



GRAMMAR: MODAL VERBS IN THE PAST

- 1) Generally speaking, modals in the past have the following **form**:
modal verb + have + past participle

Example:

Present: You **should see** a doctor.

Past: You **should have seen** a doctor

- 2) **Except** for modals that express obligation, ability and lack of necessity:

Obligation:

Present = I **must/ have to work** hard/ Past = I **had to work** hard.

Ability:

Present = I **can run** fast./ Past = I **could run** fast when I was young.

Lack of necessity:

Present = You **don't have to/ needn't take** your umbrella./ Past = You **didn't have to / didn't need to take** your umbrella.

- 3) Modal verbs **chart**

Usage	Modals in the present	Modals in the past
obligation	You must/ have to stop when the traffic lights are red.	You had to stop .
lack of obligation or necessity	You don't have to/ needn't buy any tomatoes. There are plenty in the fridge.	You didn't have to/ didn't need to buy any tomatoes.
certainty	Affirmative : He has a Rolls Royce. He must be very rich.	He must have been rich. He had a big house and an expensive car.

	Negative: He can't be American. His English is terrible.	He can't have written that poem. He was illiterate.
ability	I can run fast.	I could run fast. Now I am old.
prohibition	You mustn't smoke here.	You mustn't have smoked here.
permission	Can I go out?	She could drive her father's car when she was only 15.
possibility	I may/ can/ might/ could rain today. It's cloudy.	I guess it may/ can/ might/ could have been Lacy on the phone
advice	You should see a doctor.	You should have seen a doctor.

WORKSHEET

Fill in the gaps with a suitable modal verb in the present or past form. The forms can be affirmative or negative. Write which the use of the modal verb is in each sentence.

- He _____ (be) French. His French is terrible.
- The kids are calm today. They _____ (be) tired.
- Although Leila was very hungry, she didn't eat very much. She _____ (like) the food.
- The phone is ringing. It _____ (be) Mary. She promised she would call.
- John had a terrible accident. He _____ (stop) when the traffic lights were red.
- I don't know why she got so many bad grades. She _____ (be) lazy studying.
- I didn't know you needed help. You _____ (tell) me.
- I am so tired. I need some rest. I think I _____ (take) a week off.
- He _____ (run) so fast when he was young.
- Nancy _____ (go) on holiday. I have just met her in the street.