

Should, ought to and had better

- A** We can often use either **should** or **ought to** to talk about obligations and recommendations (e.g. You **should/ought to** finish your homework before you go out) and probability (e.g. It **should/ought to** be ready by now) although in general **should** is used more frequently. **Ought to** is used particularly in speech and most often to talk about obligation rather than probability.

Notice also the following details –

- ☆ we prefer **should** when we say what an outside authority recommends:
 - The manual says that the computer **should** be disconnected from the power supply before the cover is removed. (*rather than ...ought to be disconnected...*)
 - ☆ we use **should** (or **would**), not **ought to**, when we give advice with I...:
 - I **should** leave early tomorrow, if I were you. (*or I would leave...; or I'd leave...*)
 - ☆ we prefer **should** in questions, particularly *wh*-questions:
 - What **should** I do if I have any problems? □ **Should** I ring you at home?
- Some people might use 'What **ought** I to do...?' and 'Ought I to...?', but this is rather formal.

Note that when we conclude, on the basis of some evidence we have, that something is certain or very likely we can use **must** (see Unit 18) but not **should/ought to**:

- It's the third time she's been skating this week. She **must** really enjoy it.

- B** We use **should/ought to + have + past participle** to talk about something that didn't happen in the past and we are sorry that it didn't:

- We **should/ought to have waited** for the rain to stop. (I'm sorry we didn't)

We often use this pattern to indicate some regret or criticism and the negative forms **shouldn't/oughtn't to have** are almost always used in this way.

We also use **should/ought to + have + past participle** to talk about an expectation that something happened, has happened, or will happen:

- If the flight was on time, he **should/ought to have arrived** in Jakarta early this morning.
- The builders **should/ought to have finished** by the end of the week.

- C** We can use **should** in questions that are offers or that request confirmation or advice:

- **Should** I phone for a taxi for you? □ **Who should** I pass the message to?

Note that in sentences like these we can also use **shall** with a very similar meaning, and **ought to** is also used in questions, although less commonly.

Compare the use of **shall** and **should** in sentences such as the following, where 'I shall' means 'I intend to' and 'I should' means 'I ought to':

- I **shall** read the script on the train tomorrow. (*or I'll read...*)
- I **should** read the script on the train tomorrow but I know that I'll be too tired.

- D** We can use **had better** instead of **should/ought to**, especially in spoken English, to say that we think it is a good idea to do something:

- If you're not well, you'd **better** ask Ann to go instead. (*or... you should/ought to...*)

although we don't use it to talk about the past or to make general comments:

- You **should/ought to have caught** a later train. (*not* You had better have caught...)
- I don't think parents **should/ought to give** their children sweets. (*not* I don't think parents had better give their children sweets.)

We prefer **had better** if we want to express particular urgency and in demands and threats:

- There's someone moving about downsrs. We'd **better** call the police, quickly.

Notice that the negative form is **had better not**. In question forms the subject comes after **had**, although many people avoid questions with **had better**:

- He'd **better not** be late again or he'll be in trouble.
- **Hadn't we better** get a taxi? (*or Shouldn't we get...?*)

Grammar review: *should* and *ought to* → C29–C32

20.1 Complete these sentences with **should/ought to + infinitive (active)**, **should/ought to be + past participle (passive)**, or **should/ought to have + past participle** using each of these verbs once only. (A & B)

answer arrive be go put remove resign send take visit wear win

- 1 He is running so well at the moment that Thomas _____ the 800 metres easily.
- 2 Where _____ I _____ the cheese? In the fridge?
- 3 The tickets _____ a couple of weeks before we go on holiday.
- 4 Payment for the full amount _____ with this application form.
- 5 You really _____ the exhibition before it closes. There are some wonderful paintings.
- 6 Don told us not to take this road. We _____ his advice.
- 7 All packaging _____ before switching on the printer for the first time.
- 8 It's important to look smart at the interview. You _____ a suit.
- 9 There are many people who think the President _____ years ago.
- 10 _____ we _____ the questions in English or in French?
- 11 If you want my advice, I _____ by train rather than car.
- 12 I can't imagine what's happened to Kathy. She _____ here by now.

20.2 In which sentences can you use **should** or **must** and in which can you only use **must**? Where both are possible, consider the difference between **should** and **must**. (A)

- 1 A timetable _____ be set for withdrawing the army.
- 2 Les isn't home yet. He _____ have been held up at work.
- 3 'I wonder how old Mike is?' 'Well, he went to school with my mother, so he _____ be well over 50.'
- 4 If you smell gas, you _____ phone the emergency number.
- 5 You _____ try to visit Nepal – it's a beautiful country.
- 6 'I know I'm always complaining that my house is small, but it's very convenient for work.' 'Yes, it _____ be handy living so close to your office.'

20.3 Where necessary correct these sentences using **should/ought to**, **must**, **shall**, or **had better**, or write ✓. (A, C & D)

- 1 Cyclists had better not be allowed to ride on pavements, even where roads are very busy.
- 2 'There's something wrong with David's computer yet again.' 'He should wish he'd never bought it.'
- 3 The concert starts at 7.45. I'd better make a note of that.
- 4 I shall take my library books back today, but I don't think I'll have time.
- 5 'The children from next door have been throwing stones at our windows.' 'Well, they shouldn't do it again, otherwise I'll call the police.'
- 6 'I'm freezing.' 'You'd better have worn a thicker coat.'
- 7 We have to be in Bristol by 4.00. I think we'd better get started.
- 8 I should phone Gary this evening, but it will probably be too late by the time I get home.
- 9 'I've looked all over the house and can't find the car keys.' 'Well, if they're not here, they must still be in the car.'
- 10 We believe that parents had better pay grandparents to look after their children.

Linking verbs: be, appear, seem; become, get, etc.

- A** When an adjective or noun phrase is used after a verb to describe the subject or say what or who the subject is, the adjective or noun phrase is a *complement* and the verb is a *linking verb*:
- ☐ Ian *is* a doctor. ☐ She *seemed* unable to concentrate. ☐ The house *became* Peter's in 1980.

The most common linking verb is *be*. Others are to do with 'being', e.g. *keep*, *prove*, *remain*, *stay*; 'becoming', e.g. *become*, *come*, *end up*, *grow*, *turn out*; and 'seeming', e.g. *appear*, *look*, *seem*, *sound*. Most of these verbs can be followed by either an adjective or noun phrase (e.g. *It sounds nice/a nice place*). However, when they are used as linking verbs, *come* and *grow* (e.g. *come to know*, *grow thoughtful*) can't be followed by a noun phrase, and *keep* is only followed by a noun if an adjective follows it (e.g. *It kept him awake*).

- B** After the verbs *appear* (= seems true), *look* (= seem), *prove*, *seem*, and *turn out* we can often either include or omit *to be*:

- ☐ The room *appears* (to be) *brighter* than when I last saw it.
- ☐ She *proved* (to be) *an extremely enthusiastic teacher*.

However, following these verbs *to be* is usually included before the adjectives *alive*, *alone*, *asleep*, and *awake*, and before the *-ing* forms of verbs:

- ☐ I didn't go in because she *appeared to be asleep*. (*not ...she appeared asleep.*)
- ☐ The roads *seem to be getting* icy so drive carefully. (*not The roads seem getting...*)

Before a noun we include *to be* when the noun tells us what the subject is, but can often leave it out when we give our opinion of the person or thing in the subject. We tend to leave out *to be* in more formal English. Compare:

- ☐ He walked into what *seemed to be a cave*. (*not ...what seemed a cave.*) *and*
- ☐ She *seems* (to be) *a very efficient salesperson*.

- C** We use the linking verb *become* to describe a process of change. A number of other linking verbs can be used instead of *become*, including *come*, *get*, *go*, *grow*, *turn* (into).

We use *get* rather than *become*: in informal speech and writing before *difficult*, *ill*, *interested*, *pregnant*, *suspicious*, *unhappy*, and *worried*; in imperatives; and in phrases such as *get changed* (clothes), *get dressed*, *get married/divorced*:

- ☐ I first *got suspicious* when he looked into all the cars. (*more formally ...became suspicious...*)
- ☐ *Don't get upset* about it! ☐ Where did you live before you *got married*?

We prefer *become* to talk about a more abstract or technical process of change with words such as *adapted*, *apparent*, *aware*, *convinced*, *infected*, *irrelevant*, *obvious*, and *recognised*:

- ☐ He *became recognised* as an expert. ☐ Their bodies have *become adapted* to high altitudes.

We use *become*, not *get*, if there is a noun phrase after the linking verb:

- ☐ Dr Smith *became an adviser* to the government. ☐ She *became a good tennis player*.

- D** We use *go* or *turn*, not usually *get* or *become*, when we talk about colours changing:

- ☐ The traffic lights *turned/went green* and I pulled away.

We often use *go* to talk about changes, particularly to unwanted situations. We use *go*, not *turn* or *get*, with *deaf*, *blind*, *bald*, or to say that someone behaves in a mad or excited way; and also with *go bad/off/mouldy/rotten* (about old food), *go bust* (= a company closes because it has run out of money), *go dead* (= when a telephone stops working), *go missing*, and *go wrong*:

- ☐ The children *went* completely crazy at the party. ☐ My computer's *gone wrong* again.

Notice, however, some common exceptions: *get ill*, *get old*, *get tired*.

After the verbs *come*, *get*, and *grow* (but not after *become*) we can use a *to*-infinitive. *Come* and *grow* are often used to talk about gradual change:

- ☐ I eventually *came/grew to appreciate* his work. (*not ...became to appreciate his work.*)
- ☐ I soon *got to know* their names. (*not ...became to know their names.*)

21.1 Put brackets around to be in these sentences if it can be left out. (B)

- 1 The job turned out to be far easier than I'd expected.
- 2 When I looked through the window, Charles appeared to be alone.
- 3 What he called his 'little cottage in the country' proved to be a castle.
- 4 Hasan proved to be an excellent source of information about the town.
- 5 She appeared to be satisfied with the work I'd done.
- 6 I've adjusted the aerial and the television seems to be working okay now.
- 7 When I picked the crab up I thought it was dead, but it turned out to be alive and bit me.
- 8 With only five minutes of the match left, Spain look to be heading to victory.
- 9 'We've decided to buy a Ford.' 'That seems to be a very good choice.'
- 10 He only looked to be about 10 years old, but I knew he must be a lot older.

21.2 Complete the sentences with an appropriate form of become or get. Use the correct or more likely alternative. (C)

- 1 Give me a few minutes to changed, and then I'll be ready to go.
- 2 The condition of the railways a major political issue during the last election campaign.
- 3 The welfare reforms will help single women who pregnant.
- 4 The reasons for my decision will clear at the next meeting.
- 5 Don't annoyed with me, but I've lost the car keys.
- 6 I didn't finish the book. I just couldn't interested in it.
- 7 After the strange events in the house she convinced that it was haunted.
- 8 I had just divorced when I met Marianne.
- 9 It's easy to find your way to the foot of the mountain, but after that things difficult.

21.3 Complete the sentences with an appropriate form of one of the verbs in brackets and one of the following words or phrases. (D)

~~berserk~~ blind bust dead to know to like red tired

- 1 I was at a zoo once when an elephant went berserk and attacked its keeper. (go/ turn)
- 2 A few seconds later the line and Graham replaced the receiver. (go/ turn)
- 3 After the spider bit Rachel her ankle and started to swell up. (go/ get)
- 4 He's actually quite friendly when you him. (become/ get)
- 5 Cutting that wood looks like hard work. I'll take over from you when you (get/ go)
- 6 We soon each other and have been great friends ever since. (become/ come)
- 7 The doctor told me that without immediate treatment I might (go/ turn)
- 8 The engineering firm Malco during the economic recession of the late 1990s. (go/ get)

21.4 Where necessary, suggest corrections in the underlined parts of this text. (A-D)

The morning we were going on holiday everything seemed to (1) turn wrong. The taxi was due at 8.00 to take us to the airport. When I looked in on Tom at 7.00 he (2) seemed awake, so I went downstairs to make breakfast. When I opened the fridge I found that the milk (3) had gone off, so there was no breakfast for us. Then Tom (4) seemed taking a long time to come down, so at 7.30 I went back upstairs and he still (5) hadn't become dressed. He said he wasn't feeling well, but I just shouted, "You can't (6) get ill when we're going on holiday!" After that the keys to the luggage (7) got missing, but Tom eventually found them in his jacket pocket. By 8.30 the taxi hadn't arrived and I was starting (8) to become worried. It was (9) getting obvious that we were going to miss our plane if we didn't leave soon. But just then the taxi arrived and we made it to the airport with minutes to spare. Surprisingly, after such a bad start, it (10) turned out to be an excellent holiday.