

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Learning Objectives

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify the different past modal verbs.
- Use modal verbs to speculate possibilities in the past.
- Use modal verbs to express capabilities in the past.
- Use modal verbs to talk about regrets.
- Use modal verbs to convey certainties in the past.
- Use proper past modal verbs in situational sentences.

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Past modal verbs are **must**, **could**, **might** and **may** with **have + past participle** to talk about **suppositions** or **speculations** regarding a past event. This is called the modal perfect tense.

- ➔ The cat has escaped – I **must have** left the window open by mistake.
- ➔ Claire has left her handbag here – she **must have** left in a rush.
- ➔ I don't know why he did that, he **could have** hurt himself.



Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

“May” and “might” are actually very similar although some people say that the past modal form of “may” has a slightly higher level of probability.

We use the past modal verb form of MAY and MIGHT to speculate about the past



In the example, the woman suggests that he is late because he missed the train (in the past):

➔ MAN: What isn't John at work yet?

WOMAN: I don't know, he **might have** missed the train.

The woman could also use the past modal verb form of “may” and it would have the same meaning i.e. a speculation about what happened to John.

➔ I don't know, he **may have** missed the train.

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Use **MIGHT** to talk about something in the past which didn't happen

Remember if we are talking about something that didn't happen, a possibility in the past we use "might have" and not "may have". We can use *might have* or *may have* + past participle when we think it's possible that something happened.



In the example, the woman suggests that if she had been ran over the car which was very fast she could have been killed:

➔ The car came around the corner so fast that **I might have been** killed.

Other examples:

➔ It's useless to dwell on what might've been.

➔ When Darian turned to find Jenn gone, he knew it was the only reason he hadn't done something they both might've regretted.

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

For speculations about a continuous action in the past we can use the modal perfect continuous tense:
MAY/MIGHT + HAVE BEEN + ING FORM OF VERB

➔ He might have been drinking and driving.
They don't know why he crashed the car but I've heard that he may have been drinking and driving

Other examples:

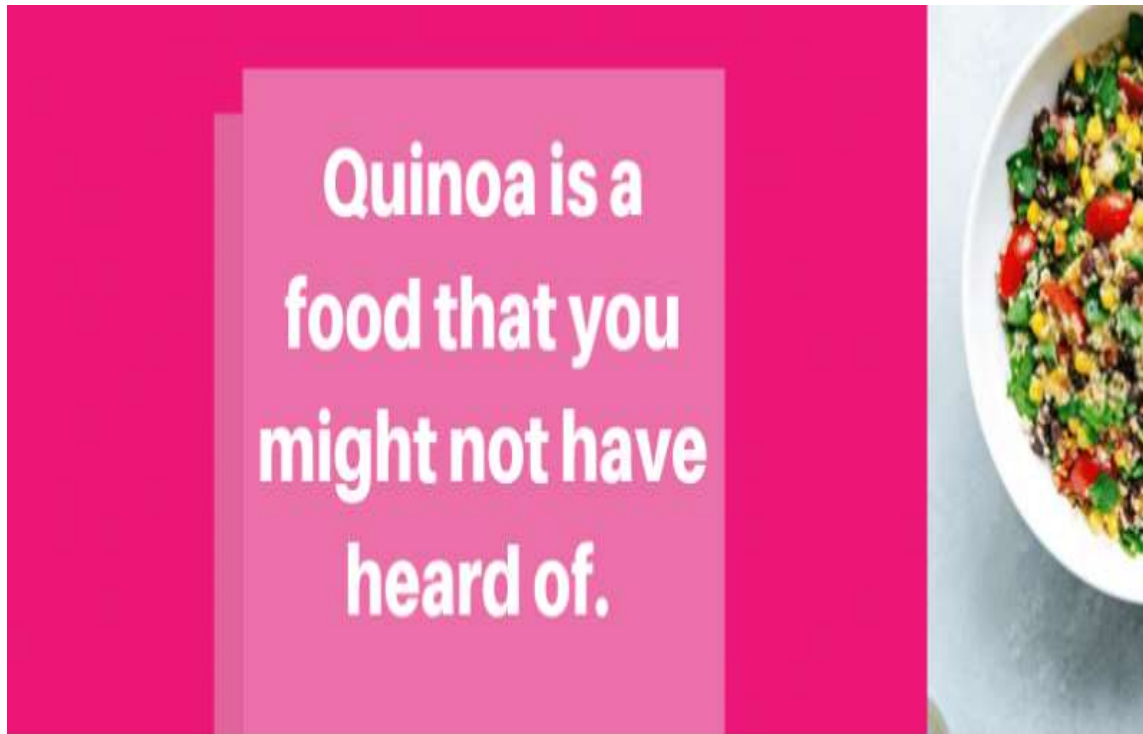
➔ Mr. Smith may have been spending all his fortune on casinos hence the bankruptcy.



Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

To form a negative past modal verb sentence simply insert the word “NOT” in between the modal verb and the word “have”:

MAY/MIGHT + NOT + HAVE BEEN + PAST PARTICIPLE



➔ Quinoa is a food that you might not have heard of.

The speaker speculates that since Quinoa is not a common dish, the listener might not have heard of it.

Other examples:

➔ Gina failed her exams again. She might not have studied enough.

➔ Your hair is extremely long. You may have not considered having it cut in years.

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

If you want to politely ask somebody as you speculate about what may have happened, you use “Do you think you may/might have + past participle”:

DO YOU THINK YOU + MAY/MIGHT + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE



- ➔ Do you think you may have added too much water to your plant? It looks quite yellow.
- ➔ Do you think she might have forgotten about the appointment? It's 9:20.
- ➔ You've been looking all morning, do you think you might have lost your keys?
- ➔ Gina failed her exams, do you think she may have forgotten to prepare for it?

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Speculate about the past using the following topic cues.



Why a kid becomes a bully



A woman rejects a man confession of love



A man sprained his ankle



A lady discovers a bruise on her leg



A teenager loses her appetite



An employee is euphoric

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

The past modal form with **COULD** is used to talk about **CAPABILITY in the past**

When we talk about ability or capability in the past we can use a form of the conditional perfect. Use **could have** to talk about possibilities if something had been different in the past.

COULD + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE



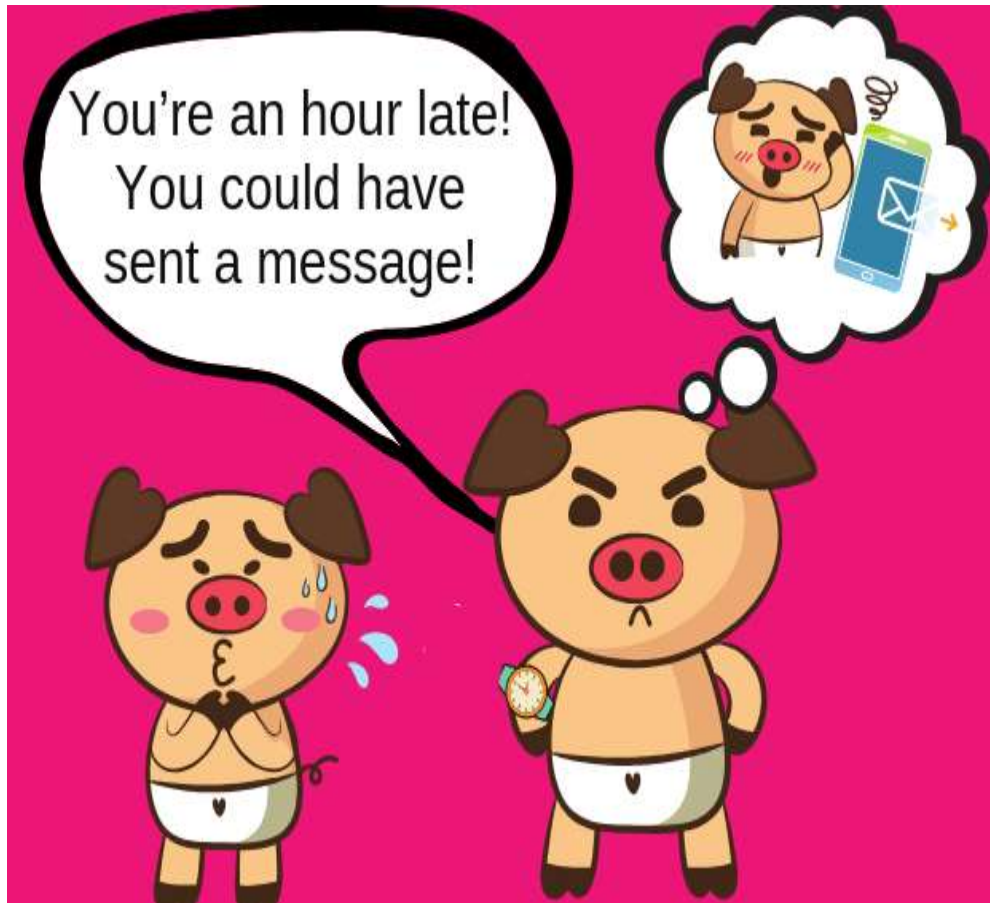
In the example, she regrets the fact that she can no longer be a professional dancer because of breaking her leg at the age of 17.

Here are some examples of **could** as a past modal verb for capability in the past:

- ➔ You could have passed your exams if you had studied as I told you!
- ➔ He could have asked me to help him build the wardrobe, instead of spending all day doing it by himself.
- ➔ If I had gone to college, I **could have** gotten a better job.

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

We use “could have” to offer gentle criticism



If a native English speaker is slightly annoyed with you for not mentioning something important, they might say to you:

- ➔ You could have sent a message at least!
- ➔ She didn't warn me about the visit, she could have mentioned that they were coming!
- ➔ I could have just watch Netflix instead of cooking if you had told me you're eating out with your friends!

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Whereas “may/might not have...” express that something possibly did not happen in the past, “could not have ...” means that something definitely did not happen. It was impossible.

COULD (+NOT) + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE

The speaker express that it is impossible for the kid to have done better than perfecting the exam

Other examples:

- ➔ Even if I had studied for 1000 hours I could not have passed that exam! It was too difficult – impossible!
- ➔ She couldn't have fallen if there had been a safety rail on the platform.



Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

The past modal form with **MUST** is used to talk about what you believe is certain about the past

This can be used in situations where you are very sure about your deductions and believe there are no other possibilities. It has a similar structure to “might/may have” but with much stronger certainty.

The speaker is certain that the bicycle disappeared because it had been stolen.

Other examples:

- ➔ Karen is late – she must have missed her train. (no other explanation is possible)
- ➔ I don't have my keys – I must have left them in the kitchen.
- ➔ I must have been at the movie when you came to my house yesterday at 8 p.m



Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Talk about certainties in the past related to the following photos.



Why a kid becomes a bully



A woman rejects a man confession of love



A man sprained his ankle



A lady discovers a bruise on her leg



A teenager loses her appetite



An employee is euphoric

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Use “couldn’t have” for negative certainty in the past, not “mustn’t have”

As mentioned before, if we are certain something was impossible or did not happen in the past we must use the past modal verb “couldn’t have,” becausee “mustn’t have” cannot be used with this meaning. Here is an extra example:



Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Talk about things that could/couldn't have happened if



you had chosen a
different career



had been from a
different country



had/hadn't been an
only child



had gone to a
different school



had been born the
opposite gender



your own could/couldn't
have been

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

We use the **SHOULD** in the past modal verb form to talk about past mistakes and make recommendations / strongly criticize past actions.

We can use this past modal when commenting on past errors or to criticize or make suggestions about past behavior. Using “should” to criticize is stronger than using “could” and more direct.

SHOULD + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE



The speaker insists that the listener is late for 2 hours.
Other examples:

- ➔ He should have gone to the doctor immediately instead of waiting.
- ➔ She should have added more salt to the food, it tastes bland.
- ➔ I should have left my house earlier.

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Use “shouldn’t have” in negative sentences expressing past criticism

You can also use this if you regret an argument.

SHOULD + NOT + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE



The speaker is expressing her mistake of making a wrong turn.

Other examples:

- ➔ You shouldn't have said that to her, now she's upset.
- ➔ He shouldn't have gone to work, he was very ill.
- ➔ I shouldn't have said that, I'm sorry.
- ➔ You shouldn't have screamed at her. Apologize to her quickly!

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

We are all busy. Life happens. There's always something to distract us from getting around to certain things we know we should do.

The question is, are you going to change anything this afternoon or tomorrow in light of this list? Or are you going to go back to your busy life?

Forbes enlisted the **25 Biggest Regrets In Life**. Which ones are yours? What should or shouldn't have done to change what had happened in the past?

Read the full article here:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/ericjackson/2012/10/18/the-25-biggest-regrets-in-life-what-are-yours/?sh=78cef6116488>

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

The past modal form with **WOULD** is used to talk about past possibilities and their (unreal) consequences

“Would have” structures are a past conditional (often used together with “if” to form the 2nd conditional), which describe not only a past possibility but also its past potential consequences. Often these consequences can no longer happen in the present, meaning they are describing situations that are unreal or unlikely/impossible to occur now.

WOULD + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE



The speaker insists that the listener is late for 2 hours.

Other examples:

- ➔ “If we had arrived earlier, we would have caught our flight.
- ➔ I would have gone to the party, but I was tired.
- ➔ If I had known they were vegetarians, I would have made a salad.

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

“wouldn't have” is used for expressing negative past possibilities

WOULD + NOT + HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE



The speaker imagines that if the driver hadn't drunk so much the car wouldn't have crashed.

Other examples:

- ➔ She wouldn't have left, if they hadn't been so rude to her.
- ➔ We wouldn't have chosen this hotel, if we had read the reviews.
- ➔ If I had brought my umbrella, I wouldn't have gotten wet in the rain.

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Complete the sentence with the correct past modal.

1. John _____ gone on holiday. I saw him this morning downtown.
2. Nobody answered the phone at the clinic. It _____ closed early.
3. I _____ revised more for my exams. I think I'll fail!
4. Sarah looks really pleased with herself. She _____ passed her driving test this morning.
5. I didn't know you were going to Phil's party yesterday. You _____ told me!
6. I can't believe Jim hasn't arrived yet. He _____ caught the wrong train.
7. I can't believe Jim hasn't arrived yet. He _____ caught the correct train.
8. Don't lie to me that you were ill yesterday. You _____ been ill - Don said you were at the ice hockey match last night.
9. I don't know where they went on holiday but they bought Euros before they left so they _____ gone to France or Germany.
10. His number was busy all night - he _____ been on the phone continuously for hours.
11. It _____ been Mickey I saw at the party. He didn't recognize me at all.

Lesson 10. Past Modal Verbs

Fill in the blanks with the correct forms of modal verbs and main verbs.

1. I _____ (buy) bread but I didn't know we needed it. (past possibility)
2. We _____ (invite) so many people to our party! I'm worried that we won't have enough room for everyone. (past negative advice / regret)
3. I _____ (start) saving money years ago! (past advice / regret)
4. We _____ (join) you at the restaurant, but we couldn't get a babysitter. (past willingness)
5. The weather _____ (be) any worse! (past negative possibility)
6. I _____ (arrive) on time, even if I'd left earlier.
There were dreadful traffic jams all the way. (past negative possibility)
7. They _____ (win) the football match, but John hurt his ankle. (past possibility)
8. Amanda _____ (finish) the work, but she felt ill and had to go home. (past willingness)
9. Lucy _____ (left) earlier. She missed her flight. (past advice / regret)
10. We _____ (finish) the game, even if we'd wanted to. It was raining very hard and we had to stop. (past negative possibility)
11. I _____ (eat) so much chocolate! I feel sick! (past negative advice / regret)
12. Luke _____ (pass) the exam if he'd studied a bit more. (past possibility)
13. John _____ (call) Amy, but he didn't have her number. (past willingness)
14. You _____ (be) rude to him. He's going to be really angry now. (past negative advice / regret)
15. She _____ (come) to the restaurant if she'd left work earlier. (past possibility)

The End