

# Modal auxiliary verbs + 'have'

## Introduction



We **should have** turned left, not right - now we're lost.

## Definition

This is a structure which is used with **modal auxiliary verbs** and with verbs which have a similar function to talk about the past, present or future. For more information on these, see **Introduction to modal verbs** and the following:

Can	Could	Should	Ought to	Might and may	Will
Shall	Would	Must	Have to	To need / need	

## Construction

**Affirmative:** subject + modal + 'have' + **past participle**  
I **should have** gone.

**Negative:** subject + modal + 'not' + 'have' + **past participle**  
I **shouldn't have** gone.

**Interrogative:** modal + subject + 'have' + **past participle**  
**Should** I **have** gone?

**Note that** this construction is not possible for all the verbs listed above or all the uses below. In particular:

1. In the affirmative, **can have** and **need have** are only used with restricting words - see below.

2. **may not have** is not contracted.
3. **may have** is not used in the interrogative.
4. **must have** is only used in the affirmative.
5. **ought to have, have to have** and **to need to have** are constructed as follows:

	Ought to have	Have to have	To need to have
<b>Affirmative</b>	subject + 'ought to' + 'have' + <b>past participle</b>  I <b>ought to</b> have done it.	subject + 'have to' + 'have' + <b>past participle</b>  He <b>has to</b> have done it.	subject + 'need to' + 'have' + <b>past participle</b>  He <b>needs to</b> have done it.
<b>Negative</b>	subject + 'ought not to' + 'have' + <b>past participle</b>  I <b>oughtn't to</b> have done it.		subject + 'do not' + 'need to' + 'have' + <b>past participle</b>  He <b>doesn't need to</b> have done it.
<b>Interrogative</b>	'ought' + subject + 'to have' + <b>past participle</b>  <b>Ought I to</b> have done it?		'do' + subject + 'need to' + 'have' + <b>past participle</b>  <b>Does he need to</b> have done it?

## Uses

This structure can be used in some of the same ways as standard **modal auxiliary verbs** in past, present and future contexts.

The main uses are listed below.

Modal	Use	Examples
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**Can have****Possibility**  
[interrogative only]How **can** you **have forgotten** again? I reminded you this morning!**Deduction**  
[rare in the affirmative form - only with words such as 'only', 'hardly' and 'never'.]I **can only have been** at the meeting for an hour but it felt like three - it was so boring.You **can't have been** cold - it was 30° and you were wearing a coat.It **can't have been** easy with four young children and a full-time job - how did you manage?

**Could have**

**Possibility in the past, present or future**

"Where was Lionel this morning - I couldn't find him?"  
"I'm not sure. He **could have been** in a meeting room."

I **could have** gone to the US to work but I took a job in London instead.

Thanks for your help last week - I **couldn't have done** it without you.

He **could have been** a doctor now but he left university to travel round the world.

I **couldn't have** worked today (if you'd asked me); I have an important appointment.

"What shall we do tomorrow?"  
"Well, we **could have** gone cycling with everyone else - the weather forecast is great. But I still haven't fixed my bike so let's go for a walk instead." [It would have been possible if I'd fixed my bike.]

**The possibility of things that didn't happen**

You **could have** started a fire when you left that cigarette there - you really should be more careful.

**Speculation about the past**

"Why isn't Antoinette here yet?"  
"I don't know but she **could have** decided to go to lunch with the client she was visiting this morning."

**Unrealistic situations**

We had a great time in Italy; I **could have** stayed there forever.

**With 'I wish'**

I **couldn't have** worked for your last boss - he was far too demanding.

**As 'would be able to' in conditional sentences**

I wish we **could have** had a meeting last week; the problem is just getting worse.

If you'd asked me, I **could have** helped you.

**Reproach**

You **could have** reminded me about the meeting! I was 10 minutes late.

<b>Should have</b>	<b>Advice in retrospect</b>	<b>You <i>should have</i> gone by train.</b>  <b>You <i>shouldn't have</i> married him.</b>
	<b>The best or right thing to have done in the past - maybe some regret</b>	<b>We <i>should have</i> discussed this with the client before making a decision.</b>  <b><i>Should I have</i> ordered some more of these?</b>  <b>I <i>shouldn't have</i> shouted at you earlier - I'm really sorry.</b>
	<b>Expectation</b>	<b>She worked hard and she <i>should have</i> passed her exam - I don't know why she didn't.</b>  <b>It <i>should have</i> been delivered yesterday - I'm not happy with their service.</b>
	<b>Deduction</b>	<b>He <i>should have</i> finished lunch by now - I'll try calling him again.</b>  <b>Don't worry. It's not too late to change the order - they <i>shouldn't have</i> dispatched it yet.</b>
	<b>Regret in the present</b>	<b>I <i>should have been</i> at home now but I'm still stuck at work.</b>  "Do you think the food here will be OK?" "Mmm, I <i>should have</i> thought so. Let's try it."
	<b>Opinion - more tentative than 'think'</b>	<b>I <i>shouldn't have</i> thought it would rain today.</b>
<b>Ought to have</b> [rare in negative and interrogative]	<b>Advice in retrospect [less common than <i>should have</i>]</b>	<b>You <i>ought to have</i> gone by train.</b>
	<b>The best or right thing to do</b>	<b>He <i>ought to have</i> worn a helmet.</b>
	<b>Expectation</b>	<b>They <i>ought to have</i> arrived by now.</b>

<p><b>Might/may have</b></p>	<p><b>Possibility in the past</b> [<b>may have</b> is not possible in the interrogative]</p> <p><b>Reproach</b></p> <p><b>To highlight a contrast between positive and negative</b></p>	<p>The report <b>may have</b> been on the printer - I forgot to look there.</p> <p>Susan wasn't in her office but she <b>might have</b> been in the canteen.</p> <p>You <b>might have</b> helped me but you just stood there watching!</p> <p>She <b>might/may not have</b> been punctual but she was very efficient. [=Although she wasn't punctual, she was very efficient.]</p> <p>She <b>might/may have</b> been punctual but she wasn't very efficient.</p>
<p><b>Will have</b></p>	<p><b>Deduction</b></p> <p><b>Future actions and states</b></p>	<p>"Who was Chantal talking to on the phone?" "It'<b>ll have</b> been her boyfriend. He calls her every afternoon."</p> <p>She'<b>ll have</b> finished by now.</p> <p>See <b>future perfect</b>.</p>
<p><b>Shall have</b></p>	<p><b>Future actions and states</b></p>	<p>See <b>future perfect</b>.</p>
<p><b>Would have</b></p>	<p><b>Opinion</b></p> <p><b>Conditionals</b></p> <p><b>Wishing</b></p> <p><b>Hypothetical situations</b></p> <p><b>Deduction in the past, especially when based on historical evidence</b></p>	<p>I <b>wouldn't have</b> thought you'd like Japanese food - that surprises me.</p> <p>I'<b>d have</b> helped you if you'd asked.</p> <p>I <b>wouldn't have</b> been as successful now if I hadn't worked so hard.</p> <p>I'<b>d have</b> loved to live in the countryside when I was young but I grew up in the city.</p> <p>The traffic was terrible this morning - it <b>would have</b> been quicker to walk.</p> <p>In the last century, more people <b>would have</b> lived in this region than now.</p>

<b>Must have</b>	<b>Deduction</b>	"Who was Chantal talking to on the phone?" "It <b>must have</b> been her boyfriend. He calls her every afternoon."
<b>Have to have</b>	<b>Necessity [see future perfect and note below]</b>  <b>Deduction</b>	We <b>have to have</b> finished this by tomorrow.  "Who was Chantal talking to on the phone?" "It <b>has to have</b> been her boyfriend. He calls her every afternoon."
<b>To need</b>	<b>Necessity [see future perfect and note below]</b>	I <b>need to have</b> finished this by tomorrow.  To reach our targets, we <b>don't need to have</b> sold as many cars by the end of this month as last month.  <b>Do we need to have</b> sent the invitations by Thursday or Friday?
<b>Need</b>	<b>Necessity [rare in the affirmative - only with words such as 'only', 'hardly' and 'never'.]</b>	I <b>need only have</b> stayed for an extra ten minutes but I decided not to.  They <b>needn't have</b> spent so much money - what a waste!  <b>Need we have</b> booked the biggest meeting room? We're only expecting three people.

## 'Could have' or 'may/might have'

These are both used to talk about possibility but in different ways.

They **could have** played golf yesterday.

= all the right conditions existed but they didn't play.

They **might/might not have** played golf yesterday.

= we don't know if they played or not.

They **couldn't have** played golf yesterday.

= something prevented them and they didn't play.

# Present continuous

Some of these can be followed by the present continuous for some uses. For example:

## 1. Possibility

He **could have** been having lunch.

He **couldn't have** been having lunch.

I **could have** been relaxing at home now but I'm still at work.

He **might/may have** been having lunch.

## 2. Deduction

He **can't have** been having lunch - the canteen was closed.

He **should have** been having lunch.

He **must have** been having lunch.

He'll **have** been having lunch.

He **has to** have been having lunch.

## 3. Reproach

You **could have** been helping me instead of watching TV.

## 4. Regret

I **should have** been relaxing at home now but I'm still at work.

## 5. Advice

You **should have** been learning Japanese, not English.

You **ought to have** been learning Japanese, not English.

## 6. The best or right thing

We **should have** been spending less money on new computers.

We **ought to have** been spending less money on new computers.

## 7. Expectation

They **should have** been working on the installation yesterday.

They **ought to have** been working on the installation yesterday.

## 8. Deduction

"I called Kerry but she didn't answer."

"She'd **have** been having lunch, I expect."

## 'To need' and 'need'

Note the following different meanings:

I **needn't have** bought so much cheese. [I bought some but when I got home, I discovered I already had a lot in the fridge - I didn't know it was there.]

I went shopping but I **didn't need** to buy chocolate because I already had some. [I didn't buy any because I knew I had some.]

## The future perfect

Note that this structure has the same construction as the **future perfect simple**.

We'll **have** finished this by Friday.

As well as 'will' and 'shall', we can use some modal verbs for this tense.

We **might** have finished this by Friday. [possibility]

We **should** have finished this by Friday. [expectation]

We **ought to** have finished this by Friday. [expectation]

We **need to** have finished this by Friday. [necessity]

We **have to** have finished this by Friday. [necessity/obligation]

## Examples



He **can never have** had dance lessons!



"I've postponed next week's meeting because I haven't had time to prepare for it." "Well, we **couldn't have** had it next week anyway because too many of us will be on holiday." "Oh yes, I forgot about that."



My train **ought to have** been here by now but there was a delay, so I'll be late - sorry. I **should have** driven instead.



I miss working at the bank. It **might not have** been the most exciting job but I had great colleagues.



I'm sorry Akira isn't here yet - he'll **have** been held up in the rush hour traffic.



"It's not bad but I'd **have** done this part differently." "OK, I'll change it."



It **must have** been raining.



"What do you think? Remember we **have to have** decided this before we meet them again."



He **needn't have** worried - of course she said yes.

## Some common expressions

Expression	Meaning	Example
'may well have' + <b>past participle</b>	Someone probably did something but doesn't remember.	"You said you wouldn't be here tonight." "I may well have said that but here I am anyway!"
'could have' + 'sworn'	To have been sure about something.	I can't find my keys. I could've sworn I left them on my desk but they're not there.
'You should have' + <b>past participle</b>	'I wish you had...' There's a suggestion that someone has missed something good.	You should have seen her reaction when I told her the news!
'Who'd have thought it?'	Expresses great surprise.	"Tom asked Liz to marry him." "I know - who'd have thought it!"
'It could have been worse.'	'We shouldn't worry - it wasn't too bad.'	"There was a train strike last week and half the team couldn't get to work." "Oh well, it could have been worse - this isn't our busiest month."
'might have known'	Expresses a lack of surprise.	"Who ate the last cake?" "It was Lucie." "Ah...I might have known it!"

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