

14 Modals (2): modal perfect

Modal + perfect infinitive (*have* + past participle)

You **must have felt** great when you got your exam results.

You **shouldn't have spoken** to her like that.

You drove without a licence? You **might have killed** someone!

Paul **might have forgotten** our date.

Could you **have left** your keys at the hotel?

must, can't, couldn't

We use *must/can't* + perfect infinitive to talk about guesses about the past that we are (almost) sure of. Often, we are (almost) sure because we have some evidence.

There's John's coat. He **must have forgotten** it.
Angie hates sweet things. She **couldn't/can't have eaten** the cake that was in the fridge.

should, ought to

We use *should/ought to* + perfect infinitive to criticise people (or ourselves) for things they did/didn't do.

Oh, no! I **should have called** Tony at six and I forgot! (I didn't call him.)

We **shouldn't have left** the dog at home on its own. (But we did.)

You really **ought to have invited** Maria to your wedding. (But you didn't.)

You **ought not to have copied** Rita's homework. (But you did.)

may, might, could

We use *may/might/could* + perfect infinitive to talk about things that possibly happened/didn't happen in the past.

How does Lisa know about the party? I suppose Jane **may/might/could have told** her.

The thieves **might have escaped** through the window.

Peter **might not have known** about the meeting.

! BE CAREFUL!

Might/could + perfect infinitive can also be used to talk about an unreal (hypothetical) possibility, something that was a possibility in the past but which we know didn't happen.

You **might have hurt** yourself jumping off the wall like that!

Don't run across the road again! You **could have been killed**!

The modal perfect continuous can be formed using modal + *have + been + -ing* to refer to actions in progress at a point in the past or to emphasise the duration of an action.

You **can't have been doing** your homework all this time! I don't believe you!

Darren **must have been sleeping** when we called him yesterday.

✓ QUICK CHECK

- 1 When does the modal perfect refer to?
the past/the present/the future
- 2 Which of these is used to criticise other people?
can't have done/should have done/must have done
- 3 Which modal is missing?
There's John. He _____ have got back from Canada.

The unreal past

The past simple is not always used to refer to the past. It can be used to refer to the present, or even the future, when it is used after certain phrases or in certain types of sentence. This is called the *unreal past*.

We use the unreal past ...

- in hypothetical conditional sentences
If I **won** the lottery, I'd buy a new house. (see page 185)
- to talk about unlikely hypothetical situations using *suppose* or *imagine*
Imagine you **got** an A in the exam.
How would you feel?
- to talk about present wishes
I wish I **had** more money. (see page 196)
- after *would rather* when we are talking about things we want/don't want other people to do
I'd rather you **came** at six tomorrow.
- after *it's (high or about) time*
Don't you think it's about time we **left**?
- in polite requests and questions
I'm sorry, Sir. **Did** you want something?

✓ QUICK CHECK

- 1 Does the past simple always refer to the past?
yes/no
- 2 Which is correct?
I'd rather you don't do that./I'd rather you didn't do that.
- 3 *Imagine you won the lottery.* Does the speaker think this is likely or unlikely?
likely/unlikely