

English B2 · Past modals

Upper-intermediate English for Chinese speakers; classroom examples, not official exam items.

The detective's time machine

The modal is a detective, and have + participle is its time machine: must have deduces, can't have rejects, might have shrugs.

The deduction scale

Modal	The detective says	Example
must have	I'm sure it happened	She must have studied. The test was perfect.
may/might/could have	possibly it happened	He might have forgotten. He does that.
can't have	it surely didn't happen	They can't have left — the lights are on.

Use the evidence

The opposite of must have is can't have — never mustn't have.

Your turn: the deduction

Your turn

The ashtray is clean. You ____ smoked here.

- A. mustn't have
- B. can't have
- C. shouldn't have
- D. don't have to have

should have: the blame tense

should have — the right thing didn't happen

You should have studied. The test noticed.

You should have called. We waited.

shouldn't have — the wrong thing did

You shouldn't have eaten my noodles. I noticed.

I shouldn't have watched that last episode.

Your turn: blame or deduction

Your turn

The phone bill proves it: I ____ called her.

- ☐ A. should have
- ☐ B. must have
- ☐ C. can't have
- ☐ D. would have

Never should of

The "uhv" sound

should've, could've, would've — said fast, written in full.

should of — never. The detective weeps.

Your turn: the written form

Your turn

Which is correct in writing?

- A. You should of called.
- B. You should have called.
- C. You should've called it of.
- D. You should had called.

Say it aloud

The teacher is smiling. She must have read our essays.



Or she can't have read them yet.

Both are possible; one is hopeful.



He can't have finished the homework —
the ink is still wet from the pen shop.



I should have slept earlier. I shouldn't
have watched that last episode.

Check yourself

- He must have missed the bus — the detective is sure.
- They can't have left already — the detective rejects.
- You should have called — the blame tense.
- I could have won — unused ability; the trophy wasn't there.