

**Namaste English**  
**Mastery Course on Modal Verbs**  
**By Santosh Sir**

# **Modal Verbs Day 9**

## **Introduction to the course**

- ❖ It's important that we have the knowledge of modal verbs along with the knowledge of tenses. So, this time we have brought a mastery course for you on Modal Verbs.
- ❖ In this course you will get mastery on Modal Verbs.
- ❖ You will get to know that which modal verb to be used appropriately.
- ❖ Your spoken part will improve.
- ❖ Your written part will be rhetoric, after you have attended all the sessions of this course.

## Daily Life usage of Modal of Most Common modal verbs with 'Have'

Today we will take a look at the **modal verbs** *could have*, *would have* and *should have*. These past tense modals are useful for expressing your present feelings about a past decision (or other action).

*Could have*, *would have*, and *should have* are sometimes called “modals of lost opportunities.” They work like a grammatical time machine. The simple past just tells what happened. Past modals tell what *could have*, *would have*, and *should have* happened.

To form these past modals, use *could*, *would*, or *should* followed by *have*, followed by a past participle verb. Use *have* for all pronouns; never use *has* or *had* to form a past modal. Here are some examples:

She *could have gone* to any college she wanted to.

I *would have gone* to the party, but I was tired.

He *should have told* the truth about what he saw.

Each of these modals has a slightly different meaning. We'll look at each of them using examples from movies and popular songs.

### Could have

We'll start with *could have*. *Could have* means that something was possible in the past, but it did not happen.

I *could have gone* directly to college, but I decided to travel for a year.

Listen to this song by 1980s teen pop star Tiffany. The singer is thinking about past possibilities with her lost love.

Could have been so beautiful

Could have been so right

Could have been my lover

Every day of my life

Native speakers often do not pronounce their past tense modals as clearly as Tiffany. *Could have been* usually gets contracted to *could've been* or even *coulda' been*.

Listen to Marlon Brando in the classic film “On the Waterfront.” Brando’s character, Terry Malloy, was once a promising young boxer.

“You don’t understand. I coulda’ had class. I coulda’ been a **contender**. I could have been somebody—instead of a **bum**.”

To form the negative with these modals, use *not* between *could* and *have*. *Could not have* means that something was impossible in the past. For example:

She could not have been on that flight because I just saw her at work.

Defense lawyers often use *could not have* to argue for a client’s innocence.

A popular **compliment** in English is, “I couldn’t have said it better myself.” You can say this when you like the way somebody said something. It is a way to show strong agreement.

## Would have

Let’s move on to *would have*.

*Would have* is a bit more difficult because it has two common structures. The first is with *but*. *I would have A, but I had to B*. Use this structure to show that you wanted to do something in the past, but you could not.

I would have called, but there was no phone service.

I would have loaned you the money, but I didn’t have any.

*Would have* also forms the result clause of a past unreal conditional. For example:

If I had known they were **vegetarians**, I would have made a salad.

You can always reverse conditional sentences. If *would have* comes first, there is no comma.

I would have made a salad if I had known they were vegetarians.

Past unreal conditionals are very complex; you can learn more about them on a [previous episode of Everyday Grammar](#).

Usually, *would have* suggests a bad feeling about the past. But not always. In this song by the band Chicago, the singer is surprisingly happy that his ex-girlfriend cheated on him. Her **infidelity** gave him the opportunity to meet someone else. And that someone else turned out to be his true love.

If she would have been faithful

If she could have been true

Then I wouldn'ta been cheated

I would never know real love

I would've missed out on you

## Should have

Finally, let's look at *should have*. *Should have* means that something did not happen, but we wish it had happened. We use *should have* to talk about past mistakes. A worried mother might say:

"I was so worried about you. You should have called!"

*Should have* is common in **apologies**. For example:

I'm sorry that I'm late for work. I should have woken up earlier.

You might remember Lieutenant Dan in the movie *Forrest Gump*. In the movie, Dan loses both of his legs in the Vietnam War. He would have died, but Forrest saved him.

Listen for *should have* as Dan **confronts** Forrest.

“You listen to me. We all have a destiny. Nothing just happens. It’s all part of a plan. I *should have died* out there with my men. But now I’m nothing but a **cripple**!”

*Should have* can be used in a light-hearted way. In this song, country singer Toby Keith imagines how exciting his life would be if he had chosen to be a cowboy.

*I should’ve been* a cowboy

*I should’ve learned* to rope and ride

I couldn’t have said it better myself.

As you can see, these modals of lost opportunities offer a colorful way to talk about past choices.

## Might Have

*"A rabbit might have eaten all my flowers."*

Let's take a look at that form.

might (modal) + have + eaten (past participle verb)

We use the modal might (you can also use may or could) because they show that we are not 100% sure about what happened. We are speculating about past events (guessing what we think happened). We then must use have followed by a past participle verb. We use 'must' when we have a stronger opinion about what happened.

Here are some other examples:

*"My neighbour could have stolen the flowers"*

*"The wind might have blown them all away."*

	positive	negative	question
Could have	<b>I could have been a cowboy.</b>  <i>Possible but didn't happen</i>	<b>He couldn't have known about the story.</b> <i>Impossible in the past</i>	<b>Could/couldn't he have known about the story before it was published?</b>
Would have (used with past unreal conditional)	<b>I would have told you if I had known.</b> <i>Regret about the past</i>	<b>He wouldn't have won the election without her support.</b> <i>Alternate outcome</i>	<b>Would/wouldn't you have won without her support?</b>
Should have	<b>I should have listened to my mother.</b> <i>sorry about past decision</i>	<b>He shouldn't have told her anything!</b> <i>Sorry about past decision</i>	<b>Should/shouldn't you have called first?</b>

VOA

## About the Instructor

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Santosh Sir has wide teaching experience of more than 5 years in English Language and Literature. He is an ex-faculty of Exam Mitra Institute, Delhi. Students have known him as a teacher who makes English Learning easy by his short methods and tricks.

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