

Explanations

Had to and must have

Had to is the past form of *must* and refers to a past obligation.

*Sorry I'm late, I **had to post** some letters.*

The negative form is *didn't have to* and refers to an absence of obligation.

Must have refers to past certainty, (see below)

Should have and ought to have

Where **should* appears, *ought to* is also possible.

- Expectation

Should have refers to something which was supposed to happen.

*The parcel I sent you ***should have arrived** by now.*

- Criticism of an action

*You ***shouldn't have eaten** so much last night.*

- *Should have* and verbs of thinking

The past form *knew* in the example is an unreal verb form, and the *should have* form is used according to 'sequence of verb forms'. See Grammar 9.

*/ **should have thought** you knew.*

- With *be* and adjectives describing chance

*It was strange that you **should have been staying** in the same hotel last year.*

- As a polite expression of thanks on receiving a gift or a favour

*I've done the washing up for you. - Oh, you really **shouldn't have!***

The intonation should be friendly, as this is not a criticism.

Could have

- *Could have* refers to past possibility or uncertainty.

*David **could have won** the race if he had tried, (possibility/ability)*

*It **could have been** Sue, I suppose, (uncertainty)*

- *Couldn't have* is also possible for both meanings.

- *Couldn't have* can be used with comparative adjectives.

***We couldn't have been happier** in those days.*

- *Could have* can also express unwillingness.

***She could have gone** to the party with her friends, (but she didn't)*

***We couldn't have left** the dog on its own. (so we didn't)*

Could

- *Could* refers to past permission or past ability.

*When I was sixteen I **could stay** out till 11.00. (I was allowed to)*

*Mary **could swim** when she was three, (she actually did)*

- Compare:

*Mary **could have swum** when she was three, (but she didn't)*

May have and might have

- *Might have* refers to past possibility which did not happen.
*You **might have drowned!***
- *Might have* and *may have* refer to uncertainty.
*I suppose I **may have been** rather critical.*
- Both can be used in the negative to express uncertainty.
*They **might not have received** our letter yet.*
- *Might have* is used to express annoyance at someone's failure to do something. There is strong stress on the words underlined.
*You **might have told** me my trousers were split!*
- *I might have known + would* is an idiom by which the speaker expresses ironically that an action was typical of someone else.
*I **might have known** that he **would** be late.*
A: *It was Jack who broke the vase.* B: *I **might have known!***

Must have and can't have

- These refer to the speaker's certainty about a past action.
*Someone **must have taken** it. (I am sure they did)*
*You **can't have lost** it. (I am sure you didn't)*
- Both can also be used with *surely* in exclamations.
***Surely you can't have eaten** all of it!*
***Surely you must have noticed** it!*

Would not

- This expresses an unwillingness in the past.
*Everyone was angry because Sam **wouldn't turn** off the television.*

Would have

- *Would have* can refer to events in the past which did not actually happen.
*I **would have accepted** this job, but I didn't want to move house.*
- Assumptions about the past are also possible with *would have*.
A: *Someone called after you left but didn't leave a message.*
B: *That **would have been** Cathy, probably.*

Needn't have and didn't need to

- *Needn't have done* refers to an unnecessary action which was actually done.
*You **needn't have paid** all at once, (you did pay)*
Didn't need to refers to an unnecessary action which was not done.
*I **didn't need to go** to the dentist again, luckily.*

Adverbs and modals

- Adverbs such as *well, easily, obviously, really, just* are often used to emphasise modal expressions, in both present and past time.
*You could **easily** have been killed.*
*I might **well** decide to come.*
*She **obviously** must have left.*
*You couldn't **really** have managed without me.*
*I might **just** take you up on that.*

Practice

1 Underline the correct word or phrase in each sentence.

- a) That *can't have been/shouldn't have been* Nick that you saw.
- b) You *must have given/might have given* me a hand!
- c) I caught a later train because I *had to see/must have seen* a client.
- d) I suppose Bill *should have lost/might have lost* his way.
- e) I didn't refuse the cake, as it *should have been/would have been* rude.
- f) I don't know who rang, but it *could have been/must have been* Jim.
- g) It was odd that you *should have bought/would have bought* the same car.
- h) I asked them to leave but they *might not/wouldn't go*.
- i) It's a pity you didn't ask because I *can't help/could have helped* you.
- j) It's your own fault, you *can't have/shouldn't have* gone to bed so late.

2 Complete each sentence using one of the phrases from the box.

can't have	must have	shouldn't have	may not have
may have	shouldn't have	can't have	ought to have
didn't need to	shouldn't have		

- a) You and your big mouth! It was supposed to be a secret. You shouldn't have told her!
- b) The plane is late. It..... landed by now.
- c) You.....met my brother. I haven't got one!
- d) There is only one explanation. You.....left your keys on the bus.
- e) You.....heard me right. I definitely said 204525.
- f) The meat is a bit burnt. You.....cooked it for so long.
- g) I'm sorry. I accept I.....been a little bit rude.
- h) You really.....taken so much trouble over me.
- i) Was it really necessary? You.....tell the police, you know,
- j) Keep your fingers crossed! The traffic warden..... noticed the car's parking ticket has run out!

3 Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given.

- a) It wouldn't have been right to leave you to do all the work on your own.
couldn't
couldn't have left you to do all the work on your own.
- b) Perhaps they didn't notice the tyre was flat.
might
 They.....the tyre was flat.
- c) All that trouble I went to wasn't necessary in the end.
needn't
 I.....all that trouble.
- d) Apparently someone has borrowed the cassette player.
have
 Someone.....the cassette player.
- e) I'm disappointed that you didn't back me up!
might
 You.....me up!
- f) Our worrying so much was a waste of time.
needn't
 We.....so much.
- g) It's just not possible for the cat to have opened the fridge.
possibly
 The cat.....the fridge.
- h) It would have been possible for Helen to take us in her car.
could
 Helen.....us a lift.
- i) It's possible that the last person to leave didn't lock the door.
might
 The last person.....the door unlocked.
- j) School uniform wasn't compulsory at my school.
wear
 We.....school uniform at my school.

4 Complete each sentence by writing one word in each space. Contractions (can't) count as one word.

- a) I could have become a millionaire, but I decided not to.
- b) You.....have been here when Helen told the boss not to be so lazy! It was great!
- c) Peter wasn't here then, so he.....have broken your vase.
- d) I.....have bought that car, but I decided to look at a few others.
- e) If you felt lonely, you.....have given me a ring.
- f) Don't take a risk like that again! We.....have lost because of you.
- g) It's been more than a week! You.....have had some news by now!
- h) We were glad to help. We.....have just stood by and done nothing.
- i) You really.....have gone to so much trouble!
- j) I.....have thought that it was rather difficult.

5 Correct any errors in these sentences. Some sentences are correct.

- a) Surely you mustn't have forgotten already! can't
- b) Even Paul couldn't have foreseen what was coming next
- c) Frances might not have understood what you said
- d) It was funny that she should have remembered me
- e) Harry may have won the match with a bit more effort
- f) You must have told me you had already eaten
- g) Look, there's £30 in my wallet. I shouldn't have gone to the bank after all.
- h) You mustn't have been so unkind!.....
- i) I couldn't have managed without you
- j) I have no idea who it was, but I suppose it would have been Ann

6 Underline the most suitable adverb for each space.

- a) Someone obviously/currently/fortunately must have picked it up by mistake.
- b) He could really/cheerfully/easily have stolen the painting without anyone knowing.
- c) I may surely/well/dearly have made a mistake.
- d) You really/clearly/needlessly shouldn't have spent so much on my present.
- e) Bill rarely/simplely/certainly wouldn't listen to anything we said.
- f) I couldn't just/yet/already have left without saying a word.
- g) Certainly/Rarely/Surely you can't seriously believe that I am guilty!
- h) I opened the window, I greatly/surely/simplely had to get some fresh air.
- i) I still/unfortunately/surely couldn't have come to your party,
- j) How dangerous! You could still/strongly/well have been injured!

- 7 Complete each space in the text with an appropriate modal verb. Some are negative.

Dear Toshie,

Thanks for sending back the book I lent you. You (1) can't have read it already! You must be the world's fastest reader! Hope you enjoyed it.

Well, the big news is, I decided not to go to Italy to take up my job offer. Basically, moving there (2).....meant a lot of upheaval and frankly I couldn't face the hassle. Maybe I (3)..... just gone, and been a bit more adventurous, and for sure, I've got mixed feelings about it, as if part of me wanted to go. Who knows, I (4).....met the man of my dreams! But I didn't take the decision lightly. I (5).....spent several weeks thinking about nothing else. Anyway, what's done is done.

My other news concerns my Dad. You remember I was getting very worried because he'd been having dizzy spells and feeling all light-headed. Well, I (6).....worried - he's been diagnosed as suffering from low blood pressure, so he's on medication for that. The doctor said it's possible that his vegetarian diet (7).....set it off. It's a pity you weren't here! You (8).....been able to help Dad, with your interest in holistic medicine. You (9).....given him some of your aromatherapy treatments.

Anyway, hope to see you again before too long. By the way, guess who's getting married in June? Brenda! I (10).....known it would be her! It's typical; that girl has all the luck!

Bye!

Love from, Sue

→ SEE ALSO
Grammar 9: Unreal time
Grammar 11: Modals: present and future
Grammar 15: Consolidation 3