Deduction & Speculation (must be/can't be/could be): Speculation About the Present: Must Be, Can't Be & Might Be + -ing Exercises

Fill in the blank with the correct option.

1. The office light is on and I can hear typing. Someone ___ in there.
   a) can't be working
   b) must be working
   c) should be working
   d) might be sleeping

2. It's midnight and her bedroom light is off. She ___ .
   a) can't be sleeping
   b) might be working
   c) should be reading
   d) must be sleeping

3. I can smell something delicious from the kitchen. Mum ___ dinner.
   a) must be cooking
   b) can't be cooking
   c) should be cooking
   d) must be eating

4. I can hear laughter and music from next door. The neighbours ___ a party.
   a) can't be having
   b) might be leaving
   c) must be having
   d) should be having

5. Ben just said the Earth is flat. He ___ — nobody really believes that!
   a) can't be joking
   b) must be joking
   c) should be joking
   d) might be lying

6. Emma is laughing and chatting happily with friends. She ___ about the exam — she looks completely relaxed.
   a) must be worrying
   b) should be worrying
   c) can't be worrying
   d) might be worrying

7. The factory gates are locked and there are no cars in the car park. They ___ anything today.
   a) can't be producing
   b) must be producing
   c) should be producing
   d) might be producing

8. He's wearing a suit and tie on a Saturday morning. He ___ to something formal.
   a) can't be going
   b) should be going
   c) might be running
   d) must be going

9. I can hear water running in the bathroom. Someone ___ a shower.
   a) can't be taking
   b) must be taking
   c) should be taking
   d) will be taking

10. I'm not sure what Sarah is doing. She ___ TV — she usually watches at this time of day.
    a) must be watching
    b) can't be watching
    c) could be watching
    d) should be watching

11. I wonder where Dad is. He ___ the car — he said it was dirty this morning.
   a) might be washing
   b) can't be washing
   c) must be washing
   d) should be washing

12. Karen's phone has been engaged for 30 minutes. She ___ to someone.
   a) can't be talking
   b) should be talking
   c) might be sleeping
   d) must be talking

13. I think Alex ___ for us at the station, but I'm not 100% sure he got my message.
   a) can't be waiting
   b) might be waiting
   c) must be waiting
   d) should be waiting

14. There are strange noises coming from upstairs. The cat ___ with something up there.
   a) must be sleeping
   b) can't be playing
   c) could be playing
   d) should be playing

15. Why is John wearing sports clothes at the office? He ___ to the gym after work.
   a) might be going
   b) can't be going
   c) must be going
   d) mustn't be going

16. Sam is whispering on the phone and has moved to a quiet corner. He ___ something private.
   a) should be discussing
   b) can't be discussing
   c) might be ignoring
   d) must be discussing

17. I'm not sure where Emma is right now. She ___ late at the office — she has a big deadline tomorrow.
   a) can't be working
   b) could be working
   c) must be working
   d) mustn't be working

18. He's been in the bathroom for over an hour. He ___ a bath, not just a quick shower!
   a) should be taking
   b) can't be having
   c) must be having
   d) might be taking

19. It's 2 p.m. on a school day. The children ___ their afternoon lessons right now.
   a) must be having
   b) can't be having
   c) should be having
   d) might be skipping

20. This road doesn't look right at all. We ___ the wrong way.
   a) should be going
   b) can't be going
   c) might be turning
   d) must be going

Answers

1. b) must be working
2. d) must be sleeping
3. a) must be cooking
4. c) must be having
5. b) must be joking
6. c) can't be worrying
7. a) can't be producing
8. d) must be going
9. b) must be taking
10. c) could be watching
11. a) might be washing
12. d) must be talking
13. b) might be waiting
14. c) could be playing
15. a) might be going
16. d) must be discussing
17. b) could be working
18. c) must be having
19. a) must be having
20. d) must be going

Explanations

1. "must be working" (b)

Use 'must be + -ing' to make a strong deduction about what is happening right now. The light and typing sounds are strong evidence that someone is working in the office.

2. "must be sleeping" (d)

Use 'must be + -ing' when evidence strongly suggests what someone is doing now. It's midnight with the light off — sleeping is the most logical conclusion.

3. "must be cooking" (a)

Use 'must be + -ing' when sensory evidence (the smell) strongly suggests what someone is doing. A delicious smell from the kitchen logically means someone is cooking.

4. "must be having" (c)

Use 'must be + -ing' for a strong deduction about a current activity. Laughter and music are strong evidence of a party in progress.

5. "must be joking" (b)

Use 'must be + -ing' when someone's statement is so absurd that we can strongly deduce they are joking. The evidence (a clearly false claim) leads to this conclusion.

6. "can't be worrying" (c)

Use 'can't be + -ing' when someone's current behaviour contradicts an activity or state. Laughing and chatting happily is strong evidence that she is NOT worrying.

7. "can't be producing" (a)

Use 'can't be + -ing' when evidence clearly shows an activity is NOT happening. Locked gates and an empty car park are strong evidence that the factory is not producing anything.

8. "must be going" (d)

Use 'must be + -ing' when someone's appearance gives strong clues about what they are doing. A suit and tie on a Saturday strongly suggests a formal event.

9. "must be taking" (b)

Use 'must be + -ing' when you hear evidence of an activity in progress. Running water in the bathroom strongly suggests someone is taking a shower.

10. "could be watching" (c)

Use 'could be + -ing' when you are not sure about what someone is doing. 'I'm not sure' and 'usually' (not always) tell us this is a guess, not a strong deduction. 'Must be watching' would be too strong.

11. "might be washing" (a)

Use 'might be + -ing' when you have some evidence but are not certain. 'I wonder' shows uncertainty. He mentioned the car was dirty (some evidence), but we don't know for sure what he's doing now.

12. "must be talking" (d)

Use 'must be + -ing' when evidence strongly points to a current activity. An engaged phone for 30 minutes is strong evidence that she is talking to someone right now.

13. "might be waiting" (b)

Use 'might be + -ing' when you are uncertain. 'I think' and 'I'm not 100% sure' directly tell us this is an uncertain guess, not a strong deduction.

14. "could be playing" (c)

Use 'could be + -ing' when you have some evidence but the conclusion is uncertain. Strange noises could have many causes — the cat playing is one possibility, but not the only one.

15. "might be going" (a)

Use 'might be + -ing' for a possible explanation. Sports clothes at the office are some evidence, but there could be other reasons too. This is a guess, not a strong deduction.

16. "must be discussing" (d)

Use 'must be + -ing' when behaviour gives strong clues. Whispering and moving to a private spot are strong evidence that the conversation is about something private.

17. "could be working" (b)

Use 'could be + -ing' when you have a possible explanation but are not certain. 'I'm not sure' shows uncertainty. The deadline provides a possible reason, but we don't know for sure.

18. "must be having" (c)

Use 'must be + -ing' when evidence strongly suggests what someone is doing. Over an hour in the bathroom is much too long for a shower — a bath is the logical deduction.

19. "must be having" (a)

Use 'must be + -ing' when the time and circumstances make a strong deduction almost certain. At 2 p.m. on a school day, children are almost certainly in their afternoon lessons.

20. "must be going" (d)

Use 'must be + -ing' when the evidence (the road looks wrong) strongly suggests what is happening. If the road doesn't look right, we can strongly deduce we are going the wrong way.