You said people believe false information because they haven't been taught to think properly. Do you still want to defend that?

Adam: I think so, yes. Most of it comes down to education. If you've been trained to check sources and spot weak arguments, you're much less likely to fall for something.

Dr Marsh: All right. And is there evidence that the people who fall for false claims are, on average, less educated?

Adam: I assume so. That's the whole point of teaching critical thinking, isn't it?

Dr Marsh: It might be. But you said you *assume* so. Have you actually seen a study?

Adam: Not directly, no. It just seems obvious.

Dr Marsh: Let's test whether it is. Think of the most intelligent person you know. Is there anything they believe that you find completely unreasonable?

Adam: ...Yes, actually. My uncle. He's a structural engineer, he's extremely careful about everything in his work, and he's convinced that a particular vitamin cures more or less anything.

Dr Marsh: And is he uneducated?

Adam: Obviously not. He's probably better at evaluating evidence than I am, professionally.

Dr Marsh: So what's your explanation?

Adam: I suppose... he doesn't apply the same standards in that area. At work he'd never accept a claim without testing it. But with the vitamin thing, he just doesn't.

Dr Marsh: Why not, do you think?

Adam: Maybe because it matters to him personally? He started taking it after he was ill. So he wants it to have worked.

Dr Marsh: That's a reasonable explanation. Does it fit with your original position?

Adam: Not really, no. I said it was about training, and he's got the training. He just isn't using it there.

Dr Marsh: So would you like to revise the claim, or defend it?

Adam: Revise it, I think. Maybe it's less about whether you *can* think critically and more about whether you *choose* to, in a particular moment.

Dr Marsh: That's a significant change. What made you willing to make it?

Adam: The example, really. I couldn't find a way to fit my uncle into what I'd said.

Dr Marsh: Good. Now let me push in the other direction, because I don't want you to give up the original claim too cheaply. Is education irrelevant, then?

Adam: No, I wouldn't go that far. It probably still helps. If you've never been shown how to check a source, you can't do it even if you want to.

Dr Marsh: So where does that leave you?

Adam: Somewhere in between, I suppose. Education gives you the tools. Whether you pick them up depends on something else — how much you want the claim to be true, maybe.

Dr Marsh: Is that a stronger position than the one you started with?

Adam: I think so. It's less tidy.

Dr Marsh: Those two things are often related. One more question, and then we'll stop. You've just changed your mind in about six minutes, on a topic you clearly care about. Was that uncomfortable?

Adam: A bit. Mostly because I'd said the first version quite confidently.

Dr Marsh: Remember that feeling. It's the one that stops most people from doing what you just did.



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