

Modal Verbs in the Past

Exercise Worksheet with Answer Key

Level	Focus	Skills
B2-C1	must have / might have / should have / could have / needn't have	accuracy, transformation, error correction

Instructions

Complete each exercise carefully. Use the correct past modal form and the past participle.

For sentence transformation, keep the meaning the same and use the key word given.

Write clearly and check whether the meaning is certainty, possibility, regret, criticism, missed opportunity or unnecessary action.

Exercise 1. Complete the sentences

Use a suitable past modal and the verb in brackets.

1. Ella looks exhausted. She _____ all night. (work)
2. Tom is not here yet. He _____ the bus. (miss)
3. You _____ me earlier. I was waiting for your call. (tell)
4. We _____ so much food. Half of it is still in the fridge. (buy)
5. I can't find my keys. I _____ them in the office. (leave)
6. They _____ the truth, because their story was completely different. (know)
7. You _____ to Nadia like that. She was very upset. (speak)
8. The streets are wet. It _____ during the night. (rain)
9. He _____ the earlier train, but he decided to wait for us. (catch)
10. She _____ her password, so she couldn't get into her account. (forget)
11. I _____ that film at the cinema, but I never got round to it. (see)
12. They arrived at dawn. They _____ very early. (leave)

Exercise 2. Choose the best answer

1. She looks far too cheerful. She ___ heard the bad news.
 - a) must have
 - b) can't have
 - c) should have
2. If you had asked me, I ___ helped you.
 - a) would have
 - b) must have
 - c) needn't have
3. They ___ checked the address before setting off. Now they are on the wrong side of town.
 - a) should have
 - b) must have
 - c) can't have
4. We ___ taken a taxi. The station was only five minutes away.
 - a) might not have
 - b) needn't have
 - c) ought not
5. He didn't answer the phone. He ___ been asleep.
 - a) may have
 - b) should have
 - c) can't have
6. You ___ all that money on clothes. Now you can't pay the bills.
 - a) shouldn't have spent
 - b) mustn't spend
 - c) can't have spent
7. The lights were off, so they ___ gone out.
 - a) must have
 - b) should have
 - c) needn't have
8. She ___ gone to university in Edinburgh, but she decided to stay in Leeds.
 - a) could have
 - b) can't have
 - c) ought to have
9. He ___ offended by your comment; he laughed straight away.
 - a) must have been
 - b) can't have been
 - c) shouldn't have been
10. They ___ packed an umbrella. The forecast warned them about the storm.
 - a) should have
 - b) would have
 - c) can't have

Exercise 3. Sentence transformation

Rewrite the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning. Use the key word given. Do not change the key word.

1. I'm sure Olivia forgot about the meeting.

MUST

Olivia _____ about the meeting.

2. It was possible for us to win, but we didn't.

COULD

We _____, but we didn't.

3. It was a mistake for Ben to send that email.

SHOULDN'T

Ben _____ that email.

4. Perhaps they took the wrong road.

MIGHT

They _____ the wrong road.

5. It was not necessary for me to bring my laptop, but I brought it.

NEEDN'T

I _____ my laptop.

6. I am sure he didn't understand the instructions.

CAN'T

He _____ the instructions.

7. If Mia had known, she would have told us.

WOULD

Mia _____ us if she had known.

8. It was the right thing for you to apologise earlier.

SHOULD

You _____ earlier.

Exercise 4. Correct the mistakes

Each sentence contains one mistake. Rewrite it correctly.

1. She must have went home early.

Correct version: _____

2. You should have to tell me the truth.

Correct version: _____

3. We needn't have to hurry because the lesson started late.

Correct version: _____

4. He can't have saw the warning sign.

Correct version: _____

5. They could won the match if they had defended better.

Correct version: _____

6. I shouldn't have ate so much before the journey.

Correct version: _____

7. Marta might has forgotten your name.

Correct version: _____

8. He was able speak French when he was six.

Correct version: _____

Exercise 5. Guided production

Complete each response with your own idea. More than one answer may be possible.

1. I was very tired this morning because I _____ .

2. My friend was late, so he might have _____ .

3. One thing I shouldn't have done last week was _____ .

4. A trip I could have taken, but didn't, was _____ .

5. Someone in my family must have _____ because _____ .

6. I needn't have _____ yesterday because _____ .

Answer Key

Modal Verbs in the Past

Exercise 1

1. must have worked
2. might have missed / may have missed / could have missed
3. should have told
4. needn't have bought
5. may have left / might have left / could have left
6. can't have known
7. shouldn't have spoken
8. must have rained
9. could have caught
10. must have forgotten / may have forgotten / might have forgotten
11. could have seen
12. must have left

Exercise 2

1. can't have
2. would have
3. should have
4. needn't have
5. may have
6. shouldn't have spent
7. must have
8. could have
9. can't have been
10. should have

Exercise 3

1. Olivia must have forgotten about the meeting.
2. We could have won, but we didn't.
3. Ben shouldn't have sent that email.
4. They might have taken the wrong road.
5. I needn't have brought my laptop.
6. He can't have understood the instructions.
7. Mia would have told us if she had known.
8. You should have apologised earlier.

Exercise 4

1. She must have gone home early.
2. You should have told me the truth.

3. We didn't need to hurry because the lesson started late. / We needn't have hurried because the lesson started late. (accept according to explanation given)
4. He can't have seen the warning sign.
5. They could have won the match if they had defended better.
6. I shouldn't have eaten so much before the journey.
7. Marta might have forgotten your name.
8. He was able to speak French when he was six. / He could speak French when he was six.

Exercise 5

Suggested answers will vary. Accept any grammatically correct and meaningful answer using an appropriate past modal structure.