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Chapter Twelve

• <i>could have</i>	• <i>should have</i>	• <i>would have,</i>
• <i>may have</i>	• <i>might have</i>	

These past modal verbs are all used hypothetically, to talk about things that didn't really happen in the past.

could have + past participle

1. **could have+ past participle** means that something was possible in the past, or you had the ability to do something in the past, but that you didn't do it.
 - I could have stayed up late, but I decided to go to bed early.
 - They could have won the race, but they didn't try hard enough.
 - Julie could have bought the book, but she borrowed it from the library instead.
 - He could have studied harder, but he was too lazy and that's why he failed the exam.

couldn't have + past participle means that something wasn't possible in the past, even if you had wanted to do it.

- I couldn't have arrived any earlier. There was a terrible traffic jam (= it was impossible for me to have arrived any earlier).
- He couldn't have passed the exam, even if he had studied harder. It's a really, really difficult exam.

modal verbs

2. We use **could have + past participle** when we want to make a guess about something that happened in the past. (See also **modals of probability**.) In this case, we don't know if what we're saying is true or not true. We're just talking about our opinion of what maybe happened.

- Why John is late?
- He could have got stuck in traffic.
- He could have forgotten that we were meeting today.
- He could have overslept.

We can also choose to use **might have + past participle** to mean the same thing:

- He might have got stuck in traffic.
- He might have forgotten that we were meeting today.

should have + past participle

1. **Should have + past participle.** We use this for expressing “regret”.

We use this form also for giving advice about the past.

- I should have studied harder!
(= I didn't study very hard and so I failed the exam. I'm sorry about this now)
- I should have gone to bed early
(= I didn't go to bed early and now I'm tired).
- I shouldn't have eaten so much cake!
(= I did eat a lot of cake and now I don't feel good.)
- You should have called me when you arrived
(= you didn't call me and I was worried. I wish that you had called me).
- John should have left early, then he wouldn't have missed the plane
(= but he didn't leave early and so he did miss the plane).

2. It's often used with 'by now' for prediction.

- His plane **should have arrived** by now
(= if everything is fine, the plane has arrived).
- John **should have finished** work by now
(= if everything is normal, John has finished work).

We can also use this to talk about something that would have happened if everything was fine, but hasn't happened.

- Lucy **should have arrived** by now, but she hasn't.

Shouldn't have + past participle means that something wasn't a good idea, but you did it anyway.

may/might have + past participle

We use **may have** to show that something has possibly happened now and **might have** to show that something happened at some time in the past:

- It's ten o'clock. They **may have arrived** now.
[= *Perhaps they have arrived*]
- They **might have arrived** hours ago.
[= *Perhaps they arrived hours ago.*]

Can you use *Might have* / *May Have* Interchangeably?

No! Some people believe so but it is not true. *May have* should not be used in the past tense.

would have + past participle

1. Part of the **third conditional**. (refer lesson “Conditionals” in this book)
 - If I had enough money, I would have bought a car (but I didn't have enough money, so I didn't buy a car).
2. To talk about something you wanted to do but didn't. This is very similar to the third conditional, but we don't need an 'if clause'.
 - I would have gone to the party, but I was really busy.
(= I wanted to go to the party, but I didn't because I was busy.
If I hadn't been so busy, I would have gone to the party.)
 - I would have called you, but I didn't know your number.
(= I wanted to call you but I didn't know your number, so I didn't call you.)
 - A: Nobody volunteered to help us with the fair
B: I would have helped you. I didn't know you needed help.
(= If I had known that you needed help, I would have helped you.)