Expressing certainty: Making confident business decisions

1. How sure are you?

> Read the scenario below and discuss the questions with a partner.

Imagine you are on the management team of a successful coffee shop chain. You have to decide on your company's next big move. You have two options:

- **Option A:** Launch a new line of expensive, high-tech coffee machines for home use. This is a new market for you, so it's high-risk, but the potential profit is huge.
- **Option B:** Expand by opening 20 new coffee shops in a neighboring country. This is a more familiar business model, making it lower-risk, but the setup costs are high and profit margins are smaller.

Discussion:

1. Which option would you choose and why?
2. What are the biggest uncertainties or risks for each option?
3. How confident are you that your chosen option will succeed? How would you express that confidence to your team?

> *Teacher's note: Answers will vary. The goal is to encourage students to use language of certainty and risk. Below are sample answers.*
>
> *1. I would choose Option B. It's a lower-risk strategy because it builds on our core business. It will almost certainly be successful if we manage the expansion well.*

2. For Option A, the main uncertainty is whether customers will buy expensive machines from a coffee shop brand. For Option B, the biggest risk is underestimating the cultural differences and competition in the new country.

3. I'm reasonably confident in Option B. I'd say, "Without a doubt, this is a solid plan. There's a strong possibility we'll see profitability within two years."

2. The spectrum of certainty

Categorize the phrases from the word bank into the correct columns based on the level of certainty they express. Some may fit in more than one category.

It's bound to succeed | There's a slight chance of failure | I'm reasonably confident that... | It's highly unlikely that... | I'm convinced that... | The outcome is uncertain | There's a strong possibility... | Without a doubt... | The market might not respond well | I have my reservations | It will almost certainly... | It's a foregone conclusion

High certainty	Moderate certainty	Low certainty / Uncertainty
It's bound to succeed I'm convinced that...	I'm reasonably confident that...	There's a slight chance of failure

Without a doubt... It will almost certainly... It's a foregone conclusion	There's a strong possibility...	It's highly unlikely that... The outcome is uncertain The market might not respond well I have my reservations

3. Listening: A manager's assessment

> You will hear a manager discussing a new product launch. Listen carefully and fill in the gaps with the words you hear.

"We've analyzed the market data, and it's (1) highly likely that our new product will perform well. There's a (2) strong possibility we'll exceed our initial sales targets this quarter. However, the competitor's reaction is still (3) uncertain, which (4) might affect our long-term projections. I'm (5) reasonably confident in our strategy, but we (6) can't ignore potential risks. It's (7) improbable that they can replicate our technology quickly. We (8) must, however, prepare for various scenarios."

Comprehension check:

After listening, discuss these questions:

1. What is the manager most confident about?
   The manager is most confident that the new product will perform well and that they will exceed initial sales targets.
2. What is the main source of uncertainty for the team?
   The main source of uncertainty is the competitor's reaction to their product launch.

4. Grammar focus: Modals and adverbs of probability

We use **modal verbs** and **adverbs** to show how certain we are about something. The choice of word significantly changes the meaning.

- **Certainty: will**, **must** (for logical conclusions), **is bound to**. Adverbs: **definitely, certainly, undoubtedly**.
  *Example: "With these sales figures, we **will definitely** meet our targets."*
- **Expectation: should**, **ought to**. Adverb: **probably**.
  *Example: "The new software **should** improve efficiency."*
- **Possibility: may**, **might**, **could**. Adverbs: **possibly, perhaps**.
  *Example: "The competition **might** launch a rival product."*

> Rewrite the following sentences using the word in brackets to reflect the indicated degree of certainty. You may need to change the sentence structure.

1. The merger will be successful. (convinced)
   → I'm convinced that the merger will be successful.
2. Our profits will increase next quarter. (probably)
   → Our profits will probably increase next quarter.
3. The regulator will approve our plan. (slight chance)
   → There's a slight chance the regulator will approve our plan.
4. The market leader is too powerful for us to challenge. (It's unlikely)
   → It's unlikely that we can challenge the market leader.
5. The project will finish on time, judging by the current progress. (must)
   → Judging by the current progress, the project must finish on time.

5. Reading: "Tech giant OmniCorp considers risky acquisition"

Read the fictional news article below. Highlight all the words and phrases that express certainty, probability, or risk. Then, answer the questions that follow.

BUSINESS TODAY

Shares in tech giant OmniCorp fluctuated today amid rumors of a potential takeover of robotics startup, 'KineticAI'. Analysts are convinced that the acquisition would give OmniCorp a significant edge in the automation market, a sector where it has been struggling to innovate. "An acquisition of KineticAI is almost certainly the fastest way for OmniCorp to catch up," said one market analyst. "Without a doubt, their technology is five years ahead of everyone else's."

However, the deal is far from a foregone conclusion. There is a strong possibility that competition regulators will scrutinize the deal, which could lead to lengthy delays. Furthermore, integrating KineticAI's unique and rebellious company culture might prove to be a significant challenge for the more corporate OmniCorp. An inside source stated, "It's highly unlikely that their top engineers will adapt well to our structure. There's a slight chance we could lose key talent." Despite these potential pitfalls, OmniCorp's CEO seems reasonably confident, stating that the long-term strategic benefits "will probably outweigh the short-term risks."

Questions:

1. According to the analyst, how certain is it that this acquisition will help OmniCorp?
   The analyst is very certain. He uses high-certainty phrases like "almost certainly" and "without a doubt."

2. What are the two main risks or uncertainties associated with the deal?
   The two main risks are potential scrutiny from competition regulators and the challenge of integrating the two different company cultures, which could lead to losing talent.
3. How does the CEO feel about the acquisition's chances of success? Which phrase tells you this?
   The CEO is moderately confident. The phrase "reasonably confident" indicates this feeling.

6. Role-play: The strategy meeting

> Work in small groups of 3-4. You are the management team for a company that produces electric vehicles (EVs). You must decide on your next major investment.

Your options:

- **Plan A: The 'Gigafactory'** - Invest $5 billion in building a massive new battery factory. **Potential reward:** You control your supply chain and will probably become the market leader. **Risk:** It's a huge financial commitment, and it's highly unlikely you will see a return on investment for at least five years.
- **Plan B: The 'Global Partnership'** - Partner with an established battery manufacturer in Asia. **Potential reward:** Lower initial cost and faster market entry. **Risk:** You might be dependent on your partner, and there's a slight chance they could become a competitor in the future.

Your task:

Discuss the two options. Use the phrases and grammar from this lesson to argue for your preferred plan, express your confidence, and discuss the potential risks. Try to reach a final decision as a group.

Useful language to guide your discussion:

- "I'm convinced that Plan A is our best bet because..."
- "I see your point, but we can't ignore the possibility that..."
- "Are we certain we can mitigate the risks involved with...?"
- "There's a strong possibility that a partnership will give us..."
- "It's improbable that we can fund the Gigafactory without..."

> *Teacher's note: This is a speaking activity. Monitor students for correct usage of the target language. Encourage them to use a wide range of phrases from the lesson to express different levels of certainty. The goal is fluency and application, not a single 'correct' decision.*