

Past Modals

Should Have + Past Participle

It means that something would have been a good idea, but you didn't do it. It's like giving advice about the past when you say it to someone else, or regretting what you did or didn't do when you're talking about yourself.

Example:

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).

Could Have + Past Participle

It means that you had the ability to do something in the past or something was possible in the past, but you didn't do it. For example:

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.

We also use this structure when we want to make a guess about something that happened in the past. In this case, we don't know if what we're saying is true or not true.

Example:

Why is John late?

-He could have got stuck in traffic.

-He could have forgotten that we were meeting today.

Couldn't Have + Past Participle

It means that something wasn't possible in the past, even if you had wanted to do it. For example:

I couldn't have arrived any earlier. There was a terrible traffic jam (= it was impossible for me to have arrived any earlier).

Must Have + Past Participle

We use this structure when we want to make a guess about something that happened in the past. In this case, we are pretty sure that what we're saying is true. For example:

-Where was Julie last night?

-She must have forgotten about our date.

Might Have + Past Participle

We use this structure when we want to make a guess about something that happened in the past however in this case we are not as sure as when we use the structure “Must Have + Past Participle”. For example:

-Where was Julie last night?

-She might have worked late.

Conditional Sentences

Pay attention that (Should/Would/Could/Might + Have + Past Participle) can be used as a part of the third conditional sentences. For example:

If she had studied, she would have passed the exam (but, really we know she didn't study and so she didn't pass).

